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A GENRE OF COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE:
BLOGS AS INTERTEXTUAL, RECIPROCAL, AND PEDAGOGICAL

by

RACHEL GRAMER
B.A. Rollins College, 2001

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term
2008

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the rhetorical features of blogs that lend them dialogic strength as an online genre through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of speech genres, utterances, and dialogism. As a relatively new online genre, blogs stem from previous genres (in print and online as well as verbal), but their emergence as a popular form of expression in our current culture demands attention to how blogs also offer us different rhetorical opportunities to meet our changing social exigencies as online subjects in the 21st century. This thesis was inspired by questions about how blogs redefine the rhetorical situation to alter our textual roles as readers, writers, and respondents in the new generic circumstances we encounter—and reproduce—online.

Applying the framework of Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* and Pierre Levy's *Collective Intelligence*, this thesis analyzes how blogs enable us as online subjects to add our utterances to our textual collective intelligence, which benefits from our personal experience and the epistemic conversations of blogs as online texts. In addition, it is also an inquiry into how the rhetorical circumstances of blogs as textual sites of collective intelligence can create a reciprocal learning environment in the writing classroom. I ultimately examine blogs through the lenses of alternative pedagogy—informed by David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald's *Mutuality in the Rhetoric and Composition Classroom* and Xin Liu Gale's *Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Postmodern Composition Classroom*—to suggest the potential consequences of a writing education that includes how we are currently writing—and being written by—our culture's online generic practice of blogs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my committee members, who so graciously offered their advice on this project and, more importantly, shared their passion for language and teaching with me during the last three years. I want to thank Dr. Blake Scott for introducing me to an expanded understanding of genre and for his continued interest in my learning, and Dr. David Wallace for his incessant and essential questioning of the relationship between privilege and pedagogy. My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Kathleen Bell for navigating the flotsam of many drafts and recognizing me throughout this process as a fellow human first and a student second. For her personal guidance and academic support, I am forever indebted.

I also want to thank my friends, family and colleagues, who allowed me both the physical and psychological time and space to complete my master's degree, which is an incredible privilege. I am especially grateful for my husband, Greg, who could not have anticipated the demands of time and patience involved in a project this long, but who took them all in stride with loving support.

And last, but not least, I want to thank every teacher I have had the privilege to encounter. You have provided extraordinary examples and cautionary tales, and I have learned from each of you. My interest in school, and my desire for education, are not just a testament to my life choices, but to yours as well. I wouldn't be here without you.

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CHAPTER ONE: BLOGS AS A GENRE IN OUR CULTURE & CLASSROOMS

“Web 2.0 technology personalizes culture so that it reflects ourselves rather than the world around us. Blogs personalize media content so that all we read are our own thoughts.... The purpose of our media and culture industries...is to discover, nurture, and reward elite talent....Instead of Mozart, Van Gogh, or Hitchcock, all we get with the Web 2.0 revolution is more of ourselves.”

—Andrew Keen, “Web 2.0”

“A new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms.”

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 15-16

This conversation about the evolution of communication is only one discussion in the corner of one room in the history of the world in a Burkian parlor that began long before Mikhail Bakhtin entered and will continue long after this paper is electronically submitted for review. In the scene of the writing classroom, students and teachers operate within generic constraints determined by the types of utterances they are authorized, required and inclined to use. I have seen myself participating in educational institutions throughout my life, as a student (I have spent 20 of my 29 years in school) who wanted to be a teacher (since age 13) and finally became one for a year (at age 24). It is through this lens that I have developed my current understanding of

generic theory: of subjectivity as socially constructed and culturally available; of educational situations as rhetorically situated and ideologically charged; and the artificial audience of the classroom as a sort of restricted addressivity too often with little consequence in the real world of culture consumption and shaping. This perception of my own subjectivity as a participant in educational institutions has led me to connect my generic theory questions with my interest in alternative pedagogy and then the relatively new evolution of online utterances. Specifically, my inquiry here focuses on blogs as an online genre, to address the disciplinary potential of blogs and how both teachers and students might reaccentuate the genre to offer alternative ways of thinking about, and putting into practice, the teaching of writing at any level (though certainly also in the first-year composition classroom, whose structure, purpose and curriculum is always in question, open to interpretation and, therefore, amenable to change).

In these four chapters, I will analyze the rhetorical features of blogs, how they are situated as a genre within our culture and how students and teachers might both learn from their generic practice in the writing classroom. I begin here with a brief introduction of the history of blogs in the context of contemporary culture, as well as with a definition of the kind of blogs I will be referring to throughout my study. I will also establish how blogs work rhetorically within the larger framework of genre theory, specifically situating them within Bakhtin's concepts of utterances and speech genres as applied to online texts, as well as the Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and intertextuality. Furthermore, as I examine blogs in their generic role in what Henry Jenkins calls our convergence culture, I will also focus on how blogs might facilitate a more ideal version of our future in which we learn to rely on each other and on what cybertheorist Pierre Lévy calls our collective intelligence. Ultimately, my goal is to explore how these rhetorical and cultural circumstances might influence the pedagogical potential of blogs in

a writing classroom and to suggest how both students and teachers might benefit from a pedagogy of mutuality and reciprocity that emphasizes alternative generic education, including blogs. I will examine how blogs alter the traditional rhetorical situation—by authorizing experiential knowledge and redefining subject roles—and, therefore, are ripe for inclusion in a classroom that seeks to do the same. In the end, my analysis will investigate how such pedagogical practice might reaccentuate the genre itself as well as help us reconsider our roles as teachers and students in the 21st century writing classroom.

The *Kairos* of Blogs

Because the Net generation is coming of age in an era of constantly changing media and messages, gadgets and genres, students entering the university in the year 2008 have increased access to a world of information outside academic or societal control. Access to technology is often equated with access to education and information, and it is as (rather unwilling) participants in this triangle of rhetorical circumstances that students find themselves in the writing classroom. As Net generation members have increased access to and expertise at using the Internet, both at home and at school, they are exposed to rapidly evolving opportunities for online communication. With new ways of communicating come new and renewed reasons to do so, we are living in an interesting period in communication history. Since the Internet makes space for “new” everyday, who better to explore the potential possibilities—and identify pitfalls—than the users in whose lives it has played a large role since the beginning? My study of online generic praxis is situated within this period with an understanding of *kairos* as described

by Carolyn Miller: “*Kairos* describes both the sense in which discourse is understood as fitting and timely—the way it observes propriety or decorum—and the way in which it can seize on the unique opportunity of a fleeting moment to create new rhetorical possibility” (qtd. in Miller & Shepherd). Each time we go online can seem like “a fleeting moment” in the constantly changing, shifting and updating that has come to characterize Internet activity. And the genres in practice in this “fleeting moment” are just as fluid, in constant flux. While the genres that the Net generation participates in online have evolved out of a tradition of oral and print genres, they are only ever relatively stable at best and have been, are being and will continue to be absorbed, altered, renewed and reaccentuated by continued practice.

In the recursive process of both shaping and being shaped by the online experiences in which they choose to participate, the Net generation is constantly exposed to new technology that has accompanied this period of communication changes, technology that was unavailable to previous generations. The Net generation has not only a wide variety of online communication opportunities—e-mail, instant messenger, chat rooms, Web sites, social networks—but also a range of technologies on which to carry out their multi-media experiences—laptops, WiFi, mobile phones with Internet access, iPods, iPhones, BlackBerrys, etc. But these technologies, although they, too, epitomize our constant, rapid cultural change, are not the focus of my study—only the ways of communicating for which we use the technology. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins describes this cultural change in terms of media convergence, which “involves both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed” (16). “We are already living within a convergence culture,” Jenkins suggests, a culture in which more people have access to information and participate in the creation and sharing of that information (16). But what defines this particular cultural

moment is not any specifically delivery or dissemination technology; rather, our convergence culture, as Jenkins sees it, “represents a paradigm shift” in how we receive, perceive and understand our changing roles in culture shaping through the new media available to us (243). What matters to me here is not the technology that we use to blog, but what rhetorical purposes are at work when we do so because what’s more important than the gadgets available to us are this century’s new exigencies for composing texts. And access to technology does not guarantee proper deployment of that technology to explore the evolving rhetorical potential constantly made available online.

As a genre of largely written texts interacting with the written texts of others, I have chosen blogs the genre to analyze and ultimately link with alternative pedagogical intentions. At first, bloggers were professional web programmers (Blood, “Introduction,” x); today, although there are still a substantial number of professional journalist blogs, knowledge of web programming is no longer necessary to write a blog to the world, and personal blogs are commonly viewed as the pinnacle of amateur writing. And though blogs began as lists, or logs, of web sites (characterized by numerous external links with brief “hooks” for the busy web surfer who wanted to know what was out there in cyberspace without spending hours searching) (Blood, “Weblogs”), they are often perceived as dumping grounds for personal woes (characterized by chronological entries that read more like a teen’s personal journal—multiplied by millions). My analysis of blogs takes place within the context of our convergence culture. More than ten years after the term “weblog” was coined to describe what we think of today as a blog (Blood, “Weblogs”), we can blog from our home or office computers, from our laptops with WiFi Internet access or from the latest, hottest multi-media mobile phone. With a few clicks of a mouse, bloggers can tell all—from political perspectives on globalization to ideologically

charged views on cultural conventions—in cyberspaces where the lines between public and private, individual and social, dissensus and consensus blur, and where the concept of new exigencies coupled with new media is expected and even demanded more than feared or questioned. In short, with blogs, our culture of confession seems to be synchronizing with our culture of efficiency and instant gratification in our 21st century ideologically saturated information economy.

This is exhibited most blatantly in what many people understand as the primary type of blog, the journal or personal blog, commonly identified by their rendering of personal events which are akin to diary entries made public with some interaction available through comment posting (Nussbaum). In her January 2004 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Emily Nussbaum's focused on this kind of blog. Her figures estimated that, of the nearly 10 million blogs at the time, 51 percent of users were between the ages of 13 and 19, "a generation of compulsive self-chroniclers, a fleet of juvenile Marcel Prousts gone wild," whose blogs are personal, identifying features (equating them with having access to a friend's mobile phone number) (Nussbaum). They can be "life-altering;" they can seem "deeply interactive" (Nussbaum), but more frequently than not, they are online social networks that serve the functions of communicating with friends and operate as a mixture of therapy sessions, online diaries and gossip magazines for everyday people rather than celebrities—aptly described by Nussbaum as "self-chronicling" in which "the private experience of adolescence...has been made public." Personal blogs are described in more favorable scholarly terms by Blood as fostering "cults of personality," engaging others in reflection and conversation and creating, in essence, a sort of cultural diary/time capsule ("Weblogs"). It is this type of blog (and perspective) that can be most closely associated with expressionistic pedagogy as defined by

James Berlin: characterized by the “search for original metaphor, the keeping of a journal, and participation in peer editorial groups” (14). The comment function on most sites that host blogging capabilities can be read as a version of peer response, through which bloggers receive feedback and can communicate with an audience about their writing. And although I have found no documented research on bloggers’ searches for “original metaphor,” they do operate within one of the most powerful cultural metaphors of our time: cyberspace.

But before blogs were defined merely as “a website that is updated frequently, with new material posted at the top of the page,” they were more well known as “a list of links with commentary and personal asides,” what is today more commonly identified as a filter-style blog (Blood, “Weblogs”). Blog readers, researchers, scholars and ne’er-do-wells alike quote Rebecca Blood as an expert insider on what defines blogs, this type in particular in which

An intelligent human being filters through the mass of information packaged daily for our consumption and picks out the interesting, the important, the overlooked, and the unexpected. This human being may provide additional information to that which corporate media provides, expose the fallacy of an argument, perhaps reveal an inaccurate detail. (“Weblogs”)

This is an ideal perspective on filter blogs—assuming both intelligence and accuracy perhaps not found in other texts online—from a prototype blogger heavily invested in threshing out the positive, life-affirming details of the genre as a whole. When discussing filter-style and journal-style blogs, Blood also focuses on the dichotomy between a journalism of the people and a journal of a person connected to other people, respectively (“Weblogs”). But I am particularly interested in the practice of blogs as these two types have already collided and coalesced to produce a different dialogic, heteroglossic textual learning experience than either could provide

on their own. Blood asserts that filter-style bloggers learn to “readily question and evaluate” online texts and use their knowledge of this type of blog to embark upon a “journey of self-discovery and intellectual self-reliance” (“Weblogs”), but in the examples I examine in subsequent chapters, these kinds of blogs are in practice not as self-reliance but as individuals, saturated in their own ideologies and experiences, participating in communal discourse communities defined not by a dependence on self, but by reliance on others. As a genre, blogs are not a monolithic set of texts with pre-determined purposes or entirely codified features; rather, they are fluid and can vary greatly in appearance, frequency, length, complexity, links and rhetorical ends available and pursued. In this way, they offer us new ways to *be* in the world, new ways to interact and communicate with others. And my study analyzes this hybrid style of blog in which participants make the personal political, in which the personal commentary and everydayness of blogs is absorbed into something larger than the personal blog itself, something *not* immediately connected to such everydayness that enters into online reality instead as an artistic event (Bakhtin, “Speech Genres” 1228).

Blogs Meet Bakhtin: Online Utterances & Speech Genres

In Bakhtinian terms, language is not only ideological but also heteroglossic and centrifugal—and as such, so are the utterances we use to communicate with each other using language. As a speech genre, blogs are ideologically constructed, practiced and disseminated. My analysis will focus on blogs as utterances as defined by Bakhtin in “The Problem of Speech Genres”: oral and written realized forms of language that reflect the social conditions and aims

“of participants in the various areas of human activity” through their content, style and structure (1227). Each online utterance is one of a multitude of “relatively stable” speech genres that involves (as Bakhtin asserts for all utterances) a relationship between the utterance, a listener and that listener’s influence on the utterance (“Speech Genres” 1232). My interest in investigating blogs depends upon this transactional view of language, which Berlin defined as “truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation” (15), specifically the social epistemic form of transactional rhetoric in which “all elements of the rhetorical situation” are involved (“interlocutor, audience, material reality, and language”) and “there is never a division between experience and language” (16). Berlin, too, positions language as an ideological force that cannot be separated from our experiences. In Chapter Two, I will bring to bear the Bakhtinian concepts of utterances, dialogism and intertextuality to examine blogging conventions, style and form—and our relationships with them as subjects in online environments. How are blogs similar to and different from other online genres, and how does this affect us as textual creators?

In her article “Genre as Action,” which has been the most influential on genre theory since Bakhtin earlier in the same century, Carolyn Miller contends that we learn what ends are available to us when we learn genre—and learn to understand recurring social situations better and how we may act together, as a community, within them (165). So my one of my primary questions here aims to examine how blogs as a genre are distinct from every other genre: how do their rhetorical features enable us to communicate differently? Specifically, how do blogs enable us to engage in unique dialogic conversations online? Concentrating on the intertextuality that blogs make available—how our texts interact with others’ texts, which affects the meaning we make through blogs—how might participants benefit from blogs and their particular type of

textual dialogue? Using insight from Aaron Barlow's understanding of the potential of blogs to show us new ways to communicate in the public sphere, my rhetorical analysis of blogs will also include how they operate as abnormal discourse to open up public conversations about access to, and the definition of, knowledge. Via Xin Liu Gale's *Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Postmodern Classroom*, I include neopragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty's characterization of abnormal discourse as discourse whose sole purpose is to keep all discourse from being normal (or dominant) discourse (Gale 72)—in brief, to keep the conversation going about what counts as meaning and who has the authority to make that decision. In the end of my rhetorical analysis, I will situate authority in blogs as an authority of the people who create them, and ask also what social exigencies the genre is meeting that we, as a people, as textual producers, need. If blogs give us access to each other's individual experience, then we as a people who empower this genre must, in return, according to Miller's characterization of genre as action ("Genre"), have a cultural need for this access to individuals' heteroglossic expression.

Blogs as Collective Intelligence

In addition to being authorized by the experiential knowledge and generic practice of individual participants, blogs also have a greater rhetorical purpose as an available speech genre as they are practiced frequently in our culture. In 2005, Perseus WebSurveyor reported that more than 31.6 million blogs existed on major host sites, in the "The Blogging Geyser." They also predicted that that number would grow to more than 53.4 million by the end of that year. Up-to-date counts on blogs are a challenge to tally due to the fluidity and speed that characterize

the Internet, and the lack of efficient means to determine which blogs are still active and updated frequently (fitting one of Blood's and others' definitions of the genre). A genre whose texts number in the millions within little more than a decade is an integral part of our online culture, but the question remains: why blogs? Miller postulates that genres evolve as cultures do; when people in a culture engage in new genres, the question to ask is what the culture needs differently that previous genres could not meet ("Genre" 158). She sees this exigence as our need to know how to take an interest as textual composers within a changing culture ("Genre" 158). In her later essay, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre," she situates genres as constructions of members of a culture that simultaneously create and reproduce the genre and, therefore, the culture of which it is a part, "by using available structures as the medium of their action and thereby producing those structures again as virtual outcomes, available for further memory, interpretation, and use" (71). Therefore, bloggers reproduce recurring notions of themselves and others, and the online culture of blogging, in turn, provides the structures for them to do so. Miller calls for examination of the culture in which such generic practice is enacted, of the collective that recursively reproduces a genre—for my purposes here, blogs—and is reproduced by that genre ("Rhetorical" 71-72).

In Chapter Three, I will further examine the intertextuality of blogs as those features affect our cultural interactions with each other and others' texts as well as our own within what Jenkins describes as our convergence culture. How do blogs affect our current understanding of our cultural roles as readers, writers and textual producers online? In addition to the surface changes visible in blogs through intertextual features—quoting, hypertext and blogrolls—there is a deeper ideology at work in how we as individuals acknowledge our reliance on others' utterances to negotiate meaning with each other within discourse communities. An ideology that

reflects a larger shift in the way we not only receive, but also perceive information and authorize the sources from which it comes. I will first analyze how blogs problematize the traditional understanding of the rhetorical situation (in which the speaker, listener and message are ideologically separate points on the rhetorical triangle) and the rhetorical consequences of preventing the neat roles of reader, writer and audience from holding absolute control over the meanings encountered in blogs. What risks and benefits do blogs bring to our textual interactions with each other? While I do not claim that blogs are an ideal genre of democratic participation—because too many members of our culture have unequal access to the Internet, which imbues the opportunities there with further ideological bias—they do have rhetorical features that lend them the strength of a folk genre. Specifically, here I will consider their refiguring of subject roles, their inclusion of a wider audience as a public genre and the textual moves available that allow bloggers to participate in negotiating meaning with others' texts. As a folk genre, blogs enable us to continuously update, extend, edit, quote, refer to, link to and comment on our own texts as well as others' in a public discourse community. Ultimately, I will link my ideas about genre—from Bakhtin and Miller, among others—to Jenkins' definition of our convergence culture and how blogs allow us to contribute to what Lévy calls our collective intelligence. If blogs are a genre open to the people, in which people may negotiate meaning with each through direct textual interaction, then what does this say about our culture and our evolving needs to communicate with each other? And if we are relying on collective intelligence—turning to each other for meaning rather than traditionally authorized social institutions—what are the consequences? The rules of blogging are not set in stone, not predicated upon any reified rhetorical structure or official restrictions; bloggers themselves, though not responsible for hosting sites that determine the exact form and structural capabilities of blogs, establish and

govern the rhetorical purposes of blogs—and how those purposes change from one utterance to the next. But there is an understanding—of the genre as well as of ourselves—to be gained by seeing their greater global purpose as one of individual participation in our collective intelligence community.

An Alternative Pedagogy of Mutuality & Blogging

In her comprehensive book on applying and incorporating Bakhtinian language theory into university composition pedagogy, *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, Kay Halasek begins by asking how we can rethink current notions of the teaching of composition, how our thinking can be altered, updated, changed to meet the new exigencies of students entering the university in the 21st century. It is with this sense of change—that has already (recently) taken place in the academy as well as the changes that are yet to come, or to be fully integrated into the pedagogical paradigms and practices—that my analysis on blogs will ultimately turn to questions of pedagogy. But the change I am interested in is not the changes that seem to be forced upon the rhetorical situation of the writing classroom. Not the changes in technology, which lie largely outside educational institutional control and are instead dictated by the business of gadgets and those who build them and can afford the latest products. Nor am I particularly qualified to tackle the changes in the demographics of incoming first-year student populations and their ramifications in every aspects of education. Instead, I take the following factors as givens although my research reveals the extent, effects and direction of these changes as points of constant contention: technology is changing by the minute, and so are the people who use it in

any capacity. The students entering the university are not the same as the men who entered the first composition classroom at Harvard in 1874; in fact, they are vastly different in matters of race, ethnicity, (pop) culture, socioeconomic status, family background, technological access, ideology and certainly gender. It stands to reason, then, that the relatively recent changes in composition pedagogy in the second half of the 20th century (movements described in detail by Berlin in *Rhetoric and Reality*) stem from teachers, administrators and theorists alike who acknowledge that pedagogy must evolve as the 21st century student changes each year. Yet this seemingly innocuous assumption is anything but safe in the rhetorical situation of the writing classroom because change is not seen as a universally safe concept in any social institution.

It is within this arena of technological, rhetorical and pedagogical change that Halasek asks—herself as well as her readers, critics and colleagues—not *whether* she should use Bakhtin in the classroom, but *how* and to what extent (2). For my purposes here, I ask not *whether* we should use blogs in the composition classroom, but *how* and to what extent. Although, like any genre or pedagogy, blogging can be idealized as a means for hoping to achieve a more heteroglossic writing classroom, there is epistemic value in a genre in which we may acknowledge the combined dialogic features of online genres; the refigured roles of writer, reader, audience and message; a generic vehicle for active participation in a collective intelligence; and a generic act that empowers us as textual producers, cultural shapers and 21st century learners. Blogs have become a recognized genre authorized by its participants, and while certain discourse communities—corporations, journalists, environmentalists, grassroots activists, etc.—have taken advantage of them as a culturally relevant, available speech genre, the academy's participation is not currently defined or decided. Even more so, it is as yet unclear how teachers might reaccentuate the genre for practice in writing education. In the end, no

change in technology, genre or culture is enough in the writing classroom unless it is also accompanied by an alternative pedagogy that aims for more fully realized subject roles for both students and teachers. In Rorty's terms, this means that blogs must offer textual interactions that engage both students' abnormal discourse—which operates to challenge the dominant discourse in its unfamiliarity with its conventions—and teachers' abnormal discourse—which works to subvert the homogenous aims of the dominant discourse more overtly, with an informed, reflective awareness of the ideology at work in those conventions (Gale 73-75). In short, blogs must present learning opportunities for both students and teachers to entangle themselves in textual relationships with each other, with those in their own discourse communities and with a diversity of texts outside those relationships as well. In Chapter Four, I will examine blogs for this generic and pedagogical potential through the lenses of Wallace and Ewald's mutuality and Gale's edifying teacher. To begin, I will ask how blogs might function to facilitate mutuality in the writing classroom if mutuality is dependent upon acknowledging individual experience and the role of our culture in that experience. How do the rhetorical features of blogs use experiential knowledge to alter student-teacher relationships? Is it possible that blogs can contribute to creating an environment where all participants can contribute to what counts as knowledge in the classroom and, in a larger sense, our collective intelligence? Of course, blogs need also to account for teachers' abnormal discourse—not just students'. I will also explore how teachers might altered blogs to transform generic praxis in the writing classroom. How can teachers' understanding of academic discourse, and the ways in which they choose to resist the dominant discourse's tendency to homogenize all types of discourse, reaccentuate blogs as a genre? We cannot anticipate the changes that the academy might make to blogs as a generic practice, but the

potential exists to influence both the genre and the academy with alternative ways of looking at research, sources of authority, citation and collaboration that might be fueled by blogs.

As a culture, we have traveled a lot of discursive distance from Quintilian's elite classroom of the *good* man speaking *well* (complete with emphatic double meanings), and my study hopes to be part of a conversation that encourages a vision of a more heteroglossic classroom in which teachers re-envision ways to create a multitude of opportunities for students to own a variety of genres in multiple discourse communities of consequence both in and outside the classroom. This kind of pedagogy is part of a tradition that began in the 1960s with pedagogies that focused on process rather than product, that acknowledged the primacy of students' individual experience and that solidified writing as an epistemic force with public discourse at its center (see Berlin)—so that writing once again could be defined by more than standard superficial textual features. This pedagogical aim, to teach writing as an epistemic force (as characterized by Berlin, 165-179), is consistent with ideals currently championed by scholars promoting online communication as overflowing with democratic possibilities (see Bazerman, "Systems," Carbone, Blood, Nussbaum, Lasica). But I do not assume that all writing students or teachers are bloggers, or even that all Net generation students and teachers are passionate about online writing—or about the proposition of altering it for the classroom. It is not my intention to assert that the Net generation loves blogging or is as passionate about online communication. Students and teachers do not have to be passionate about blogs any more so than any group of any other generation with a need to communicate to a real audience to achieve desired rhetorical purposes using available technology. They simply need to have reason to believe that blogs matter.

If exercised in a classroom in which teachers establish and reinforce an understanding of language as a heteroglossic, centrifugal ideological force, blogs might offer a site for students and teachers to participate in a cultural collective in which it is not only important to have something to say and to say it well, but also to say it *to* a real someone—and to infuse the writing classroom with more kinds of writing that matter. And Doug Hesse’s call to writing teachers to own writing on behalf of their students might have the opportunity to shift also—to recognize the need for both students *and* teachers to own their own writing as well as their role in making meaning with others’ texts. Teachers and students both inhabit subject roles in the academy and should be partners in owning writing as well; Hesse’s call to writing instructors was to own writing—rather than let it be owned by literature professors, standardized testing corporations or governmental decisions advocated as objective, rational or universal (343)—but students need to own writing, too, so that textual production and knowledge-making are reciprocal practices in the classroom. In order for students to want to own writing in the classroom, they must see that writing as an act that matters. And in order to participate in that classroom, blogs must bridge gaps between students’ abnormal discourse and teachers’ abnormal discourse, include their textual relationships with each other and also leave space for each discourse community to interact with the dominant discourse. These inclusion are necessary to make the blogosphere a place where writing matters, where rhetorical features facilitate online communities not defined by institutions, or even geography, that bring real people together for real rhetorical ends.

It is here that my study will end, looking forward to the possibilities of how online discourse and academic discourse might benefit each other for the sake of students and teachers who are vested in both worlds in different, often conflicting, ways. I see my analysis as part of a ripe opportunity to take advantage of the rhetorical circumstances of change (technological,

experiential and generic) to reassert the importance of a diverse generic education rooted in alternative pedagogy—and to suggest blogs as a genre of positive potential in our culture and in the writing classroom, because of the way several of their key features reflect and reproduce our cultural need to recognize our textual interactions with each other and reassess our definitions of what counts as authoritative discourse. Miller asserts that “for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (165), and while the academic essay may help them understand how to participate in the academic community, students are more than just students—they are members of simultaneous discourse communities that use a variety of genres. While some of these genres may be in play in the academy, there still exists a hierarchy of which ones carry more weight authoritatively speaking (that fall more within the intent and ethos of academic discourse), which only lends to further stabilize a hierarchy of textual interactions (separating those who know from those who need to know) with academic discourse (largely the academic essay) at the top and students’ experience in other genres, in other discourse communities, maintaining secondary importance at best. If blogs are already in practice as a genre of personal authority, textual interactions and collective intelligence utterances, then an alternative pedagogy that includes blogging might hope to bring students’ experience to the forefront in the classroom and, concurrently, subvert the official, monolithic authority of the academy over what counts as knowledge and language use—and the genres used to maintain that hierarchy. While blogs are not a faultless genre, they are poised to keep these textual conversations open in the writing classroom for students and teachers—to keep open, not completed, conversations about who we turn to for knowledge, how we use others’ discourse in our own texts and how our social interactions affect our own messages and can affect change in the genres we choose to deliver those messages. If students and teachers

understand blogging as contextualized, public online utterances that depend on others and other texts for meaning, then an alternative pedagogy of blogging can create new opportunities for mutual, reciprocal knowledge-making to take place—in which all participants have more to gain by thus re-envisioning the writing classroom, than we have to lose.

CHAPTER TWO: BLOGGING MEETS BAKHTIN IN ONLINE UTTERANCES

“Springing into general consciousness so quickly, the blogs and blog communities are often examined in all aspects of their manifestation, and then are criticized for not doing *everything* in a new way. Their real success, however, will be in doing only one or two things in a new way...”

—Aaron Barlow, *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere*, 69

“We remain in a kind of stupor before the Web’s abundance, and we seem likely to stay in it indefinitely. We might as well learn how to live there. We might also consider enjoying it while it lasts.”

—Julian Dibbell, “Portrait of the Blogger as a Young Man,” 74

Many analytical conversations about blogs often focus on their relative newness as a genre—in style, form, content and rhetorical situation—and whether or not, in practice as they stand today, they fulfill their potential as such, or fall short of the infinite possibilities available to new online genres that also have the added benefit of being bolstered by new and constantly changing technologies. In *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere*, Aaron Barlow suggests that this limits our perception of blogs, holding them to a standard of super genre that enters the scene as no genre has done before, or just another drop in the usual generic bucket of forms we have encountered before. Arguments might be made for both sides (in addition to any number of points along the spectrum in between extremes), but to meet Carolyn Miller’s critical definition of genre as “a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence” (“Genre”

163), it would more constructive for us to understand blogs as they reflect our own (and, thus, our culture's) intentions and exigencies, which cannot be accurately or productively contained in any either/or scenario: as either new or old in our generic practices, either revolutionary or conservative in our loyalties to the genres we use, either familiar with every aspect of a genre or unfamiliar with its intricacies entirely. As human beings engaged in communication with each other, we are never really set in our generic practices because the genres we use to communicate are never complete as forms or vehicles for our textual interactions. Because genres are only relatively stable forms that are constantly changing based on their use by members of various and often conflicting discourse communities (Schryer, Miller and Shepherd, Bakhtin, Grigar), how can our generic practices be simplified as either/or circumstances? As a genre, blogs are not either new or old forms of communication—they encompass both new and old features of online discourse that make them at once familiar and foreign in daily practice. And these practices are still in process (and progress) each time a blogger visits, links or refreshes a page outside of the notion of reified or completed page-based discourse (Barlow 53).

In this chapter, I will explore the rhetorical features that position blogs as familiar forms of online discourse and ask how they combine in this recognizable genre. Is there a unique combination of features at work here that situates the rhetorical moves of blogs as online discourse that is open to new social exigencies? Because of our increasing status as online subjects in ways I will identify here, blogs are similar enough in style and form to be familiar as online texts, as malleable as any texts or any genre for the private intentions of individual users. I will investigate both of these aspects of generic identification—style and form—using principles gleaned from Bakhtin's theory of dialogism: that generic utterances reflect real social conditions; that speech genres are based upon transactional relationships between people; and that those

utterances ultimately reveal the complexities of our textual relationships with each other (with texts defined broadly and including people, genres and the individual written texts produced by people within specific genres) (see “Speech Genres”). With a foundational understanding of these principles, I will analyze how blogs—in style and form—are dialogically constructed and are already in practice as a genre that uses relatively simple rhetorical steps to create more complex textual dialogues than are buoyed by print genres as well as complicated relationships between us as textual beings in online environments.

But is there more to blogs as dialogic than what is already familiar to us about online discourse? There may be, as Barlow contends, ways in which blogs as a genre introduce innovation to our online generic practices. After examining the textual familiarities of blogs, I will turn my attention to features of blogs that do not have online generic equivalents but that, nonetheless, give blogs dialogic strength as a genre—namely, the specific rhetorical use of textual repetition, hypertext and blogrolls. Still keeping Bakhtinian theories of dialogism and intertextuality in the forefront, I will examine these latter features, in addition to the more familiar features of style and form, to suggest how they create more transparent textual relationships between participants that are publicly visible as well as reflective of the ideological interactions of bloggers. I will argue that, due to this generic act of ideological interface, blogs open up the act of generating and disseminating knowledge to all participants and, in this generic capacity, operate in opposition to the dominant discourse—which seeks to veil ideology so that the values and conventions of the dominant culture can remain unchallenged as discursive norms, and which functions to maintain sole authority over cultural truths that do not represent the complexity of the heterogeneous realities of its members. In this way, I will consider blogs as abnormal discourse, as Gale defines it, although they are familiar to us as online textual

experiences and operate with an awareness of the dominant culture that supports the technology of online communication. Steeped in the ideologies of participants, blogs do not maintain a claim to objectivity but instead have the generic capability to construct us as online subjects intent on revealing our textual relationships with other ideological beings; this is what makes blogs potentially subversive abnormal discourse:

Abnormal discourse does not seek knowledge or truth but renders new descriptions through wisdom; it does not intend to engender new normal discourse or competing paradigms. It exists for the sense of wonder, as Rorty puts it, for the sake of our full humanity in an age when it is threatened by obvious danger. (Gale 69)

The danger Gale speaks of is the threat of universal truth, an unequivocal yes or no to every question we ask, so that our human worth is determined by such truths and untruths (69).

Whether bloggers intend to subvert the dominance of normal discourse or not (see Gale 73), their act of blogging can be read as resistance to the dominant discourse, which benefits from being veiled from those whom the discourse homogenizes. In this chapter, I will ultimately contend that, since blogs operate rhetorically as a genre of abnormal discourse, they open up the conversation of what counts as meaning in ideologically charged spaces in which participants can tell their own stories and, thus, participate in creating textual identities that are authorized by their access to their own, and others', personal experience.

Blogging Conventions for Online Subjects

Understanding blogs as a dialogic genre—always in process—begins with an understanding of language as action, a paradigm which dictates that genres are not pre-determined, reified forms but instead are relatively stable utterances recognizable in social situations in which we, as language users, need to act. As Michael Holquist notes in his introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin does not view any genre as reified, but instead cultivates a sense of genre through an understanding of humankind as beings dependent upon and inseparable from language as an ever-changing phenomenon (xviii). Because the specific situations in which we find ourselves continually change—remembering Bakhtin's insistence that no utterance can be repeated (see "Speech Genres")—language constantly evolves based on the actual language use of real discourse communities in those situations. With an understanding of utterances as these real (not conventional) units of speech communication, Bakhtin characterizes genre as something we learn through practice, through "live speech communication with people around us" ("Speech Genres" 1238). It is real people using utterances in recognized generic situations that makes communication possible ("Speech Genres" 1234). Thus, blogging is learned through practice in crafting, linking to and commenting on texts online, and that practice, which is updated by the second, is susceptible to constant change. While every genre in the history of human communication is considered only relatively stable, because they are relatively new, regulated only by members and open to the public for interpretation and participation, blogs may be perceived as less (relatively) stable than other genres, which are perceived as already having been fixed in form, content and style—for example, an abstract, a formal scientific report or even a memoir, which are restricted by

previously recognized generic expectations. As in any genre, the style and exact form of blogs varies based on rhetorical purpose and the textual experience of the blogger—though the kinds of blogs I am discussing here are all, by their pre-meditated written nature, mediated discourse, some seem to be ruled by less of a persona, more casual or colloquial, to establish a bond of familiarity with others; while others are more formal and may often rely more on readers to infer their own meanings from multiple links rather than on the blogger’s own highly charged commentary on them. But the kinds of blogs I am examining in this chapter—that engage audiences with personal commentary and rely on individual experience while conveying information, too—fluctuate in style and form depending on the rhetorical needs of their writers, and are thus just as subject to the ideological and epistemological forces of the human beings whose acts of writing them create daily opportunities for heterogeneous as well as homogeneous cultural experiences. While no rhetorical features of blogging have been permanently reified, it is through such daily practice that bloggers participate in maintaining certain conventions and rhetorical moves that lend stability to its recognition as a genre (Barlow 50). Here, I will examine two generic characteristics of blogging—style and form—to suggest that blogs can be a comfortable site of dialogic discourse because they are already familiar to us as the online subjects we have become. Relying on this dialogic familiarity enables blogs to function as sites of abnormal discourse that subverts the dominant discourse in its availability as an accessible, public genre whose texts are authorized by a collective of participants who are simultaneously readers and writers of their own as well as others’ texts.

But in order to establish that blogging is a familiar textual practice, I must first explain my assumption of ourselves as online subjects. The proliferation of the Internet in our daily lives has led the majority of us as twenty-first century citizens to be cast as online subjects despite

whether we choose to be so assigned or fully grasp the rhetorical circumstances in which we find ourselves there personally, socially or economically. Many advertising campaigns—both local and national, in print or on radio or television—have chosen the Web as their primary direct marketing tool, promoting only their Web site as the sole contact information. Web site addresses now occupy our cultural consciousness, for the purposes of driving us online for goods, services and information we could only receive previously over the telephone or in person. This does not mean that we as online subjects are automatons, but because there is a shift in the way that information we need everyday is communicated to us, there is a shift also in the way we relate to that information. Whether we like it or not, when we turn to the Web, we are online subjects because the Internet is a technology that changes our interactions with each other, with information, with the world and history of communication. I can only use myself as the best example I know; I have Internet access at home and at work, and when I need to find information for everyday personal transactions, I turn there first. I visit Web sites not just for personal browsing for shopping, fact-finding and event details, but also for most of the consumer activities that I am privileged to see as necessary—car insurance quotes, comparison rates for phone services and online banking. I am also an online subject economically speaking when I receive, review and pay bills through paperless electronic transactions, and socially when I turn to e-mail, text messaging, MySpace or Facebook to communicate with friends and co-workers instead of calling or even walking down the hall to speak face-to-face with them. Each person has a different relationship to their online subjectivity, but it is getting increasingly easier and faster for me to turn online for information, and although most Web sites have alternative contact information to arrange verbal or face-to-face interaction (phone number and physical address),

many seek to keep customers or visitors on the Web almost exclusively through frequently asked question links, help services and online chats with customer service representatives.

Each person's relationship with Internet communication is not just different; it is a diversity that reflects that individual's social conditions, including class, race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and education. Because access to technology is not equal for all people, there is no equal starting ground for us as online subjects. Yet we are all invoked as subjects institutionally nonetheless, often with little or choice, and education is a solid example of how an entire group of heterogeneous individuals—students—are expected to adapt to their online subjectivity whether they are prepared or not, whether they want to or not, whether they have (easy) access or not. During my first year as an undergrad, I lined up with my fellow first-year students to register for classes at my appointed time, face-to-face with one of the college's Office of Student Records employees. This was the only way to register for classes for all students. Today, as a graduate student more than ten years later, I do not know where that office is located on campus. Students register for classes, apply for loans, pay tuition and submit their applications for entrance online. As an online university subject, if I want to view my grades, renew library books, request a transcript or complete a loan exit interview, I do so online, often with no alternative. It is not my intent here to argue for or against our status as online subjects; it is a complex question of inequitable access, pre-determined choices and shifting cultural norms of communication that goes far beyond whether or not the Internet makes our search for information easier—and is always ideologically charged to say the least. We can certainly do more from a chair than we have ever been able to do, but as computer software replaces the work of human beings, there is a growing need to understand the changes we are encouraging by using and relying on the Internet for our everyday needs. For my purposes here, my goal is not to argue

for or against our increasing subjectivity, but rather to suggest that, because we are daily cast in these roles as online subjects, we should try to understand the features at work there that place us in the rhetorical situation of various online environments. To this end, and because we are cast as online subjects by cultural institutions (as citizens, not just as consumers), I assume at least a passing familiarity with the basic rhetorical features I discuss here when I relate them to blogs specifically, focusing on how basic online moves converge in blogs to create a familiar enough online environment that people can recognize and comfortably navigate to engage in dialogue with one another.

Vernacular Voice

The essential aspect of blogging style that I want to highlight here can be summed up one word: vernacular. Bloggers' use of vernacular can be seen across the board, from teens' personal journals to journalistic blogs from pundit personalities. Everyday language use is intricately entangled with the everydayness of blogs, their vitality as primary speech genres and the appeal of expressive voice, which can range from quirky to crude. In "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin maintains that we select sentences and words not for themselves, but because of what we want to express in an utterance (1240). Bloggers use everyday language to express the everyday thoughts, opinions and information that their blogs are intended to convey, as in this blog, posted under rba, from ePluribusMedia:

A Nation of (F)laws

Submitted by: rba on Thu, 07/24/2008 - 12:53



originally posted 2008-07-24 02:38:08 -- bumped, cho



Serendipitous 'Toon @ USDA.gov

:::::

Today's understated opinions appear to result from a wave of dumb-ya sweeping Federal agencies and the Judiciary. In the first, the SEC pops a couple of low-level mental-masturbators scamming the public into buying phantom valued stock. So far, ok. But the highest value the stock reached was *eleven cents* a share, which even at millions of shares nets these idiots chump change compared with Soros' *3 billion* take for a hedge fund. What to do? Start with correcting the SEC Chair's name: "Cocks".

Figure 1 rba, ePluribusMedia

In this blog, an image is complemented by a brief commentary on the same issue; both texts—written and visual—address the same issue without referring to each other. The image relies even more heavily on vernacular, using everyday words and phrases that are currently associated with finance, economics and government spending in our contemporary culture, to comment upon an issue that affects today's “everyman” and that is also out of our control. In the written text, the blogger then mixes some jargon (which his or her audience would presumably understand, since ePluribus Media is touted as collaborative journalism for liberal thinkers whose tagline is “discuss, debate, decide ...”) with vernacular open to a wider audience—e.g., “mental-masturbators,” “idiots chump change” and a rather familiar pun “Cocks”—as a humorous vernacular appeal to the “everyman” in each person affected by this issue. Because, even in the

most serious of subjects or circumstances, blogs are familiar and frank, often parodic and satirical.

Their language use reveals blogs as a speech genre inextricably tied to a sense of familiarity. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin notes such familiar, frank and free speech during carnival; during his time, this speech included oaths, curses, abuses, profanities and, most importantly and applicable to blogging, colloquialisms: “The colloquial and artistic forms are sometimes so closely interwoven that it is difficult to trace a dividing line” (153). The style of blogs is, above all, colloquial—emulating, encouraging and enacting everyday conversations and familiar speech use found more in pop culture texts or in interactions with friends (*People*, not *Internal Auditor* magazine). Much of what makes the vernacular of blogs so effective can be defined in the absence of restrictions—generally, bloggers’ word usage is remarkable for the absence of jargon and pretension that so often characterize academic writing in its function as a gatekeeping force. Such familiar speech, as Bakhtin recognized during carnival, is also a heteroglossic force that serves to further offset official discourse and instead legitimize the language use of the people (*Rabelais* 154). In the same way, blogs have the power to harness and elevate the primacy of unmediated dialogue and communication involved in primary speech genres.

To be productive at creating relationships with others through texts, blogs that use accessible, everyday language establish an informality of tone characteristic of other primary speech genres that we as online subjects already know—beginning with the print genres of personal letters and journals and, more recently, with the online genres of e-mail and Web forums (chat rooms and sites, etc. where we can read and post public comments). The vernacular of blogs is often more akin to conversations I have with friends and colleagues than the

authoritative discourse I am expected to produce at work or school. The style, casual and unceremonious, is one that assumes a relationship with other bloggers and readers without actually saying so—a relationship of familiarity in two senses, both in their informal language use and in their reliance on cultural commonplaces that assume a mutual acquaintance with (or interest in pursuing) a certain extent of cultural knowledge (whether that is the most recent Sarah Palin interview or something broader like the arguments about global warming). This relationship is based on the textual recognition of similar styles that can be found elsewhere in our lives as online subjects—an e-mail (or mass e-mail), a public comment on a video on YouTube or an online review of a product, book or film. This does not mean that the style is limited in the ways it might be in these other online genres, or that it is free of additional stylistics that characterize all types of generic utterances. Barlow suggests that blogs that lack personal expression or strong style do not attract people with a diversity of perspectives (62), and certainly each blogger has her own style to attract the readers she wants to reach. But familiarity does not sacrifice voice; rather, bloggers assume that they will be understood and read by more people if their language use is accessible, not flat. Thus, blogs are characterized by (among a number of style attributes I do not have space to analyze here) accessible vocabulary and intimate voice, rhetorical features of familiarity that work to construct an environment of conversation with peers. There are, of course, blogs that employ more specialized jargon than others depending on their intent and primary target audience—blogs produced by and for academics, journalists or political analysts—but even these blogs are made publicly available to appeal to a potential wider audience. And any blogger can choose to be a part of a blogging community more likely to perpetuate such disciplinary jargon—or they can create their own blog in a non-affiliated blogging community and work at constructing their audience there, whether

they choose to use political or academic jargon, or not (see Rachel's Tavern for an example of an academic whose blog attracts a broader based audience than other academics).

This sense of familiarity and immediacy is another way in which blogs are recognizable as related to other primary speech genres online. Blogs rely on a sense of proximity, not eternity. Most readers don't get a sense that a blog is being written for the ages; it is written for today, for the near future at most. A blog, which takes personal perspective and turns it outward to the world of information and happenings, is a product of its particular moment and, therefore, always timely as it takes its place as part of the deluge of the rapidly changing information made available each minute on the Internet. In this way, blogs as primary speech genres are immediately related to "actual reality" (Bakhtin, "Speech Genres" 1228) in the ways that other online genres are connected to reality, communicating it even in real time as with instant messenger and chat rooms. Blogs as a familiar genre can benefit from our acquaintance with these genres; even though blogs themselves are not synchronous, the most recent entry is always listed first, so that we can see that the blog was written perhaps a day or two before—not a minute or two, as in synchronous communication, but also not a decade or two ago as in a print genre. Blogs' use of vernacular and intimate voice is abetted by this sense of immediacy, that right now this is how we talk, these are the words we use, this is how we communicate as an online culture—thus, their style falls in line with the familiar immediacy we have come to expect from other online genres.

Bakhtin asserts that it is the connection between reality and language that creates ideological expression, eradicating the false dichotomy of how we arrive at personal expression, through language *or* experience: "only the contact between the language meaning and the concrete reality that takes place in the utterance can create the spark of expression. It exists

neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us” (“Speech Genres” 1243). Before moving on to discuss the familiarity of blogging form and content, it’s important here to make a connection between the blog style I have been discussing—linguistically vernacular, rhetorically familiar—and the acknowledged bias at work in that style. If anything, what bloggers often do, to construct *ethos* with their intended audience, is reveal their personal ideology. Perhaps the most telling stylistic characteristic of blogs as a familiar genre connected to our everyday reality is bloggers’ construction of themselves as situated beings in ideological positions, communicating with others who are similarly (though not exactly or identically) saturated in contextual language use. In “Discourse of the Novel,” Bakhtin emphasizes that there is no such thing as a neutral utterance and that, since language in practice has no natural or innate expressivity, all specific utterances are invested with subjective meanings by their speakers or writers. In other words, all utterances in context are viewpoints from the personal perspectives of their users, “shot through with intentions” (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 293)—and so are the genres constructed from them, also in context. Blogs are personal renderings of information, opinions and experiences from the perspectives of bloggers. All blogs are, to varying degrees, textual filters of ideological experience—whether the experience relayed is a conversation about the economy overheard at a crosswalk or a link that calls attention to a relatively little-known independent film. A successful blogger understands and practices blogs as utterly subjective, personal utterances, and the reliability of an individual blogger’s established bias is not only a given, but, in practice, the reason someone’s blog can be a hit—and increase their *ethos*. Joanna Geary’s blog, for example, may seem at first glance to be a filter-style blog, commonly touted as objective, but it is, in fact, steeped in Geary’s ideological perspective as a regional newspaper journalist:

links for 2008-05-19

Published May 19, 2008 Uncategorized 1 Comment

- [Created in Birmingham » Surface Unsigned](#)

Question: What happens when an organisation tries to control over how it is talked about in the blogosphere by force? Answer: PR carnage.

(tags: [PR](#), [blogging](#))

links for 2008-05-16

Published May 16, 2008 Uncategorized 0 Comments

- [The Future of Newspapers. Strange Attractor: Picking out patterns in the chaos](#)

As journalists, we can meet this challenge. We can compete. We always have. We have competed against other journalists for exclusive stories. If new technologies are disrupting our business, we just need to use them to do some disrupting of our own.

(tags: [journalism](#), [newspapers](#), [thefuture](#))

- [Newspaper Next](#)

Making the Leap Beyond 'Newspaper Companies,' outlines a broad new vision for what newspaper companies must become if they are to survive in today's heavily disrupted media landscape.

(tags: [thefuture](#), [newspapers](#))

Figure 2 Joanna Geary, Thoughts of a UK regional newspaper journalist

All hyperlinks establish bloggers as subjective sources of information by their very nature—they indicate a preference of certain sites over others, passing on this blog and not that one, an act that is ideological at its root. No matter how objective it might seem just to point to another site or blog, it is an ideological selection, guiding readers down certain paths to making meaning, reaccentuating someone else's words to create a different utterance entirely in the context of another blog with its own audience expectations (whether commentary is controversial, highly charged or simply limited). In Geary's case, many of her links are to articles about her own work as an influential news figure in her region while others are links to outside sources accompanied by the highly charged language of ideological struggle in the context of her daily life: in the

above examples, for instance, “PR carnage,” “disrupting our business,” etc. Her ideological stance can be gleaned from her language use, which is not neutral in context by any means, is anything but objective, and, accordingly, her links follow suit, indicating her stance even more directly and taking a position on matters of ideological importance to her—control over speech and knowledge, the challenge of adapting information dissemination in our increasingly wireless and paperless age and the changing media landscape. Blogger J. D. Lasica writes of such blogs:

Sometimes they veer toward immediacy and conjecture at the expense of accuracy and thoughtful reflection. But the best news blogs offer a personal prism that combines pointers to trusted sources of information with a subjective, passion-based journalism. If nothing else, weblogs are about personal publishing—people sharing what’s in their gut and backing it up with facts or persuasion. (172)

This is what successful blog style can do: set aside the myth of objectivity, make a clear stance to readers and even narrow their ideological focus to a group of issues, so that passing readers can quickly establish whether to read on or keep moving, and so that, ultimately, their consistent reading audience knows what to expect and has reason to come back for more.

As subjective human beings, we are immersed in the ideology of blogs like many other online genres. The language use may be familiar, the voice may be intimate, the communication may be happening right now in our cultural moment—but in the end we still must be willing to engage in the subjective, messy dialogues of ideological beings, which we have need to recognize as constructed by fallible, complex individuals like us. Like the language of the marketplace that Bakhtin so admired in Rabelais, blogs, too, are “characterized by the absence of neutral words and expressions... colloquial speech, always addressed to somebody or talking for

him, or about him” in the socially and culturally constructed environment of the Internet in which “there are no neutral epithets and forms...no strictly neutral tones” (*Rabelais* 420). In “Portrait of the Blogger as a Young Man,” blogger Julian Dibbell suggests that it is this quality (blogs’ style imbued with subjectivity) that, in the real circumstances of the Web, is part of our transactional understanding of language and the social construction of knowledge (76)—a heady intellectual take that most people probably aren’t so acquainted with, but one that nevertheless can be recognized by anyone. Put more simply, Dibbell sums it up like this: “a personal point of view is as often as not your most reliable guide through the chaos” (76). In other words, the dialogic nature of blogs is rooted in their foundation as conversations from real people who are, by nature, incapable of pure objectivity because we all rely on the subjectivities of language itself, the words we use, the words that compose bloggers’ realities and transform them from the familiar immediacy and everydayness of primary speech genres—which Bakhtin defines as private discourse not intended for ideological purposes (“Speech Genres” 1228)—into textual experiences that are constructed for the artistic and ideological purposes of secondary speech genres. It is this understanding of our subjectivity that can connect our previous generic experiences to blogs as a genre, since we exist as human beings immersed in ideologically charged language as well as online subjects in similar linguistic circumstances.

I am not arguing, however, that blog style has nothing to improve or speaks to all discourse communities with equal ideological transparency. It is not to be taken for granted that bloggers communicate with greater ease with those in their own, or similar, discourse communities. Bloggers make ideological space for their own words, but they are not required to make that discursive space for others who do not have equal access to the technology, education or ideological impetus that brings many to the Web. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the*

Practice of Freedom, bell hooks calls for an “acknowledgment and celebration of diverse voices, and consequently of diverse language and speech, [which] necessarily disrupts the primacy of standard English” (173), and I am not convinced by far that this is happening as often as it should in the blogosphere or anywhere online. Blogs could have more to offer than is currently practiced, could provide an online space for other written voices that are not standard English, because there is no demand that blogs operate in standard English within the same language parameters of other standard cultural institutions (see Grigar on electronic writing). But this is very often the case, as in the blogs I examine here, in the blogs I read as well as any I have written. And so, before moving on, I must acknowledge my own privilege in what I am here defining as familiar language use—which is familiar to those in my immediate discourse communities as an educated white woman in a white collar job pursuing an advanced academic degree, and I assume, to a certain degree, familiar to a majority of people in the discourse communities in which I choose to act. There are many discourse communities not represented in what I recognize as familiar, and blogs do not provide any easy answers to how other styles may come to be represented so that discourse communities that have fewer opportunities of access, education and generic fluency may see themselves and their language in a greater proportion of blogs.

Dialogic Form: Others’ Utterances & Intertextuality

It wouldn’t be accurate to contend that blogs’ familiar, or vernacular, style is enough to make them dialogic, especially inherently so, but it is an important beginning for blogs as an

online generic practice in which people might hope to feel comfortable as discursive, textual, online subjects. The lack of jargon in a blog appealing to a wide or general audience is one step; the transparency that accompanies ideologically situated interactions, in acknowledgment of a blogger's ideological relationships with others, is another. But there is a more pervasive dialogic feature at work in blogs that is also one of the most obvious, complex and insidious—intertextuality. In this section, I will turn my attention to examining Bakhtin's theory of intertextuality as it applies to blogs, supporting and problematizing them as a familiar online genre. One of the primary rhetorical moves of blogs, intertextuality (which encompasses hypertext and other textual relationships) lends further credence to blogs as a familiar generic form—even if that form does not have an exact print or verbal equivalent—and further potential as a dialogic genre.

Not only does every utterance contain its own “other,” its own struggle, but it is this inherently dialectic *agon* (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 354-57) that is magnified when utterances enter interactive environments. Blogs are always drenched in the context of other texts, always situated in relation to others' ideological positions in a tradition of other utterances that begins before one utterance enters the scene and continues long after its completion—in other words, blogs are, at their fundamental level of basic form, intertextual. Bakhtin characterizes all utterances as inherently responsive, as reflective and aware of other composers and their utterances in the present, past and future, always positioned to participate in meaning making (“Speech Genres” 1233). This intertextuality is manifested blogs as generic utterances that reveal—not (attempt to) veil—their textual relationships with other texts. For blogs as a genre, intertextuality is not theory but everyday practice: blogs typically include, refer to or are in response to other texts, whether those texts are other blogs, Web sites, articles, photos, etc.—

online or in print. One way that bloggers include other texts is through exact repetition—in other words, a quote. In the case of Meg Tsiamis' blog, the repetition is of a blogger's own words from a comment made on another's blog:

I made [this comment](#) on Lee's blog:

“ It comes down to a) how does one define a "top" blog, and b) how does one quantify that?

Certainly the presence of a large subscriber base indicates the reach and popularity of a blog. But then so do citations (eg Technorati rank or authority - but this is also problematic), and traffic. Some blogs might cater to an audience that hasn't yet embraced RSS technology, and yet the readers will visit the site daily.

I know of a blog that has upwards of a hundred comments each post, and yet fails to "qualify" for the top list. I don't know what the subscriber numbers are, but surely that's a signal of a popular blog? But that kind of information is very difficult to easily quantify (and put in a formula).

Other blogs are informational/instructional in nature and consequently have a lot of search engine traffic, but perhaps less subscribers and less "community".

The aim of the list was to determine what is popular with Australians, which is why it is weighted by the Australian Alexa rank - so that Aussies can find blogs that are popular with other Aussies. e.g. An "Australian" blog in a foreign language might be very popular overseas, which thousands of subscribers, but would have little value to your average Australian.

Certainly your idea of a "top" blog and mine would more than likely differ. We have different interests, so it stands to reason. I'm not into cooking, cars or gardening, but that's not to say that others aren't and that they're less popular or less worthy of being on a top list.

Figure 3 Meg Tsiamis, Dipping into the Blogpond

In this way, a blogger can either repeat her entire blog, making it part of a new utterance as part of the text on screen (rather than as a reference to her original utterance through a hyperlink), or focus on a particular section for emphasis or reaccentuation. And the same can be done with another person's blog also, as in this example from Tsiamis' same blog:

Lee's response included this:

“ I guess what irks me is that the list is proclaimed as the Top 100, not *a* top 100.

I know it is NOT you proclaiming it so, but any reasonable person would make that assumptive leap.

I don't know what the answer is, either. It's a bugger! 😊

Frankly, I wasn't going to address what has already been addressed before, but I guess as this is a "feud" some sort of response is needed - as per [this Facebook conversation](#) (*edit: conversation now linked to and image removed*):

Note: For "the record" Lee's "LeeHopkins.net" is ranked at 76, which is a good thing I guess, because if not the rankings would have "inaccurate and therefore non-reliable and untrustworthy", as opposed to just "flawed, deeply flawed".

Figure 4 Meg Tsiamis, Dipping into the Blogpond

The online intertextuality of quoting is at work in other online genres as well and appears on Web sites, in online articles and most especially in the popular use of e-mail, when users take advantage of the specific feature that allows the previous e-mail message to appear under the body of the new text being written. In blogs, this feature is more deliberate—there is no automated feature to be programmed or activated—because the user must copy and paste (or take the time and effort to retype) the specific entry or entries she wishes to include in her creation of a new text in the form of a fresh blog entry. This is a method that is familiar from online genres such as e-mail, but is also a previously relied upon rhetorical move from print sources since their inception. And although the examples I have included here refer to other online texts, blogs can also include quotes or excerpts from public print sources just as well as private conversations or personal experiences. The intertextuality only grows more complex with each outside source that is used in the creation of a single blog entry, which is itself only a piece of the text that is the entire blog as a whole—a different online utterance from just a single entry. In addition to the previous example of Tsiamis, who quoted a text she had posted on another's blog, bloggers can

just as easily repost excerpts of texts they created at an earlier date. Their interaction with each of these texts reveals their relationships not only with the texts themselves, but also with those who produce them as well as the ideology at work in them. The references to other texts are accompanied by analysis or commentary that place the blogger herself in a specific ideological position in her own crafted dialogue of texts—which can interact with each other as well as the blogger’s words—as well as in the conversations that exist in those referent texts. Each blog, in a sense, is a Burkean parlor of neverending online generic conversation. And in this way, blogs as online utterances are overtly contextual and interrelated; not indifferent or self-sufficient, they reflect others’ utterances—inviting readers to make meaning from others’ original texts along with bloggers’ perceptions of them—as a main feature of their own. As a genre, blogs can be recognized as connected to other texts just like an e-mail, but the overall textual experience is more akin to an academic argument, a debate or any number of print and oral genres that invoke others’ ideology as both textual support (as a quoted source to increase the authority, credibility or reliability of one’s own words) and ideological incitement (as invoked ideas to bring into the conversation to argue for or against, or grapple with). Still, the rhetorical act of quoting is a familiar one to us in whatever context we are more familiar with, in print, online or both.

However, there are dialogic characteristics of intertextuality in blogs that do not have recognizable equivalents online, in print or verbally. One is the repetition not of an excerpt of another text, but of the entire text itself, transporting an utterance into a different social situation than the first time it was created or disseminated. The following utterance from blogger William Brady is an exact repetition of a historical print document, not a text written by the blogger or any of his readers or commentors:

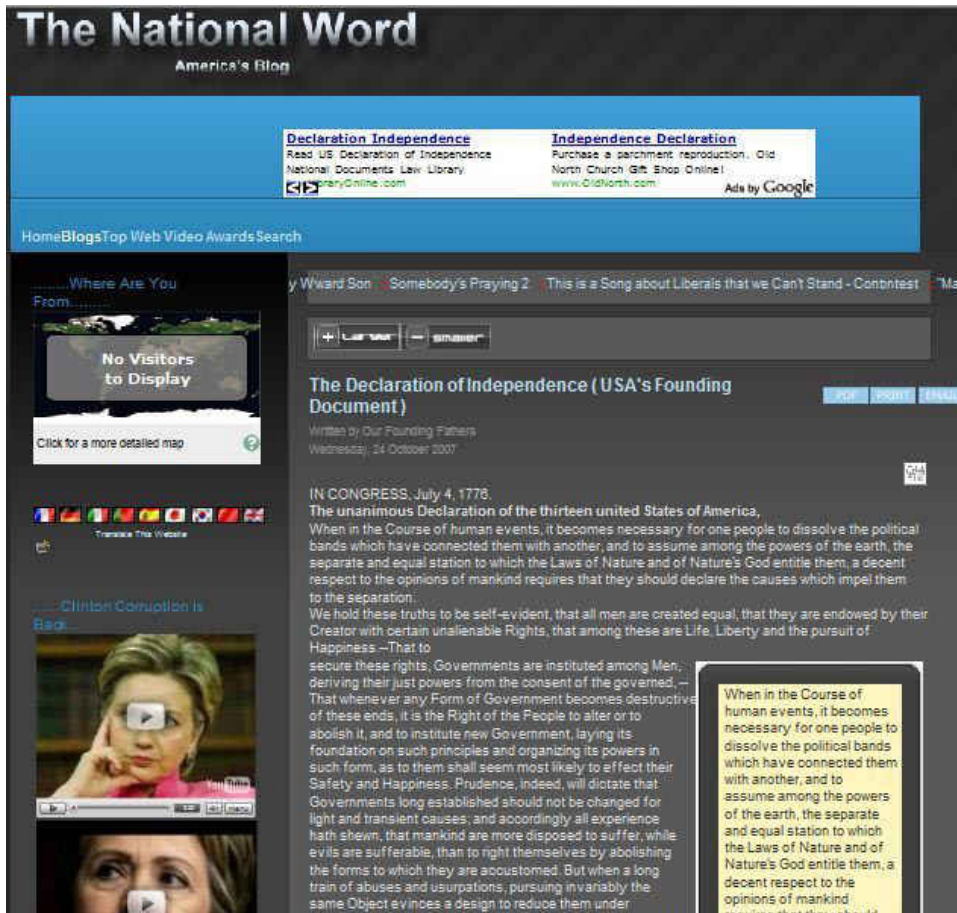


Figure 5 William Brady, The National Word

Bakhtin insists that every utterance is unique, even an exact repetition of an utterance, because its context creates a new utterance in and of itself (“Speech Genres” 1234-35), and this particular National Word blog is a prime example. The blogger repeats the words from the Declaration of Independence, authoring a new text in a new context. The Declaration presented here in 2007 is not the Declaration presented in 1776—because it is now part of an ideologically charged text that is larger than just the already ideologically charged words themselves. It is part of a blog named *The National Word*, appearing next to Hillary Clinton videos (prefaced by the mention of corruption), and part of a series of posts whose entries include the ills of government intrusion in

health care and education, and hints that Hurricane Katrina leveled the city of New Orleans because of its high crime rate (which the blogger links directly to the number of people on welfare).

Exact repetition is an ideological textual act in the blogosphere that is connected to not only the blogger himself (in this case, Brady, who is not clearly profiled on his blog), but also other posts in the same blog as well as videos on, and links in and to, that blog. This aspect of intertextuality problematizes the familiarity of blogs as an online genre because this rhetorical move is seldom crafted in any genre in the manner in which it can be exercised in a blog, as a complete utterance (not a single page of a Web site, not a part of an e-mail forward) that is not accompanied by any commentary except its attribution, pointing to the historical document as the primary source of the entire text.

And the exact repetition of a text to create a new utterance is only complicated by one of the primary rhetorical moves available in blogging—hypertext. As with the exact repetition of a text, hypertext as part of a blogical utterance creates a rhetorical situation in which the same text can be read countless ways and can lead readers to a multitude of different texts and contexts. In his article, “@ Title This_Chapter as... [Was: On the Web, Nobody Knows You’re an Editor],” Mick Doherty claims that no utterance that uses hypertext can be read the same way twice, that each reading is different, and in each reading, the audience invents what exists by choosing the hyperlink path to follow, which can be reinvented repeatedly (96). Readers and bloggers not only choose which links to make part of their textual experience, but also the links may not function or may redirect to another site entirely, altering even the blogger’s intent in making it part of her text. This blog from Gael Fashingbauer Cooper includes a hyperlink to an online Esquire article, which has a hyperlink that directs readers to an interview with the author,

as well as an Amazon Web page for a print novel, which includes an online summary and reviews:



Figure 6 Gael Fashingbauer Cooper, Pop Culture Junk Mail

Juxtaposed with other texts in numerous hyperlinks, a single blog takes on multiple meanings (Blood "Weblogs"), and this is only one example out of millions of the apparent simplicity of hypertext that can just as quickly add to readers' ease of access to information as it can to a growing awareness of the inexhaustibility of hypertext, which can lead you from skimming a blog to reading a sample of a related text, albeit one that is not mentioned in the blog at all, one

which the blogger herself may not have read or ever encountered. The same can be encountered in blogrolls, the final formal feature that I will suggest lends dialogic strength to blogs although it has no exact familiar equivalent in other genres, online or otherwise. Blogrolls are similar to online reading lists (or Amazon listmanias) or even the profile information people provide about themselves on their Web sites or social networking profiles; blogrolls are, in a sense, a list of likes, specifically of blogs that a blogger enjoys and recommends, such as this one from Tsiamis:

AUSSIE BLOGROLL

- o [Adelaide Green Porridge Cafe](#)
 - o [Alister Cameron, Blogologist](#)
 - o [All For Women](#)
 - o [Ben Barren](#)
 - o [Blogging Personal](#)
 - o [Blogging Sueblimely](#)
 - o [Cameron Reilly - G'day World](#)
 - o [Craig Harper](#)
 - o [Cyberdesign Works](#)
 - o [Darren Rowse](#)
 - o [Imaginif](#)
 - o [John Lampard - Disassociated](#)
 - o [Kelley](#)
 - o [Kin's Home...](#)
 - o [Laurel Papworth](#)
 - o [Life in the Country](#)
 - o [Lightening](#)
 - o [Matt Vapor](#)
 - o [Miscellaneous Mum](#)
 - o [On Blogging Australia](#)
 - o [Semantically Driven](#)
 - o [Servant of Chaos](#)
 - o [Skelliewaq](#)
-

Figure 7 Meg Tsiamis, Dipping into the Blogpond

But the presence of a blogroll as one rhetorical form among many in a single blog makes it more than just a simple list. It is a gathering of hypertext links to other blogs, independent of any one entry. In a similar way that hypertext ideologically situates a specific point of entry in a single post, blogrolls locate the entire blog as a larger, ideological whole while emphasizing the importance of hypertext itself in the genre (Metascene 125). Blogrolls are hypertext links that are not prefaced or accompanied by commentary or analysis; they are merely, in all their unexplained complexity, endorsements of others' blogs that do not direct readers specifically to any one entry point but the most recent post, which can change an endless number of times, depending on the blogger's update frequency. Blogrolls can lead to a myriad of utterances that ultimately create endless textual experiences, or opportunities for them, to readers with enough time and interest. Blogrolls tell readers about a blogger by disclosing what they like to read, and they offer the opportunity to diverge away from the texts they create to find other sites of (possibly even more) interest (Barlow 161). This is the cascading information waterfall that hypertext brings to blogging, which creates a new generic exigency for readers and bloggers to be aware of the multiple texts—and thus, the multiple ideologies—at work in just one text, one entry, on one blog.

What hypertext does—including in the case of blogrolls—is further saturate readers in the ideological contexts of bloggers' language use and intertextuality. Ideological markers that enmesh bloggers, texts and readers, hypertext reveals what is present in all (online) utterances—that they are all ideological in nature, drenched in the subjectivity of ideological beings who are in constant dialogue with other subjective beings, language and genres. Their familiarity may make them accessible to us as online subjects, but the ways in which blogs operate outside the recognized forms of other online genres sets them apart as a genre of interactions that, in its key

rhetorical features, presents to readers the textual relationships between participants that influence ideological meaning. Not only are all bloggers themselves respondents to the tradition of online language use, generic practices and ideological purposes that came before them, but, more importantly, a history of these links is made transparent to readers, making the blogosphere part of a dialogic speech plan that is far more dynamic than the dominant discourse currently authorizes as a homogenous force. In the blogosphere, one of Bakhtin's most emphatic points is underscored by the very rhetorical moves that construct the genre itself: understanding the texts at hand is *not* "the total speech plan" ("Speech Genres" 1238) because the texts are themselves shifting by the second and are saturated in ideology that, while relatively transparent, is only part of the conversation taking place in these texts about other texts that are themselves meant to be part of someone else's conversation in future texts (Barlow 78) and, therefore, never final, never completed.

Conversation as Meaning

The familiarity of blogs as ideological conversations bolsters their dialogic strength as a genre because, in style and content, I do not think they are completely foreign to us as online subjects. We are familiar with conversations as a set of verbal genres and, in varying contexts, print and online genres as well. We know the everyday language we employ to navigate those conversations, and the forms they take in our speech, in our writing, in our online communications. But the generic practice of conversation is not merely familiar—as it functions in blogs, it operates as abnormal discourse (as defined by Gale, via Rorty) that subverts the

dominant discourse because it further opens a genre that is already recognizable and accessible to the public. Without strict membership rules for contributors, a genre whose norm is conversation makes it difficult to maintain the illusion of the dominant culture's universal conventions as discursive norms. While academic discourse from teachers can serve as subversive in content, style and even form (as I will discuss later in this chapter), the academy as a social institution still maintains a hold—through authorized generic practice—over what is considered acceptable forms of discourse—in the form of the academic essay (as it is privileged in writing courses), access to what are deemed credible sources (often available only through purchase or affiliation with an accredited educational institution) and even the genres of the classroom that dictate the rules of behavior between teachers and students (see Bazerman, “Where Is the Classroom?”). Such restrictions make it more challenging for people to participate in the forms and ways in which others in the discourse community make meaning—which instead sustains the pretense that authorized classroom genres represent the heterogeneous realities of those who participate in discourse through them.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to turn away from the question of familiarity or innovation in style or form to ask instead about the greater ideological significance of the conversations bloggers and their texts create. What are the larger ideological implications of turning to blogs as textual online conversations? I have briefly touched upon the potential of such endless conversations to overwhelm readers with the sheer number of possibilities and entry and exit points blogs offer through hypertext and blogrolls, but I am also interested in what there is to gain from such conversations besides an awareness and increased understanding of our online textual practices and textual relationships with other as online subjects. Is there something larger at stake than simply learning to converse in (relatively newer) online discursive

environments? The simple sounding, though by no means simple, answer is no—and yes. As a genre of textual conversations, the purpose of blogs is to disseminate those conversations and, as they are doing so, to provide users practice in the art of online conversation. But publishing a blog shouldn't be confused in ideological priority with creating it to begin with. The priority of blogging is first to make the conversations, then to distribute them publicly. It is the act of conversation itself that opens up blogging as a truly dialogic form of online communication.

In “The Internet Is Not Killing Off Conversation but Actively Encouraging It,” blogger Douglas Rushkoff characterizes the conversations of blogs not as form or style, but as content: the conversation is the content, regardless of the topic, the rhetorical situation or what is used to convey that conversation: “Content is just a medium for interaction between people. The many forms of content we collect and experience online, I'd argue, are really just forms of ammunition—something to have when the conversation goes quiet...” (117). Rushkoff uses knowledge of pop culture as one example of ammunition; he describes those who know a lot about pop culture as “social currency champions”:

Content on the Web is no different. The only difference between the Internet and its media predecessors is that the user can collect and share social currency in the same environment. Those of you who think you are creating online content take note: your success will be directly dependent on your ability to create excuses for people to talk to one another. (118)

Anything that continues the conversations already taking place online is dialogic content in this sense, including the commentary, quotes, blogrolls and hypertext of blogs, as in this example from *The Angry Black Woman*:

Nothing Says Internet Popularity Like

Posted on April 7, 2008 by the angry black woman

Being linked to from a White Supremacist website. Happy Monday!

ETA: Wow, if you all could see my moderation queue right now.

This is the kind of thing that makes people leave the Internet. It really is. I went through a good chunk of my early life never encountering any blatant racism. I'm sure there was *some*, but my young, naiveté, and probably my parents shielded me from most of it. No one ever called me a Nigger, or said I couldn't do something because I was black, or anything like that.

I got to wait until I was all grown up for things like that to happen.

But even still, I don't think I ever encountered the kind of raw, ignorant, stupid, dangerous, and hurtful hate due specifically to my heritage and skin color until I started this blog. I have been called a Nigger 47 times today. **TODAY**. And it's not fucking over yet.

This is the kind of thing that turns people militant.

This is the kind of thing that makes people scared for their well being.

This is the kind of thing that silences voices, and I cannot lay any blame on anyone who chooses silence in the face of this.

This is the kind of thing that makes me a **FUCKING ANGRY BLACK WOMAN**.

Figure 8 The Angry Black Woman, The Angry Black Woman

Without even seeking out the actual link to the white supremacist site to which The Angry Black Woman's blog refers, readers are engaged in conversations of racism and the ideological disputes surrounding racism's definition and how individuals' perspectives influence that definition. Bakhtin characterizes all utterances—not just ones that involve serious consequences, such as the contentious issue of racism—as entangled, agitated, tense and complex, always already involved: every living utterance is, in its particular sociohistorical moment, “open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped...by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it” (“Discourse” 276). In other words, every utterance is part of a conversation, if not a conversation in and of itself, and each of these conversations are

ideologically charged in their contexts. Whether or not I decided to seek out more information on the conversation that began with the white supremacist site, before The Angry Black Woman's blog entered into the conversation already established there, as a reader, I was exposed to both conversations, not just the one that was immediately presented to me through the words onscreen.

What I find both interesting and frustrating about this blog—and, indeed, many blogs—is the lack of closure, or at least of completed meaning as a generic utterance. They are known for being brief, for being archived in reverse chronological order for easy reading of multiple entries. But even so, I sometimes have trouble mustering the energy to search out—or to read, if there is quite a bit of hypertext—multiple tendrils of the conversation to try to make meaning out of texts in the ways that I am accustomed to doing. In this case, I did try to follow the conversation back to its immediate textual origins, but was disappointed to find no link to the site or how to find one. As a new reader of this particular blog, I had no loyalty to this particular blogger and was strictly interested in all parts of the conversation; if I had been a regular reader, I may have been more supportive of, not disappointed by, the blogger's decision not to include information that would trace back to the supremacist site. (Each of these reactions produces a different reading of the same blog. The role that readers as a discursive group have in the conversation of blogs will be discussed in the next chapter.) As it was, I had to fight the urge to judge my reading as incomplete because I could not locate more parts of the conversation; if, as Bakhtin declares so often, context is everything, then how can I evaluate a text with any reliability without access to all the parts of the conversation?

I am still fighting the urge to declare any reading of this blog a misfire without the original text, but Barlow's text seems to keep encouraging me not to:

Though there are plenty of bloggers who believe that they have the “answers” and are blogging merely to share them, the aggregate of the blogs creates a Text not of knowledge, but of exploration, something that drives those who believe in truth as a concrete entity crazy. “How can you trust the blogs?” they ask, never realizing that they pose exactly the wrong question, for the blogs aren’t claiming to provide anything trustworthy at all. Instead they *come from* concepts of meaning that may or may not have validity, and *go to* points that are left up to the reader (and new writer) to determine. The core of Barthes’ point is that the reader (and the writer, too, as a reader) *comes to* the blog most often not for meaning but for verification within another ongoing conversation. (77)

Just as there is no single entry that determines what a blog is or is about, Barlow suggests, there is no singular meaning contained therein; there is no closure, no one answer, no final answer at all. If I already understand this logic with the print genres that I have a working knowledge of—book-length academic texts, for instance—then why should my understanding of online genres be any different? Most texts seem to raise more questions than they answer, reaching out to endless conversations of other texts—just as sorting out the meanings of all texts is dependent upon endless contexts that cannot all be ascertained with absolute certainty. The hyperlink to the supremacist site was missing from this blog, but the entry was saturated with other contexts that I could also have used to participate in the larger conversation, including the blogger’s blogroll, comments and previous and subsequent postings. If, as Barlow suggests, the conversation is the means as well as the ends of blogging, then jumping in to the conversation at the entry point I encountered would have been an appropriate, and dialogic, response to the discursive situation at hand. And although I hesitated to do so at the time, upon reflection, I am hard pressed to see how

this is so substantially and ideologically different from my relationship with the academic texts whose conversations I do not hesitate to engage with. In many ways, they are identical, the most important of which is that I cannot know every context in which they were written and do not have access to every text in the conversation of which they are already a part before I arrive on the scene.

Access to Heteroglossic Experience

Of course, the primary difference is the authority of the source—The Angry Black Woman’s blog is not an authorized text from an established academic press. It does not have the contextual features I have come to trust—the reputable press, the foreword, the works cited, the credible names I have come to recognize. I have been generically trained to search out these and other markers of authority in texts, but their absence in blogs serves to remind me that these are social constructions, too—often perpetuated as truths in texts but ideologically saturated individual realities, nonetheless. And Barlow’s *Bloggling America* as one of those trustworthy academic texts reminds me that to expect of blogs what we expect of any other genre is to miss the point of different genres entirely (77). To ask the same questions of blogs that we would ask of an academic text, Barlow says, is to ask the wrong question (77). Genres require us to acknowledge their differences not only in our usage of them, but also in our expectations of them and the kinds of questions we ask of them. Barlow maintains that blogs aren’t meant to be trusted the way we may be (too) accustomed to trusting print texts because there is no official, authorized system of checks and balances (77)—no publisher, no peer review before

dissemination, etc. And it isn't a matter of offering a positive quality to balance out this negative quality—of saying that blogs can't be trusted, but they do have dialogic strength as online conversations. Barlow seems to suggest that, while we can ask the trust question, we shouldn't expect an immediately satisfying answer—and we should adjust our generic expectations accordingly, not merely live with the disappointment that blogs don't live up to our previous generic experiences.

However, despite Barlow's emphasis that conversation is the point—not certain meaning that can be verified and trusted—there's still a great deal of epistemic potential to blog conversations—namely in their role as abnormal discourse that operates outside the traditional sources of authority. If conversations are the point of blogs (opening up, not completing, meanings of texts), how does this alter or inform our generic understanding of ourselves as online subjects with this textual practice available to us? Other generic, dialogic transactions that we encounter beg this question: just who can author a credible text in this context? But blogs, as they are currently practiced as a publicly accessible genre, demand that we alter this question to ask one specifically geared toward blogging as a new genre whose rhetorical means have altered to meet new social exigencies. The question most bloggers seem to be answering, in their texts, is a variant inquiry: how can I take this author's text and make my own meaning out of it (and other texts as well)? The question of authorization, of trust, is one that we ask in any conversation—verbal or written, in print or otherwise—and, in the next chapter, I will discuss other specific rhetorical features of blogs that involve more direct responses from other readers and writers (through comment functions and hypertext), which act as monitorial elements. But for now, it will be productive to maintain focus on the practice of conversation as it occurs between a blogger and the other texts she uses to create her dialogic utterance, the conversations

she attempts to create out of the conversations she has encountered previously. These conversations get their strength not from traditional sources of authority, but from allowing people access to the knowledge of others' individual experience. The argument for the dialogic strength of blogs as conversations is the same as the argument that cautions against blogs as reliable sources—that blogs are unauthorized sources of knowledge and, therefore, open up what counts as knowledge itself. Bloggers create online utterances that tell their perspectives of events and happenings, so that readers receive information directly from lived experience rather than through additional layers of authorizing filters. Alex Horton's blog, *Army of Dude: Reporting on Truth, Justice and the American Way of War*, gives one individual's perspective of his own lived experience as a soldier in Iraq—the mundane details as well as hypertext and reflective commentary that indicate his perspectival bias—crafted into an online utterance in the textual environment of the blogosphere:

Stupid Shit of The Week™

Dear readers, it has been far too long since my last entry. It's the same old same old, rushing around at the last minute to squeeze two months worth of work into a few weeks. I would have liked another entry before another edition of SSOTW, but this simply cannot wait. The winner of the award this week is the undisputed champion and there is no need for nominees. Loading connexes with thousands of pounds of worthless equipment pales in comparison to what was handed down to us early last week. The bar has been sunk readers, sunk to an unrecoverable level and I want the world to hear about this before any of you consider a career in the military or know someone who is thinking about it. The only candidate and winner of SSOTW:

Personal Armor Restriction

I touched on this subject on my first post, how the Army has *restricted* soldiers from wearing armor superior to the ceramic weights we currently haul around.

"We're very concerned that people are spending their hard-earned money on something that doesn't provide the level of protection that the Army requires people to wear. So they're, frankly, wasting their money on substandard stuff," said Col. Thomas Spoehr, director of materiel for the Army.

This is exactly what happens when you let an ultra bureaucratic committee of blowhards decide the fate of soldiers who actually do, gasp!, dangerous things with the terrible equipment they've been given. I am willing to bet anything that this colonel doesn't leave his air conditioned office at the Pentagon, where his most intense moments are posing for photo ops and keeping his uniform neat. I can say with all confidence, Colonel Spoehr, that I could look online for five minutes and find plates that will better protect me from rifle rounds and shrapnel than the Army issue plates. I'd even say that they'd be lighter than the roughly 15 pound ceramics we lug around. Embarrassment of the Army's shortcomings in the armor sector apparently is worth more than blood and lives.

Figure 9 Alex Horton, Army of Dude

No trusted institution or institutional procedure authorizes Horton as a trusted source of knowledge, yet he offers a personal perspective on a highly controversial and incredibly personal issue. And he does so with subjective language that reveals the ideology at work in his particular social situation, which remains of real import to his daily life even after he has returned from war: "While deployed, we knew society moved on without us. What we didn't realize is that it would keep going even after we got home, still without us" (Horton, "Nation Building"). This is not a report; it is a story, a conversation, the account of an experienced individual with something to say and a place to say it online. Blood views the majority of bloggers through this perspective rooted in individual experience: blogs "provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time" ("Weblogs").

Horton's blog does not rely on outside authority to empower his utterances, but instead uses his own personal experience as his knowledge of the world, which he then passes on to his readers. In this vital way, because blogs are not formally empowered by institutions, they participate, as a genre, in expanding what counts as knowledge and, thus, operate as abnormal discourse, counter to the homogeneous force at work in normal discourse (which authorizes the conventions, values and assumptions of the dominant culture, not the specific, contextual experience of the individuals in that culture). As conversations grow, the authorized control of knowledge weakens, and knowledge itself is opened up to include the personal experiences of those creating texts online. It is this access, to texts, to experiences, that destabilizes the hold of normal discourse over the way individuals make meaning—and, in blogs, leads to conversation itself as the only meaning we can seek or hope to find.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin notes that much of rhetorical history reveals the centripetal force of those in power (two notable examples are Aristotle and Augustine) who want to centralize and unify privileged European languages (271). Those in positions of power maintained control over what counted as knowledge by controlling what counted as acceptable word use and generic practice—and, thus, what counted as meaning. Bakhtin identifies the notion of control and intention—of every word, much less of every utterance—as naïve because all words are already entangled members of the heteroglossic communication of language and inherent in each dialogic utterance are the struggles of ideological worldviews ("Discourse" 270-75). These ideological intersections can be evidenced in blogs like Horton's every day, and in them the already entangled role of individual experience takes center stage as textual conversation rather than any assumptions of the dominant culture. In "Modern Dreams," Lawrence Alloway suggests that what's changed is "the stimulus behind postmodern culture"

itself, that we are in the process of “[replacing] culture as an object of contemplation with culture as a system of communication” (qtd. in Brottman xxvi). What this implies is the active participation of the individuals who empower that culture, that we are in the process of participating in a new way of looking at culture as communication and not as an object. Barlow characterizes this shift in different terms, but the impetus toward communal participation is clear: “When culture has become commodity, and a commodity becomes the vehicle for unfettered public discussion of culture, it is difficult to restrict that discussion to a privileged few” (4-5). As a genre, blogs have become a popular part of online communication largely because they do not enforce such restrictions. Instead, they tell the stories of a multitude of individuals from their own ideologically charged perspectives—disseminating the conversations of everyday people who are, purposely or unknowingly, participating in a genre of unauthorized abnormal discourse that is not a sign of cultural degradation (of the universal values that the dominant discourse supposed) but rather an indication of a democratic change toward the way we participate in our culture as communication (Brottman xix). Blood suggests that the democratic shift in access to blogging technology is also a shift in understanding the discursive power of the rhetorical moves blogs make available: blogs are proof of “a staggering shift from an age of carefully controlled information provided by sanctioned authorities (and artists) to an unprecedented opportunity for individual expression on a worldwide scale” (“Weblogs”). This kind of expression exhibits an understanding of our transactional relationship with language, which exists at one end of the spectrum upon which Bakhtin identified the two poles of language (unitary language as it is imagined and demanded by conservative unifying forces and then individual speakers in that language who are is heteroglossic no matter how the language is posited as naturally standardized) (see “Discourse”). This kind of expression exhibits an understanding of our

language use as a heteroglossic force, and any genre's capability of employing that force rather than bolstering the imagined unity of the dominant discourse. This, Barlow argues, is the argument made both for and against blogs; many of the arguments against blogs as serious discourse are arguments against them as abnormal discourse, arguments embedded in the ideology of the elitist control of knowledge and assumption that a genre of the people's heteroglossic language use—*anyone's* language use—that is not controlled, monitored or authorized by an authorized elite (xiii), will become a popular force of chaos, not a source of real discursive change that could add to our textual abilities as online subjects.

That is why the question of access must not end at the literal question of Internet access, but always extend to include the more complex ideological question of what the Internet gives us access *to* exactly. Jenkins argues that the more reductive access argument (to Internet access) simplifies that there is more at work here (and more to gain) than technological access; rather, participatory culture demands that people have familiarity with and mastery of the new kinds of skill sets and social interactions now available as well as extended access to the technologies that sustain them (23). Jenkins defines these new cultural participants as “monitorial citizens,” who need to be able not only to read and write but “to participate in the deliberations over what issues matter, what knowledge counts, and what ways of knowing command authority and respect” (258-59). This is Jenkins' “ideal of the informed citizen,” greatly modified from previous centuries due to the inrush of information available, which no one person can readily recall (259). He likens this particular participatory online culture to vernacular and folk culture, in which everyone participates (and there is no distinction between producers and consumers, which I will discuss in the next chapter) and takes media production into their own hands from whatever level of experience they have (Jenkins 132). What blogs give us access to is individual

experience outside our own, which leads to a heteroglossia of expression, creating a multitude of texts, conversations and meanings in the process of telling our stories as we experience them, read them, write them and share them. And the generic opportunities they provide are the rhetorical means to create and publish those texts. Such online folk culture can flourish wherever there is a manner of distribution, like the Internet (Jenkins 136). A genre of such access to folk culture does not weaken our culture of communication any more than increasing access to literacy education dilutes or threatens that culture; increasing access to information and dissemination does not change the ideologies of the people using the technology—“it simply brings more people into the equation. The Internet does not limit culture. On the contrary, it expands it by increasing the possibilities” (Barlow xiv-xv). And the rhetorical moves available in blogs—ways to express the complex ideological interactions involved in personal experience—are the first step in creating stable generic textual communities based on the collective intelligence of individuals who are authorized not by official institutions, but by other members of that textual discourse community—which will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: REDEFINING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: BLOGS AS COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

“I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from ‘audience’ to ‘public’ and from ‘consumer’ to ‘creator.’”

—Rebecca Blood, “Weblogs: A History and Perspective”

“Most of America—most of the world—still looks at the blogs and all of the rest of the Web from a ‘literary’ standpoint, and try to both understand it and regulate it from that perspective. The trouble is that is inappropriate for neterate culture, where the needs are as different from the ‘literate’ as the very building blocks. ...Culture, like cultural understanding, does not move fast.”

—Aaron Barlow, *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere*, 57

If neterate culture, as Barlow terms it, is understood as different from our mainstream culture, then it stands to reason that we do not have the same kinds of access to neterate culture that our status as members of the mainstream culture affords us. In the last chapter, I suggested that access is more than a question of technology—it is a more problematic matter of understanding the implications of our increasing access to a torrential amount of information that is accompanied by, or in the context of, personal experience. That understanding, I have argued, is facilitated generically by blogs, in their dialogic role of engaging us as online subjects in conversations with each other’s texts. But there is more to blogs than their role as dialogic, just as there is more to the question of access than technology. Blogs engage us in textual

conversations with each other, but how does this affect our ability to fulfill our potential as online subjects? How do the textual conversations blogs offer give us access to expanding roles as cultural participants, in generic practice, in textual creation, in twenty-first century knowledge communities? Barlow may seem content to say blogs create conversation, which is all the meaning they need, but what about the larger cultural role of such generic conversation? As a genre, blogs are empowered by the individuals in the culture in which they are written. In this chapter, I want to explore blogs' ideological role not only in the lives of the individuals creating the conversations, but also in the culture in which we find ourselves with the social exigencies to create dialogic conversations online to begin with. Bakhtin redefined the traditional rhetorical triangle—of speaker, audience and message—to focus instead on utterances—their relationships to the speaker, the subject and to other's utterances. Since genres are relatively stable types of utterances, here I aim to explore blogs as generic utterances and their relationships to other's utterances—the relationship that Bakhtin notes was the least developed or studied by the early twentieth century even though it is the strongest factor in the tripartite (“Problem of the Text” 123). For my purposes here, this translates to a different question: how can the conversations bloggers shape our understandings of ourselves as textual creators in the contexts of others?

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins suggests that “we are already living within a convergence culture” (16), in which more people have access to information, participate in the creation and sharing of that information and engage in one-to-one, peer-to-peer communication (208). But we should not simplify one-to-one communication as a static or straightforward relationship. When applied to us as textual creators, the relationship of one text to one text is complicated by the other texts we invoke when we respond just to one text. In the case of blogs, a response to one blogger from another may invoke the words and ideology of previous entries,

other blogs and other online or print texts. And in the writing of such a text, a blogger is participating in the actualization of responses to her own blog as well as any number of references that may be made to her text in the future. Bloggers participate in creating each other's texts without their own immediate knowledge or permission, through other blogger's use of hypertext, quotes and blogrolls, in which the speaker is sometimes another text, whose author may also be a respondent, and whose audience is also empowered to join in the immediate conversation through comment functions and hyperlinks from their own blogs. Bloggers' use of hypertext alone demonstrates that individual practitioners can exercise generic action outside the standard rhetorical situation, linking utterances together often inextricably, making rather obvious, rhetorically complicated relationships between texts and writers (who are also readers) and meanings, which are constantly negotiated as texts are updated, interrupted and altered by others. It is this relationship between other's utterances in the blogosphere that I will analyze in this chapter—how a writer simultaneously acts as reader and responder, breaking down the traditional rhetorical situation of speaker separate from the message and the audience. Blog conversations are accompanied by this shift in the roles that the conversational participants are empowered to play, by the alterations they make to their texts as they join them to others utterances. In this chapter, I will argue that, in their role as an online dialogic genre, blogs redefine participants' roles as readers, writers and textual producers, thereby redefining traditional rhetorical roles that influence the texts that participants write—and are, in turn, written by.

As I described in Chapter Two, Jenkins characterizes our culture as a site in which one-to-one participation creates folk knowledge communities where expertise lies with the people and not with the traditional sources of top-down authority (209). For Jenkins, consumption of

this knowledge is a collective process, and what we gain from the process is a collective agreement of what constitutes knowledge itself (4). But that addresses the consumption of collective knowledge. What about its actual creation? What can we gain by applying an understanding of the breakdown of the traditional rhetorical situation in blogs, to our understandings of ourselves as participants (through our textual interactions) in cultural shaping while we are simultaneously being shaped by that culture? There is no final answer to these questions, but, in this chapter, I will add the conversations of Jenkins and Lévy to those of Bakhtin, Barlow and Miller, among others, to examine how blogging influences our textual relationships with each other in our current online culture. I want to explore how the reaccentuated rhetorical situation of blogs might help us deconstruct the binary of text creator or created, culture shaper or shaped—to further emphasize that any either/or circumstance is a fiction and illusion in our both/and textual relationships (see Foucault’s “What Is an Author?”). If, as Jenkins posits, we are all participating in a convergence culture in which we are communicating directly one-to-one and our individual knowledge combined is collective intelligence (4), what are the effects of collective intelligence on the way that we receive, perceive and understanding our changing roles in culture shaping through available media (243)? In *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace*, French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy defines collective intelligence as “a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills” whose goal “is the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals rather than the cult of fetishized or hypostatized communities” (13). I will apply my understanding of collective intelligence to the rhetorical features of blogs as conversations that have altered our understanding of the current rhetorical situation of online discourse. If blogs are sites of

collective intelligence, what challenges and advantages do they present to our traditional understanding of our textual relationships with each other? While Lévy looks at Internet communication developments from an anthropological perspective, I will examine blogs from a rhetorical perspective as they complicate a utopian ideal of collective intelligence in which no one individual or group controls access, participation or the rules of protocol (Jenkins 23). But in light of the changes we have experienced as a culture, and are continuing to engage in, I will also suggest that, in the context of redefining traditional rhetorical roles that influence textual production, through blogs, we may add, in ultimately reformative ways, to the textual collective intelligence of our post-postmodern online culture.

Shifting Conception of Audience

Before analyzing the complex relationship between readers, writers and texts in the blogosphere, it's important to first establish a general understanding of a blogger's audience—and situate that audience as a contributing force to redefining the traditional rhetorical situation within blogs as a genre. In any text, of any genre, each word is always oriented toward its response, the answer it provokes, anticipates and structures (Bakhtin, "Speech Genres" 1233); in blogs specifically, each word is then oriented toward the online responses that a text provokes, anticipates and structures. Within these circumstances, there is a great need for us as twenty-first century composers to learn to account for specific others we address in blogs (or in any speech genre, online or otherwise) based on their anticipated responses, and others we read based on their utterances in context, with an understanding of our own active participation in the links of

our speech communion with others. The first step to accounting for these others is to acknowledge their presence and their ability to influence our own discourse. In other words, the first step to accounting for a blogging audience is to acknowledge them as a vast international public audience and recognize that bloggers' individual discourse, made public, is open to worldwide interpretation. Because posts are immediately public, blog posting is synonymous with blog publishing; the instant that a blogger posts entries, her audience is the World Wide Web and her text enters the realm of online public discourse. Her text is posted with the understanding that a real audience has the capability of responding to her utterance immediately, and that that audience is heterogeneous in nature—with no holistic ideological context in common, except their access to and use of the Internet. If it is a vital generic distinction that each blog text, each utterance, is not a monologue but part of an ongoing conversation (Barlow xi), it is also a vital characteristic of blogs that anyone with Internet access can participate in that conversation. This is the blogger's worldwide audience: Internet users who are readers, likely online writers of some kind and maybe bloggers themselves.

It is always with an audience outside the self that bloggers publish their texts, so that what's at stake in their dissemination is participation in ongoing public communication. But this audience is wider than the relatively narrow intended audience of other online genres, some of whose features are recognizable in blogs, such as e-mail or instant messenger, because blogs are not disseminated directly to a person or group; they are posted publicly for others to find. This means that bloggers may be faced with silence in response to their utterances and also explains Barlow's statement that "Bloggers have yet to really learn and understand the extent of their audience" (62)—since that audience could be anyone, or no one. In "Been 'Blogging'? Web Discourse Hits Higher Level," blogger Glenn Fleishmann equates this problematic blogger's

audience to print genres—which also have a potential audience of many, or a troublesome audience of no one—but suggests that bloggers have immediate recourse to seek out an audience online. Writers have no idea how many people actually read their writing in print, Fleishmann suggests, but bloggers can follow their statistics (and get stats on other bloggers, too), and also search engines make their texts more easily accessible to find, compared to print archives (110). Blogs are not guaranteed to receive readers or a multitude of responses, but bloggers can track their readership and responses to determine what course of action to take to increase their audience (Barlow 12). These actions are largely dependent on a blogger’s participation in others’ blogs, through reciprocal measures of one-to-one peer communication (Jenkins 208) such as blogrolls, comments and hypertext links to others’ blogs. Through these rhetorical features, the structure of blogs “enables readers to have a more direct relationship with the writer that builds over time” (Fleishmann 110). By attempting to construct an audience in this way, a blogger is at once a reader of others’ texts and a writer of her own texts who also takes the texts she has read and adds their knowledge to her own text, conflating what she has read and what she has written. In so doing, she also transforms the creators of those texts into potential readers and responders of her own, thereby increasing her potential audience as well as theirs.

Thus, creating audience is a reciprocal process for participants that emphasizes that blogs are based upon transactional relationships between bloggers. Many blogs, as Miller and Shepherd suggest, are born from this impetus rather than the clinical search for facts: “the generic exigence that motivates bloggers is related less to the need for information than to the self and the relations between selves.” And if it is these transactions between selves that take priority, then others are participating in shaping bloggers’ utterances before their texts are even posted. If the dialogic transactions between people are understood as a central tenet of blogging,

then participants are instantly engaged in the generic construction of audience in the blogosphere whether they are responding to the actuality or the possibility of a heterogeneous audience. In this vein, Barlow suggests that actual comments may not be any more motivating or engaging to bloggers than the possibilities of actual comments (12). Regardless of just how many people are actually reading and responding, a blogger's potential worldwide audience influences how they create their texts and the relationships they both envision and seek out through reciprocal measures. In this way, we can see the traditional rhetorical situation beginning to dissolve as a reified structure in blogs, with no reliable, clear-cut distinctions between writer and audience since writers actively seek to create audiences by engaging others in the creation of their own texts. And to be successful in this way as a genre, there must be a collective understanding of bloggers' constantly shifting roles in creating and responding to audiences. Miller calls for an examination of the culture—not just of the genre or its individual participants—of the collective that reflexively reproduces a genre and is reproduced by it (“Genre” 158). There is no structure without people to create it, Miller suggests—the collective, not an individual. There is generic power in numbers, and blogs are not a genre of one. There would be no such audience construction in blogs if there were not a mass of people to recognize the moves, to conceptualize and interpret the situations in which their actions can create, sustain and reproduce community through the use of blogs' available rhetorical structures, which participants must see as valuable for certain “virtual outcomes” (“Rhetorical” 71). In this case, in order to engage in the full generic potential available in blogs, participants must be versed in interpreting the situations in which their utterances, and their readings and uses of others' utterances, can create opportunities for recognizing and engaging in the communal negotiation of meaning, through their own

reciprocal communication with other bloggers, which facilitates textual communication within the collective.

The Role of Interruptions

In these circumstances of working to establish an audience through reciprocal recognition—what Barlow indicates is textual reciprocity “giving individuals communal reason to come back” (71)—blogger’s link their utterances to others, and therefore enter their utterances into the rhetorical circumstances of blogs where they can be repeated, reaccentuated, rebutted, reinterpreted or disseminated from another’s blog, which can lead to yet another string of utterances, and so on. In this instance, hypertext plays a role not only in creating a dialogue between participants—to create conversations as sources of meaning online—but also in providing interruptions in one’s own text, which Bakhtin emphasized, in real language use, are not determined grammatically by the sentence of one speaker in isolation, but by the interception of dialogue bound by the real circumstances of others who respond to and interrupt the whole utterance in its context (“Speech Genres” 1234-36). In a single blog, a writer may craft a response to a print text, develop an analysis of it in an online text and receive responses to their utterance from multiple readers in a diversity of forms, including a blog, hypertext mention in another’s utterance or even citations in print in popular and/or academic texts. In the case of hypertext, although a blogger cannot control or predict the influence of the interruption, she does control the placement of the interruption—where and how she uses hypertext in her utterance, in addition to the use of quotes or longer excerpts from other sources. In this particular blog,

Infomaniac: Behind the News, blogger Liz Donovan uses a combination of these to interrupt her own text with the texts of others:

7 Thursday, May 01, 2008

What happed to feminism?

Back in the '60s, a lot of us really believed that women would control their lives and their sexual power would work for the positive as feminism spread around the world.

Well, what happened? Women spend their lives, their youth and their family's fortunes on weddings, showers, proms, cruises and other fripperies that end up meaning nothing as everything falls apart a few years later. Nothing matters but the image and the dreams of a 'princess land' that's unobtainable. Many women have no control over their lives at all, and examples abound, from Britney to Paris to, now, Miley.

Doug Thompson has some choice words about parents who ask him to photograph their young daughters in sexual images for the chance for fame and fortune: [What are these parents thinking?](#)

Just in today's news from Florida, a [school teacher loses her job](#) because it was so easy to make money wearing a bikini on a [sleazy fishing boat](#) to titillate rich 'sportsmen'. (Via [Daily Pulp](#).)

And the [DC Madam commits suicide](#) after being convicted in a case that lets her rich, powerful patrons continue in their licentious ways.

Thompson quotes from a new book on this phenomenon, *Girls Gone Skank*:

Instead of advancing women's social and professional empowerment, popular culture trends appear to be backsliding into the blatant sexual exploitation of women and girls at younger and younger ages.

So much for the Age of Aquarius and Women Power. Those of us who took control of our own lives seem like a dying breed right now.

7 posted by Liz at 3:27 PM | [2 comments](#)

Figure 10 Liz Donovan, Infomaniac: Behind the News

This blog combines commentary rooted in personal experience and opinion with a quote from a print source (*Girls Gone Skank*) as well as links to an online newspaper article (with controversial Annie Leibovitz photo of Miley Cyrus), an online article from a print newspaper, a fishing charters Web site (complete with bikini mates) and a media blog with more than just

liberal journalism leanings. This unique subjectivity creates a blurred boundary between where one blogger's utterance ends and another extends, as they continuously feed each other to create new utterances, which can be reaccentuated by other bloggers (through a hyperlink) as long as the permalink remains active. In this blog, Liz Donovan is both writer and reader when she perceives and interprets others' utterances and formulates her response to them within her own text (Bakhtin, "Speech Genres" 1232-33).

But hypertext is not the only, primary or most dialogic form of interruption among the rhetorical features of blogs. Interruptions are even more clearly seen immediately connected to a participant's utterance in the form of comments. When readers comment on bloggers' texts, they engage in conversation that, while not asynchronous, is dependent upon the existence and utterance of another. The comments are more than simple feedback; the comments themselves are responsive utterances, with a point of entry into the conversation of blogs from another's text, and, like blogs themselves, they are published utterances that are part of worldwide public discourse. Comments can be seen, in one sense, to play a role similar to hypertext: they provide pauses, or interruptions, in each utterance. In the case of hypertext, the blogger still has a greater measure of control—including where and how it appears in her utterance (as a quote, a longer excerpt, a link or a combination of these)—though she cannot control the influence that her interruption will exert over readers' interpretation of her utterance (depending on if they follow the hypertext, seek out the sources of the quotes, etc.). But, in the case of comments, the blogger is less in control of the interruption, unable to predict the point of entry, ideological content or discursive direction of the utterances that are made a part of her text by another writer. The interruption, or response, is neither determined grammatically by a speaker in isolation, nor individually by the speaker herself in the context others. In this way, blogs are interrupted by

others, by an audience who is reading and responding to them, as in this example from Tsiamis’ blog in which the commentors are known to each other by name, and are engaged in conversation not only with the original blog and the text that the blogger was responding to, but also with other comments and the bloggers represented textually in others’ utterances:

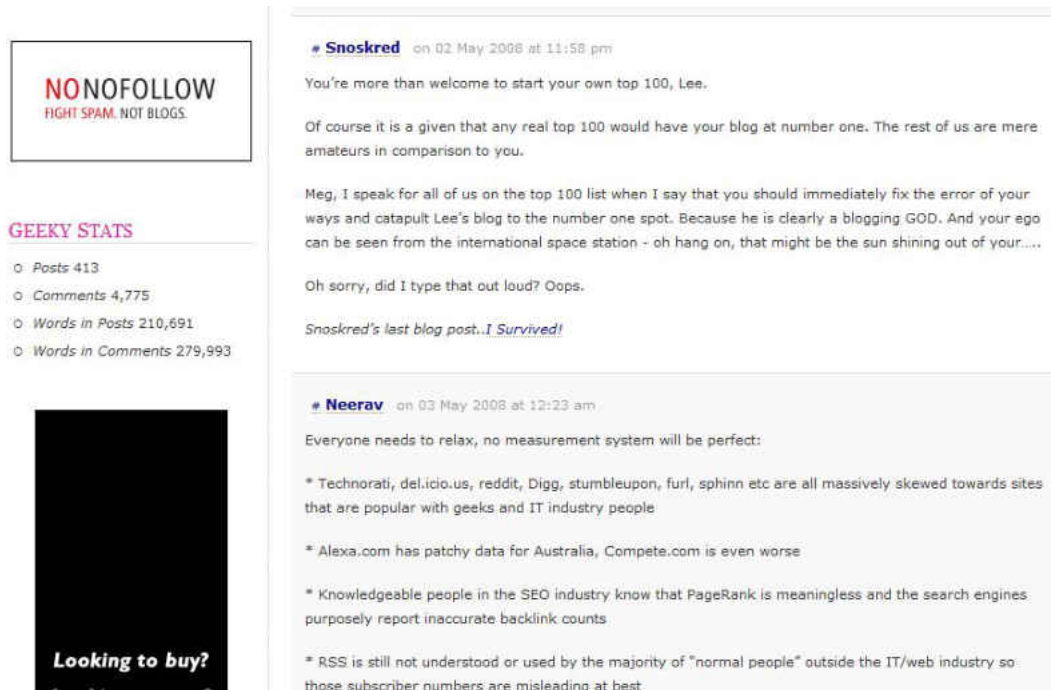


Figure 11 Meg Tsiamis, Dipping Into the Blogpond

In an instance such as this one, Tsiamis emphasizes her audience’s level of participation in her “Geeky Stats,” which indicate, on this date, that the word count for her comments has exceeded the word count of her original posts by 69,302 words. Although the word count itself is not indicative of a true dialogue of others—bloggers can leave their own comments in and amongst their respondents’ comments—the sharing of discursive space is indicative of the larger force at work in blogs that demands a shift in the way we perceive ourselves as online subjects who are simultaneously readers and writers of, and responders to, our own and others’ texts—and the

meanings negotiated therein. Meaning in these blogs, because the utterances are not determined by an individual in isolation, is not determined from a singular, controlling perspective. All conversations are created in the context of an audience of others whether through hypertext or comment interruptions. And those audiences demand an active role in making meaning out of, and influencing the substance, form and addressivity of, the utterances they read, respond to and create.

These refigurings of the rhetorical situation—by the active participation of actual audiences in the formation of utterances and in response to those utterances and their textual interruptions—signify that blogs do not operate by the conventions of the standard rhetorical triangle that Bakhtin debunked—comprised of neat, mutually exclusive points of speaker, listener and utterance. In practice, blogs work against the fiction of such an orderly arrangement because participants are always involved in multiple roles of textual influence—not just creating, or reading, or responding to an utterance. Because of the existence of a responsive audience—the real potential of actual and direct as well as indirect response (through comment and hypertext, respectively)—in a genre defined by the creation of texts that use others’ texts, bloggers are simultaneously writers, readers and responders who influence the subject and texts of others’ utterances, with the click of a mouse, all in a single post. And if, by understanding genres, we understand our own roles in social systems and the value of our social relationships (Bazerman, “Systems” 99), then what can we learn by understanding the breakdown of the traditional rhetorical situation in the blogosphere? We can first learn more about our evolving roles as online subjects who are shaping, and being shaped by, the utterances of others online. But perhaps we can also learn something by studying more closely a genre that, in its very rhetorical

features, opens up what it means to participate in the genre itself and, therefore, in our current culture.

To uncover “how a genre both constrains and enables writers and readers,” Anthony Pare and Graham Smart ask a series of questions, including how the genre might “enable or prevent ways of seeing and knowing,” give participants flexibility as they contribute or even alter the rhetorical features, and—most importantly—offer alternatives to conventional roles within that genre: “How far can writers and readers stray from the roles they conventionally perform within a genre before the collective is threatened?” (153). Blogs operate by generic conventions certainly, but the roles that they offer participants are defiant of the homogenous purpose of conventional discourse by their dialogic nature as conversations with others’ utterances as well as their actively, constantly negotiated role in each other’s textual creations. Miller characterizes genre as the aspect of situated communication that’s capable of reproduction in multiple (endless) situations and times—because the roles of speaker and audience can be infinitely reproduced (“Rhetorical” 71)—and in blogs, this is no more true than in any other genre. But the roles that can be infinitely reproduced are themselves never static, changing from one utterance to another, from one blog to another, traveling from one’s own blog to a hyperlink in another blog, or a comment in yet another’s blog.

Within these textual circumstances, blogs not only problematize the complex relationships between readers, writers and messages (relationships that are themselves problematized by constant negotiations of participants’ dependence on language); they are also further complicated by the additional screens of ideological purpose that interfere with an already constantly renegotiated rhetorical situation. For blogs, there are no two neat points to place readers and writers in the rhetorical triangle; there are millions, as those conflated roles are

endlessly reproduced. Along with those millions of strands, there are accompanying ideological screens for each individual and that individual's worldview and purpose for each utterance. And no one's explicit purpose for blogging is the same; like any genre, blogs are open to multiple utterances on endless occasions, and do not operate in the traditional paradigm of one-to-one media, a cultural movement as noted by Ithiel de Sola Pool in *Technologies of Freedom*: "the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding" (23). Just as any technology no longer transmits just one service or kind of information, no one media or genre is developed for a singular purpose in a narrow context (see Jenkins). While blogs may allow us to communicate with each other one-to-one, as Jenkins notes, there is no mandated, singular purpose for doing so. The rhetorical contexts of blogs run a heteroglossic gamut of textual interactions and public purposes, leading Jenkins to note a particular predicament of our convergence culture: "One person's diversity, no doubt, is another person's anarchy" (210). Blogs present this problem in their role as an online genre that attempts to create a multitude of public conversations and to open up the traditional positions of rhetorical participation. How we respond to the forces of such centrifugal communication, which take us farther and farther from the conventions of traditional discourse authorized by the dominant culture, depends upon whether we think it's a reformative direction for our culture that's worth pursuing—which I will address in the next section as well as the question of whether there may be a predominant cultural purpose for blogs among the multiplicity of individual intentions.

Adding Our Texts to the Collective Intelligence

Blogs are a genre dependent not upon the individual mind but upon the transactional relationships between people with multiple perspectives. Jenkins contends that we are already living in a convergence culture that relies on people to participate in making knowledge as group-authorized sources of disseminating information (16). Jenkins suggests that many of our culture's current ties are (relatively) quickly breaking down, including our ties to physical geography, and to biological families and nation-states as sources of ultimate authority (27). In short, our ties to older forms of community are breaking down while new ties—to voluntary allegiances, to non-familial communities (defined by personal, intellectual and emotional interests) and to the production and exchange of communal knowledge (Jenkins 27)—are increasingly relied upon in their place. If people are turning to blogs as a source of communal textual creation and knowledge, we should ask what makes blogs an appealing genre in our current cultural context. Blogs gain authority based upon personal experience shared with others, which becomes a form of communal knowledge—individuals coming together in transactional, textual relationships with each other to constantly renegotiate and redefine meaning. Then, their refigured participants' roles in textual creation—including the interruptions of others throughout their utterances—create a discursive environment in which there is no standardized central authority and we have a need to learn how to negotiate the textual wor(l)ds of others. But in addition to this cultural shift in how meaning is created, disseminated and received, there is also the matter of the sheer amount of information available to us in online environments where so many more people have the power of instantaneous publishing than ever before. With more ways to communicate than ever before (and far more conveniently) and more devices on which to do

so, and with increasing rhetorical purposes to do so, who better to turn to for help than each other? As a culture, every day, we encounter “more,” and more than we can reasonably read, process and respond to in environments fueled by online communication that are constantly approaching overwhelming. There is no way to read even a significant percentage of it all, much less process the information for thoughtful response, before it is updated to include *more*. In this context, we have reached a point where we *need* to depend on each other for what Lévy defines as “universally distributed intelligence” because there is simply too much knowledge available for one person to hold even a fraction of a percent of it: “No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity” (13-14). As a genre, blogs enable people to acknowledge this state, this cultural shift in which people have a need to acknowledge that “What we cannot know or do on our own, we may now be able to do collectively” (Jenkins 27). An individual engaged in the blogosphere is one who constantly acknowledges, with each online utterance, that she is one among many and, in this, finds strength in a knowledge community available to her every minute: it is a philosophy of *I know a lot, so I’m sharing with you, because you know a lot, too, and I need you to share it with me in return*. It is a matter of individual need, elevated to mutual acknowledgement on a collective level.

In “Genre as Action,” Carolyn Miller theorizes that people in a culture adapt the genres they use—create, sustain, reaccentuate, discard and so on—when their culture develops a need that the previous genres cannot meet (158). She argues that we learn what ends are available to us when we learn genre—and learn to understand recurring social situations better and how we may participate and act together as a community within those situations (“Genre” 165). Blogs, as a genre, help us recognize our need to act together to deal with the torrential amount of information available to us online as well as our shifting subject roles in the creation of that

information through textual production. In short, as a culture, we needed to learn to rely upon each other for meaning and do so effectively in our daily communications—we needed an accessible rhetorical forum for conversation that could utilize our growing need to be able to rely on what Lévy identifies, and Jenkins analyzes, as collective intelligence: “Collective intelligence refers to this ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members” (Jenkins 27). Lévy defines such groups as knowledge communities, which hold a greater sum total of information than any one individual and make that information available to the group (Jenkins 27-28). Collective intelligence does not place the power of knowledge into any one person or group’s hands. There is no “one who knows” and “one who doesn’t.” Instead, collective intelligence “assumes that each person has something to contribute, even if they will only be called upon on an ad hoc basis” (Jenkins 53). Collective intelligence is “disorderly, undisciplined and unruly” with “no fixed procedures for what you do with knowledge” and includes “debates about the rules [that] are part of the process”—because it is based upon individual experience rather than official paths to authorized knowledge through formal education (Jenkins 53). Thus, there is also no set hierarchy of whose knowledge is paramount or primary, and whose contributions are secondary; knowledge distribution in a collective intelligence is not valued by traditional hierarchical standards: “What holds a collective intelligence together is not the possession of knowledge—which is relatively static, but the social process of acquiring knowledge—which is dynamic and participatory, continually testing and reaffirming the group’s social ties” (Jenkins 54). The emphasis here is on the collective, what individuals can contribute to a larger group, through their own personal experience using the rhetorical, textual features available to them through blogs—what bloggers can offer as individuals to other individuals within the collective in which everyone’s texts are created,

modified, interrupted and interpreted. By contrast, Miller and Shepherd's emphasis in their rhetorical analysis of blogs is largely on self, on blogs "as a site of relative stability" because they make "'real' the reflexive effort to establish the self against the forces of fragmentation, through expression and connection, through disclosure." But there is more at work than disclosure, than self, in a dialogic genre that facilitates a communal need to search for meaning in public conversations. Blogs can be read as both an antidote to individual postmodern fragmentation and, in another sense, fuel for a different kind of authority entirely, one that does not live within the individual self and works toward the productive disintegration of traditional discursive authority. In a textual world defined by infinite (and infinitely fracturing) ideologies, perhaps blogs join people together for one underlying purpose—to communicate to add our individual texts to our collective intelligence. The central tenant is not postmodern by nature, but rather post-postmodern: the authority at work is not tradition, not relativism, not fragmentation, but community, and the intelligence contained within that community. So that the central purpose can be interpreted as effectively transforming individual experience into collective intelligence through textual production, without the intercession of traditional sources of official authority in the dominant discourse—corporations, formal education, mainstream media, governmental institutions, etc.

Comments as Collective Authority

Because blogs come directly from people, unmediated by official sources of authority, they are saturated in the ideology of their creators whose utterances can only be trusted if the

bloggers are trusted as textual negotiators of meaning. And without official gatekeepers, the task of policing collective intelligence in a heteroglossic community defined by the negotiation and flexibility of making meaning, falls to individuals within the collective itself. There is not an absence of authority here—the authority falls to individuals, who are participating based upon their experience, and their ability to engage with others in the same textual negotiations. When bloggers place authority in each other, assuming the privilege to determine what counts as meaning, they not only assume epistemic power for themselves, but also place it in the hands of bloggers they trust, and make the entire collective, in turn, responsible for scrutinizing that information for accuracy (Jenkins 28). In “Weblogs: A New Source of News,” Lasica interviews three major blogging figures, including Doc Searls, and locates one of the ways in which bloggers establish their authority and, therefore, prompt others’ trust:

One of the interesting hallmarks of a successful weblog is that it becomes an authoritative source of information based on community endorsement. “People link to it, and those links increase the site’s authority and raise its profile in as natural a way as possible,” Searls says. So what we have is a marketplace in which we grant authority to those we trust to alter or author our own opinions. ...“The weblog community is basically a whole bunch of expert witnesses who increase their expertise constantly through a sort of reputation engine.” (Searls qtd. in Lasica 177-178)

Yet the purpose of blogs is not merely to relay information, but also to present individual interpretations of it. So the focus should not necessarily rest only on the accuracy of factual information, but also include the intent of the interpretation of facts as they are mingled with bloggers’ own subjective commentary. The primary rhetorical feature through which this is

accomplished is the comment function, which Miller and Shepherd characterize as “[a form] of social control, [a sign] of approval, acceptance, [and] value. ...Both linking and commentary create the hierarchy that structures the social world of blogs.” It is through this generic transactional relationship that bloggers “serve to regularize the social interaction, as well as the writing and reading, involved in the production of knowledge” (Pare and Smart 149). Blog comments have a wide range and can often be—either explicitly or implicitly—affirmative, confirming the content of a blogger’s post with bolstering or favorable remarks, as in these comments on Gael Fashingbauer Cooper’s blog:

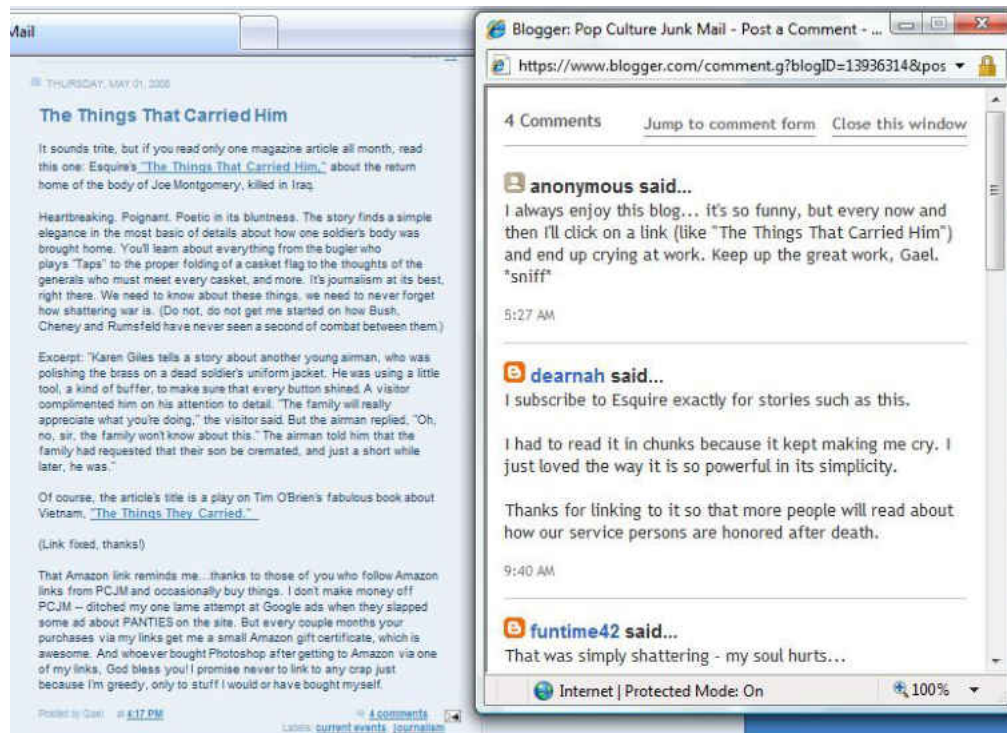


Figure 12 Gael Fashingbauer Cooper, Pop Culture Junk Mail

In addition to the text provided, readers can also add their interpretations of others’ comments to determine the meaning they will make out of a particular utterance and if they will extend their trust to a particular blogger or post. Even the seemingly simplest of comments can reveal a great

deal of information: about who's reading a blog, how often, what else they read, etc. In this instance, the blog's links themselves lend credibility to the blogger—verification of the article in Esquire and of the book from Amazon—as do the affirmative comments left by other bloggers who, in addition to not refuting any information in this particular post, assert why they read this blog regularly. And the comment function includes hyperlinks to each commentor's blog and profile, so that readers of their comments can place them in context of their own blogs and the ideology they present there.

At times, affirmation in the “reputation engine” of blogs is most invisible when the larger ideological conversations sparked by a blog overshadow the factual elements of a blog in the comment, as in these comments in response to a Crooks and Liars blog entitled “Cal Thomas Says America Only Sees Angry Black Women on TV.” These are only four out of 166 comments that implicitly support blogger John Amato's presentation of facts about Thomas' verbal utterance and its context, and instead focus on the ideological implications of Thomas' and Amato's messages:

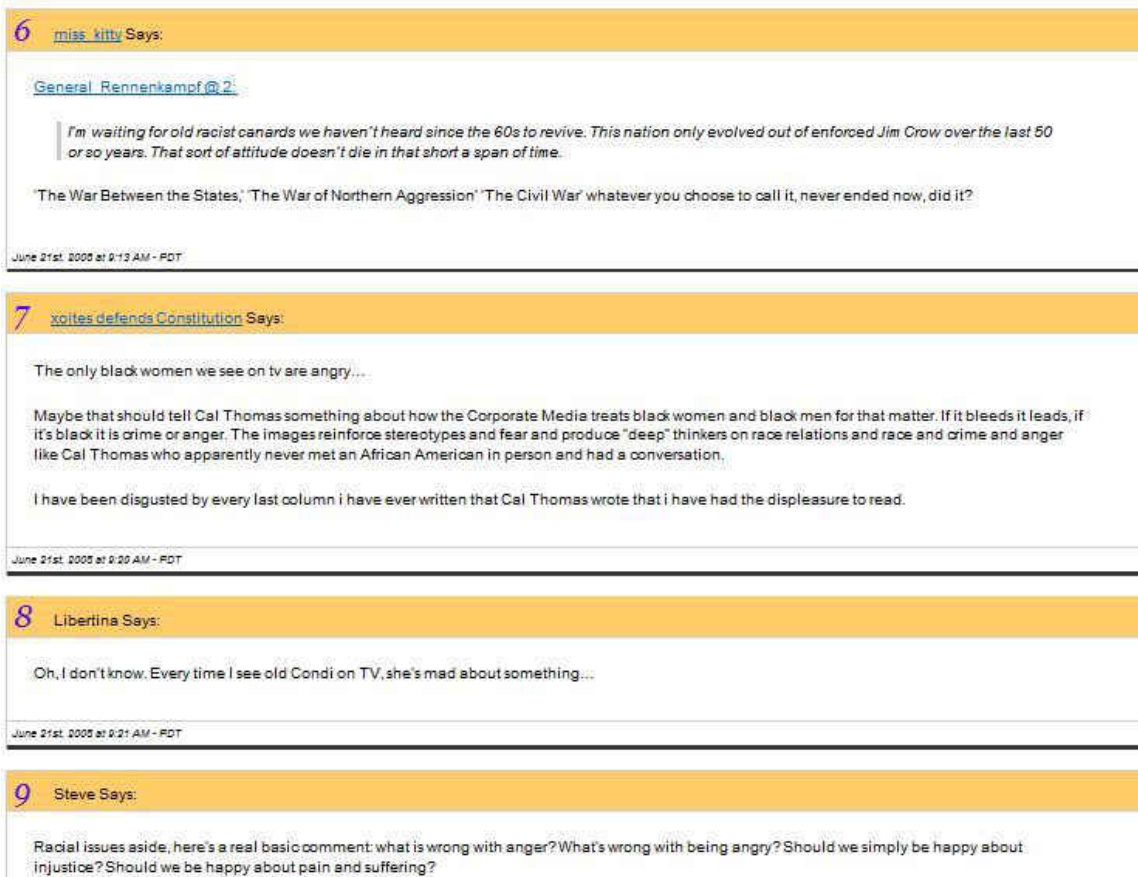


Figure 13 John Amato, Crooks and Liars

By commenting, these bloggers authorize Amato and the material he has posted as a source of information, indicating their trust in his the sources he has provided in his blog, including a YouTube video of Thomas' interview on Fox News. In many cases, mainstream or alternative news sources (online and/or in print) are bloggers' sources of information outside of their own personal experience; the information they present is accompanied by links to other trusted, if more traditional, sources of authority. But what brings readers to their blogs rather than just the news Web sites alone is the personal commentary and the ability to comment themselves and participate in creating new utterances with others who are attracted to the same or similar blogs and end up following their links to the same page where they are motivated to comment. Barlow

suggests this community building is one of the most vital self-regulatory systems that bloggers follow as a sort of code: “most group-builders in the blogosphere concentrate their effort on giving individuals communal reason to come back to their Web sites and to cooperate when contributing to it” (71). Bloggers provide accurate information in their posts, accompanied by their commentary that serves to promote conversation, because they want readers to reciprocate in creating a reliable, dialogic discursive space in which to negotiate meaning.

But bloggers whose utterances are poised to attract a more heterogeneous audience are more likely to encounter more difficulty in anticipating or controlling the reciprocity of comments. It is in this instance that commentors are the only form of social control not for the blogger herself, but for those who comment on her text, as in this excerpt of comments from Rachel Maddow’s blog:

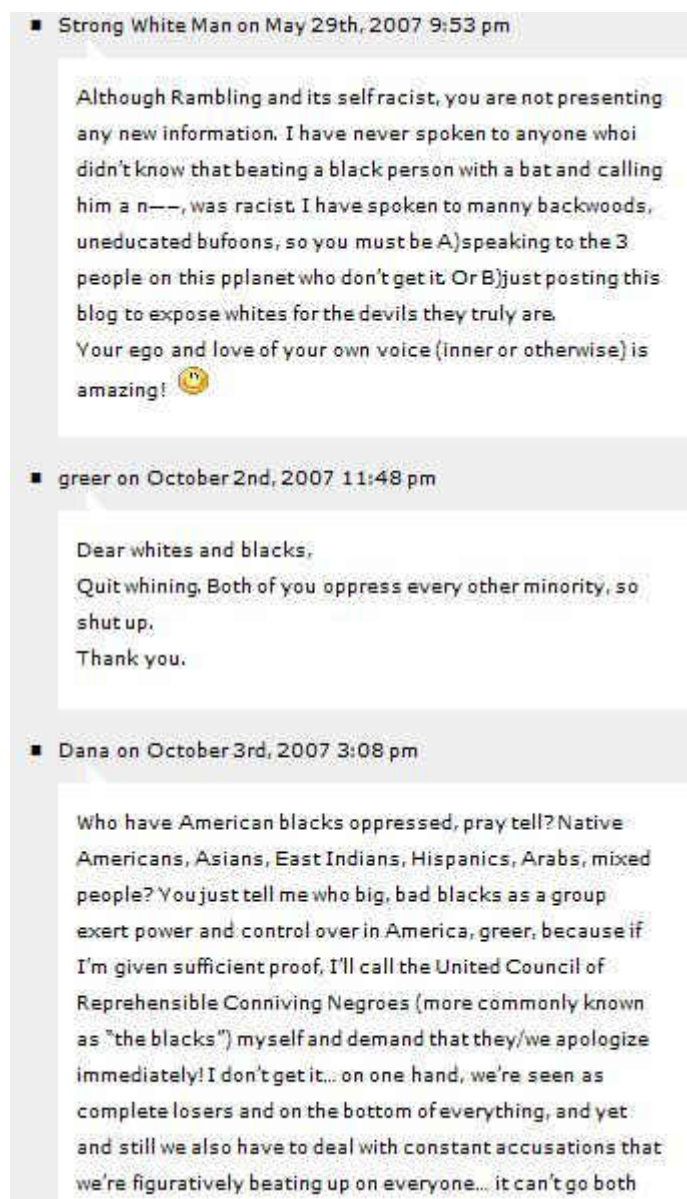


Figure 14 Rachel Maddow, Rachel's Tavern

This particular post here operates as a dialogic textual utterance that attracts and feeds heteroglossic responses and creates a rhetorical community defined by dissent (see Miller, “Rhetorical Community”), and although the comments are not as affirmative as in the previous example (with comments from more like-minded participants), they do still serve as the only regulatory function within this particular utterance as well as adding to the collective

conversation, altering the utterance and each reader's negotiation of the meaning of the text, the comments and any other blogs they may link to from this one. Most importantly, though, are the links that connect individual's comments to their blog, other comments they've made or their personal profiles; in Rachel's Tavern, comments are logged by guests but not hyperlinked to other blogs in the same network, as they are in this comment on Joe Sudbay's blog from [Bostonian_Queer_in_Dallas](#), on AmericaBlog.com:

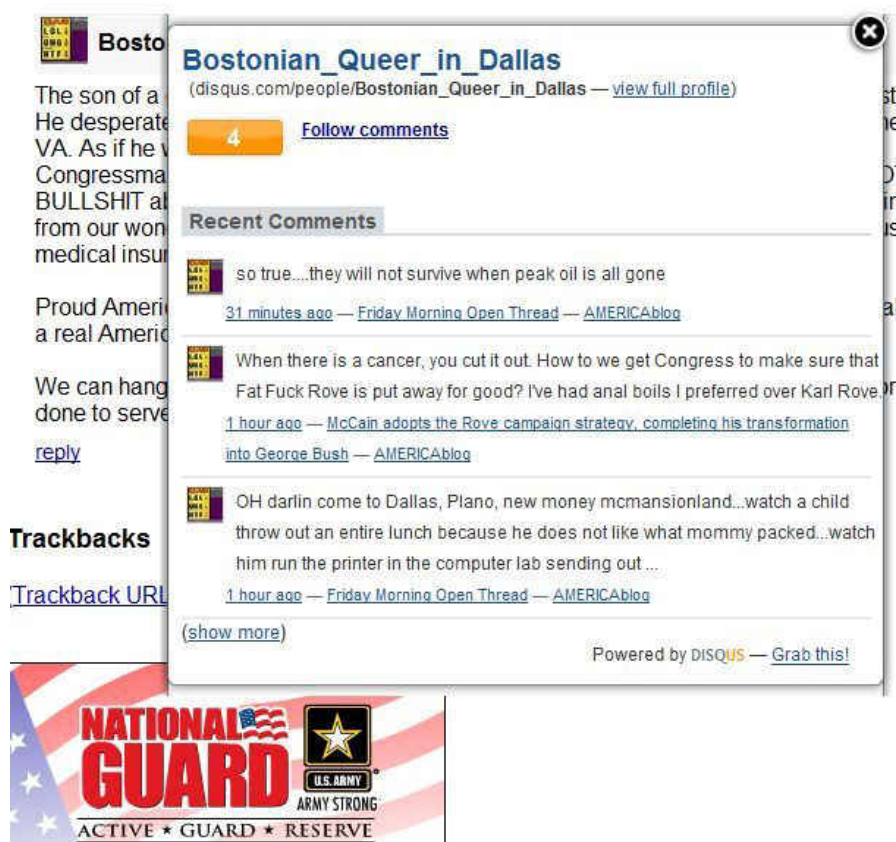


Figure 15 [Bostonian_Queer_in_Dallas](#), AmericaBlog.com

A single comment of this blogger's, in a single post, provides hyperlinks to the blogs he has commented on recently and his blog as well as the others on which he has commented. This is how we decide to trust a blog as an authorized source of negotiated meaning—by deciding to

trust those who have commented on the blog as well as the blogger herself. And this is done not in the simplistic information gathering of seeking out someone's age, gender, race, education, profession, religion, sexual orientation, geographic location or political affiliation. While these are identity markers that help determine our utterances, which reflect our real social conditions, they are just markers of the sum total of our ideological influences. Blogs offer an alternative means of identification through texts in the contexts of other texts and others' utterances. These are the principles of collective intelligence at work: bloggers add their texts to the collective intelligence communities available in blogs, and they are, in turn, read through readers' interpretations not only of their body of texts, but also of other bloggers (through hyperlinks to their comments and their blogs) who participate in influencing the meaning of their specific utterance in context. So that our assessments of the texts we read come from other texts, from the ideology people reveal through language—and not just one utterance in isolation, but multiple utterances placed in the larger context of blogs as a dialogic genre in which others are participating in making meaning with us through textual interruptions as well as separate texts of their own.

A Collective Goal, Not Homogenous Ideology

In addition, as blogs are currently practiced as a genre, there is still, as discussed in Chapter Two, no collective dedication to any unified purpose outside of making conversations to contribute to the collective intelligence of our culture. In contrast to utterances founded upon a reliance on authorized sources of official knowledge, participants in the collective intelligence

knowledge communities involved in blogging do not have to agree, only agree to disagree—so there is no firm control over what constitutes knowledge; there is no official truth (Jenkins 256). As Lévy notes, “Collectivity is not necessarily synonymous with solidity and uniformity” (66). The secondary purposes and heteroglossic ideologies at work in blogs are by no identifiable means uniform, because blogs also operate on the final caveat of Lévy’s definition of collective intelligence: “The basis and goal of collective intelligence is the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals rather than the cult of fetishized or hypostatized communities” (13). The focus is on recognizing individuals in their roles as contributors to our collective intelligence, and further enriching the online communities in which those individuals participate. Lévy sees such collective intelligence communities as an “achievable utopia” in which people value, respect and trust different perspectives and come together in grassroots communication movements to share knowledge (qtd. in Jenkins 235). In this ideal, meaning is always still under textual construction by users who determine their own individual terms of participation and take on the task of monitoring others in the collective (Jenkins 245). This method is not foolproof; there is no sure way to police the textual utterances published in blogs. And there is nothing inherently democratic—or inevitable—about such knowledge communities, but in practice, there are “democratic potentials found in some contemporary cultural trends,” which deserve to be cultivated (Jenkins 247). Lévy’s optimism regarding this ideal stems from some of the recent changes in our culture, technology and modes of communication that seem to have opened up the possibility of creating collective intelligence communities, albeit with a great deal of effort (see Jenkins 238). The extent to which blogs can do this depends on the extent to which we as individuals in these textual relationships can do this in our post-postmodern culture, which is evolving to be defined not solely by principles of relativism or fragmentation, but by a deeper

recognition of all individuals as textual creators who are part of larger textual communities in which meaning is negotiated on a collective level.

It is this that Lévy refers to when he argues that collective intelligence needs to be “constantly enhanced,” deliberately acknowledged, developed and used in recognition of the wealth of knowledge contained in individual experience across cultures online, defying geography and time in knowledge communities all over the world (15). Such a process, Lévy maintains, results in “the effective mobilization of skills,” and preceding such mobilization is the identification of those skills:

...we have to recognize [our individual skills] in all their diversity. ...The ideal of collective intelligence implies the technical, economic, legal, and human enhancement of a universally distributed intelligence that will unleash a positive dynamic of recognition and skills mobilization. (15)

First and foremost, this means that cultural participants’ skills must be recognized and valued for what they are—not held up to antiquated or reified expectations separate from individual experience or discursive needs. Lévy identifies these as actual skills versus what he calls “officially validated skills,” which are a minority of the actual skills in play at any given time in our culture (15). In other words, if blogging is an actual skill in play that is given cultural power and discursive legitimacy, then it should be identified and recognized as such by the dominant culture as legitimate generic knowledge that has a reformative effect on how we communicate with each other:

In the age of knowledge, failure to recognize the other as an intelligent being is to deny him a true social identity. ...For when we acknowledge the other for the range of skills he possesses, we allow him to identify himself in terms of a new

and positive mode of being, we help mobilize and develop feelings of recognition that will facilitate the subjective implication of other individuals in collective projects. (Lévy 15)

In generic practice in blogs, learning to rely on our collective intelligence has a positive influence on us as cultural producers and shapers because it bolsters our online textual production, motivation and dependability. And in helping to make us as textual creators more reliable, valuing individuals' contributions to our collective intelligence also reinforces our confidence in each other as capable, trustworthy members of communities we both participate in and rely on for negotiated textual meaning online. If we can learn to participate more fully in our collective intelligence as bloggers, then we can tap into the strength of the “new and positive mode of being” that Lévy identifies, and learn how to transform the terms of our participation in any discourse community—so that individual experience is valued and textual relationships are understood in the context of generic practice, real social conditions of members and constantly negotiated meaning-making. In the next chapter, it is this education in situating collective intelligence within generic practices that I will suggest that the academy can learn from, in order to acknowledge both students and teachers as participants in our culture's collective intelligence.

CHAPTER FOUR: A PEDAGOGY OF BLOGGING THAT MATTERS

“Critical literacy should aim to transform both the student and her culture and might begin by examining the subject position of students in the classroom. Such transformations, Bakhtin reminds us, are achieved only through engagement, struggle, negotiation, and dialogue.”

—Kay Halasek, *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, 119

“The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”

—bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 207

In earlier chapters, my focus has been on blogs as a genre—their dialogic features, their transactional nature, their heteroglossic textual relationships. As a popular online genre, blogs, I have argued, contribute to our expanding understanding of ourselves as online subjects and textual creators online, and facilitate us in adding to our culture’s collective intelligence, thereby acting as a way for us all to reaccentuate and reproduce recurring notions of ourselves through generic practice online. But in this chapter, I will focus on two specific discourse communities within our cultural collective—students and teachers in the writing classroom—that are poised to

benefit directly (and immediately) from an increased understanding of online generic praxis, of which blogs could play a productive part. Both students and teachers stand to gain by practicing the dialogic intertextuality of blogs, which could serve to expand our understanding of ourselves—and each other—as textual and cultural participants in our collective intelligence. The academy could only benefit from a reciprocal learning relationship with the textual practices offered by blogs, but such a reciprocity would require examining the complexities of both students' and teachers' textual interactions with blogs' generic features. In this chapter, I would like to explore these exchanges to suggest how students' abnormal discourse might interact with blogs as a genre in ways that are different from how teachers' abnormal discourse would alter and interact with the genre. To do so, I will rely on Gale's distinction between the kinds of abnormal discourse presented by students and teachers: that students' discourse can be characterized as nonresponsive because it acts as ignorant of, or operates outside of, the conventions of normal discourse, whereas teachers' discourse can be characterized as responsive because it acts with knowledge of those conventions but chooses to discard or cast aside those normative standards (73-74). This distinction ultimately defines student and teacher discourse as different, but not in oppositional terms. Gale uses the distinction to analyze each discourse's relationship to the normal discourse of the dominant culture. For my purposes here, I will focus first on how blogs might further engage students' nonresponsive discourse in the writing classroom by changing the terms of their participation in textual production, through intertextuality, in a classroom guided by alternative pedagogical principles of mutuality and reciprocity, as defined by David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald in *Mutuality in the Rhetoric and Composition Classroom*. How might relying on personal experience and collective intelligence in blogs change the way students see themselves as textual creators in the writing

classroom? Can blogs add to students' generic education by recognizing their skills and engaging them in the practice of intertextuality? It is not my intent to suggest that students can learn from blogs as they can learn from any other genre they might be asked to practice in the classroom, but rather that students may learn something different about themselves by participating in this particular genre, by learning how they can act within it not only to expand their own generic praxis but also to contribute to reaccentuating the constantly changing online genre.

At the same time, I will also give attention to how blogs might be reproduced and reaccentuated in the writing classroom by teachers, who are located within a different abnormal discourse community, one defined by a critical awareness of—and, therefore, more likely also critical distance from—the normal discourse of the dominant culture. How might blogs affect teachers' understanding of themselves and students as 21st century textual composers? In a pedagogy in which blogs are situated as textual sites for everyone to add their experience and conversations to our collective intelligence, how might teachers perceive classroom subject roles differently? Here, I will add the pedagogical perspective of Min Zhan Lu to examine how blogs as a generic practice might facilitate teachers to re-envision traditional subject roles of both teachers and students within the classroom. And I will also inquire into how teachers might, in turn, reaccentuate the genre for different purposes for use in the academy, including how blogs might provide alternative understandings of research, citation and collaboration. To all of these multiple alternative pedagogies—Halasek's pedagogy of possibility, Wallace and Ewald's mutuality and reciprocity and Lu's perspectives on privilege—I will also add Doug Hesse's discussion of discourse that matters and Gale's concept of the edifying teacher (who has a constant awareness of her abnormal discursive relationship, and interactions, with both students' discourse and normal discourse) to suggest that blogs can not only give students a place to

practice and reaccentuate their own discourse, but also engage teachers in their pedagogical relationships to their own and their students' discourse. And if blogs, as dialogic textual experiences, can be practiced as part of our collective intelligence for academic purposes, then perhaps they can be understood by all classroom participants as textual experiences that matter—*both inside and outside of the classroom.*

Students' Discourse & Academic Discourse

First, I would like to say a word about students' abnormal discourse and academic discourse as these subject roles have been traditionally ritualized in the classroom. Gale characterizes students' abnormal discourse as nonresponsive because it is ““what happens when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of [the] conventions”” of normal discourse (Rorty qtd. in Gale 73). In this way, Gale positions the intent of students' discourse not as a covert adversarial challenge, but as a subversive force that ignores the conventions of the dominant discourse out of a lack of knowledge of its conventions and the ideological values behind them (74). So, while it may be a subversive influence within the dominant discourse, students' abnormal discourse is not inherently antagonistic, just ignorant of the conventions that the dominant discourse expects to be followed. Historically, the academy has allowed students entrance into its discourse community under the auspices of experts offering novices inculcation into the ways of knowing and communicating privileged there—with a tacit understanding that, while there, students would learn what they needed to know from those who had already mastered academic discourse conventions. Namely, they would learn what counts as knowledge,

the forms such discourse takes and how information should be transmitted. In generic practice, this role is upheld in the specific genres valued—abstracts, reports, the academic essay—which are empowered each time a teacher assigns one to a student, inculcating them in the academic tradition in implicit exchange for the tacit reward of that institution’s evaluation and degree conferral (see Halasek 184). The relationship of students’ discourse to academic discourse was not one of give and take—not a both/and situation, but rather “either learn ‘X’ or fail”—but an interaction defined by hierarchy and the assimilation of one discourse into another.

Despite a century’s worth of pedagogical pushes for change—notably beginning with John Dewey in the 20th century—many members of the academy still identify this relationship as active because the ideology at work in the academy continues to treat students as neophytes characterized by their lack of previous knowledge of the academic community rather than as valuable contributors to the academy as a knowledge community (see Berlin, Freire, Gale, hooks, Lu, Shor). In *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, Halasek critiques David Bartholomae’s support of academic discourse as the proper gatekeeper to accepted knowledge; similarly, in *Teachers, Discourses and Authority*, Gale applies this same critique to all social constructionists who argue for revealing the social construction of all discourse while still privileging academic discourse as the vehicle for that revelation (47). Wallace and Ewald criticize radical pedagogy similarly, arguing that making “the ultimate end of education” critiquing the dominant culture and resisting cultural reproduction is one-dimensional at best (137), but neither should academic assimilation be the goal. Halasek maintains that forcing students to take on any identity rooted in such dualism asserts academics’ position of privilege as experts in both the abnormal discourse of critique and the dominant discourse they are critiquing—and it relegates students to the position of inferiority and victimization (46-50). She contends that there are more than the two choices

Bartholomae offers in “Inventing the University”—assimilate to, or be assimilated by, the discourse community (Halasek 42-43). Halasek suggests two alternatives to accepting the terms of the dominant discourse: not speaking at all, or speaking on other terms entirely, those of subversive discourses (42-43). Her answer is a change not in one discourse community or another, but an alteration to the relationship between them and how they communicate with each other. It’s not enough to engage students in conversations of how they are constructed by academic discourse, if there is no explored alternative that is given discursive legitimacy. In her last chapter, “Toward a Pedagogy of Possibility,” Halasek offers one answer in generic education: “If genres of academic discourse are oppressive to students, the answer is not to change students to meet the expectations of the discourse but to challenge the discourse to adapt to students” (174). As a popular genre that developed outside the academy, blogging can be seen as a generic alternative to academic discourse that opens up what counts as knowledge and who participates in the conversation, as Barlow suggests here of academic bloggers:

As a whole, academia can be accused of speaking only to the converted, of working within carefully defined circles of the like-minded, and of avoiding the controversies of public debate. The blogs may be a way for changing that, and it could be that academic bloggers are on the leading edge of creating not just an ‘invisible college’ but a broadening of education as a whole, taking it beyond the boundaries of departments and universities to all who might wish to join in on any particular topic or question. (28-29)

Barlow contends that blogs might open up academic conversations to include more people, but his focus is on transferring academic discourse to the blogosphere, where it would inevitably be altered and shaped by the genre. But it would still begin in sync with the transmission model of

education—those who know bringing knowledge to those who don't—simply transferring this model into online environments. In this chapter, I want to explore instead how students and teachers could both bring their personal experience to bear in the textual conversations of blogs to create a rhetorical situation that includes not just the dialogue of those who have already entered into academic membership, but also those outside the discourse of academic authority and knowledge: students. Privileging one kind of discourse—whether it's that of dominant discourse or one that attempts to subvert it (deconstruction, feminist, Marxist, etc.)—over another is not, as Wallace and Ewald maintain, alternative pedagogy (7) because it does not alter the balance of knowledge and power in the classroom (12-13). If, as Gale asserts, students' abnormal discourse creates an alternative space to the dominant discourse while incognizant of that discourse's conventions, or its own subversive role (74), then those characteristics of students' discourse need to be seen not as a deficit but as a valued way of knowing that can benefit any discourse community of which it is a part.

Blogs & A Pedagogy of Mutuality

To welcome students as wholly realized subjects in the writing classroom in which they are discursive participants, there must be a space to acknowledge students' abnormal discourse, the ways they write against the academic tradition, as well as the ways they are instructed to write within the conventions of the dominant discourse in the academy. Thus, the writing classroom must be open to be altered by a pedagogy of mutuality, as defined by Wallace and Ewald, a both/and understanding of individuals' knowledge and experience as well as our

culture's role in shaping those experiences: "A focus on mutuality provides a means for understanding how individual learning is neither completely independent nor completely predetermined by social and cultural forces" (132). Classroom practices in a pedagogy of mutuality are accompanied by an understanding of meaning as socially constituted, knowledge as a cultural (as well as academic) construct and language as a generative, epistemic force (Wallace and Ewald 5). Within such a pedagogy lies a need for the *new*, for students and teachers to mutually create new knowledge together and to "work out their multiple subjectivities *within new types of discourse*" (Wallace and Ewald 7).

This does not merely refer to the types of written discourse asked of students, but also extends to the ways that teachers and students communicate with each other: "mutuality in knowledge making cannot be achieved within the context of speech genres that privilege teachers' absolute control over what counts for knowledge" (Wallace and Ewald 10). A pedagogy of mutuality must alter the classroom speech genres (see Bazerman, "Where Is the Classroom?") not only to make space for students' abnormal discourse, but also to include teachers' abnormal discourse as well, which questions what the dominant discourse and the academy declare as universal values or authoritative knowledge. Teachers' abnormal discourse—their challenge to normal discourse through the use of language as hermeneutics, as conversation, as dissensus, as epistemic inquiry outside the jurisdiction of the dominant culture (Gale 66)—must have a place in the classroom, too, just as students' abnormal discourse should, and Gale insists that these two kinds of abnormal discourse must be understood not in opposition to each other, or to the dominant discourse, but always in relation to each other (88-89). A writing classroom that seeks to acknowledge students' and teachers' range of interactions must be open to be reaccentuated by alternative generic practice, the goal of which is to approach an

ideal of mutuality in order “for students and teachers to understand their own subjectivities and to find voices that allow them to speak in the academy and other contexts that matter to them” (Wallace and Ewald 143). While blogs are certainly not the only alternative to traditional academic genres, they are not a reified, authorized genre for academic practice, so they present one possibility for joint abnormal discourse from both students and teachers to serve as a site of public conversation. Blogs offer a generic ally to the principles of mutuality in their recognition of individual experience, their redefinition of traditional roles in intertextual situations and their position as public discourse that matters.

Textual Authority in Experiential Knowledge

As established in Chapter Two, blogs as a genre create recurring spaces for conversations among individuals online whose textual authority is rooted in experiential knowledge. Wallace and Ewald characterize such action as interpretive agency, which “involves bringing one’s prior experience to bear in the construction of knowledge” (16)—not codifying anyone’s experience and erasing their individuality. In this case, the conversations of blogs are a generic vehicle for students’ individual experience that can be characterized by heteroglossic language use, diverse generic encounters and heterogeneous perspectives that are not regulated by the academy. Though blogs have their own conventions, they are not institutionally determined, monitored or sanctioned, and the overall action taken within the genre is sharing experiential knowledge with a larger public discourse community, without necessarily abiding by the standards of the dominant discourse or its intention to maintain cultural norms and values. Exposure to blogs as

generic instruments for sharing experience could benefit students within a pedagogy of mutuality in which every student has a voice as well as the opportunity to engage that voice in a collective intelligence of others, which includes but is not limited to the teacher and other students in the class or university. And the plethora of other genres that students can encounter in blogs—with hypertext to articles, blogs, images, Web sites, videos, reviews and so on—is matched by the multiplicity of perspectives available online to which students may add their own discourse in communities that are not neatly defined by the pre-determined novice ideology that is too often associated with students as an imagined, homogenized group. More importantly, no one individual has authority in the blogosphere because everyone's utterances exist in cyberspace with millions of others; while one blogger may be well-known or trusted as an authoritative source, every blogger has an opportunity to participate in creating meaning in anyone else's texts and in receiving the reciprocity of response on her own blog. The discursive strength comes not from one person's experience but from a multitude of individuals' contributing their experiences into the well of collective intelligence where everyone has access to it (see Wallace and Ewald 19). So there is a need to keep an open mind—for both students and teachers—about the ways in which our individual subject positions are assumed, and one of the ways that Gale asserts we can do this is an emphasis on maintaining conversation as a top priority to connect the textual production done in school with the aims of students' abnormal discourse:

for Rorty the conversation is both means and end in itself, a human pursuit of knowledge, a humanizing process in which space for new wonders is kept open, a hermeneutic endeavor to confront and embrace the incompatible values, ideas, and language games, a way of human existence and growth. (Gale 66)

In this role, as a site of public conversations in heterogeneous discourse communities, blogs can serve as an epistemic genre in which students are not being assimilated by the academic community, or being asked to speak from the marginalized position of the subversive outsider, in which they do not need to overtly succumb to or threaten to overthrow the dominant discourse, but instead operate as both individuals with experience to share and as members of a collective who shape that collective intelligence and our culture through the folk genre of blogging.

At the same time, the conversations based on teachers' experiential knowledge must also have a place in a classroom governed by mutuality. Gale describes teachers' role in their interaction with students as twofold: they have a dual responsibility as both "social agent for democracy and as cultural agent for learning" (4). Part of teachers' valuable experience is in their omnipresent understanding of the dominant discourse, in which both students and teachers are immersed:

Challenging the dominant tradition and discourse is not easy because academics are constituted by the dominant discourse in numerous ways: the content, the form, the standards of correctness and clarity of the dominant discourse all embody dominant ideologies from which the people writing in that language have no escape. (Gale 82)

In the writing classroom, teachers are aware not only of the generic choices available to students, but also of the constraints of those genres imposed on us by the dominant discourse. As educated members of the academy, writing teachers are in a position to understand the generic conventions and rhetorical features available, and can give students the benefit of that knowledge of genres as they operate within the dominant discourse. Gale characterizes any teacher as one who "speaks and is obligated to teach" normal discourse, but who is simultaneously also a

member of her own abnormal discourse community and maintains a critical distance in order to “check normal discourse’s tendency to dominate and oppress” students’ abnormal discourse (90). Gale further asserts that both interactions are necessary for keeping students’ conversations going (90), and a dual interaction also represents the experiences of both teachers and students who inhabit the worlds within and outside of the academy.

But perhaps the most important experiential knowledge that teachers can bring is their awareness of their own particular privilege as an occupant of multiple subjectivities—as agents for learning in our culture as well as instruments of social change within the academy who maintain open space for conversations so that “normal discourse will not be able to assume absolute authority in the classroom, for its claim of possessing the ultimate Truth for students to discover will be problematized and challenged by” teachers’ abnormal discourse, which must also challenge the privileged position of dominant discourse (Gale 90). In blogs, there is no individual authority or expert, no single “I who know,” but instead a multitude of individuals who prevent a single voice—including the teacher’s—from prevailing as the ultimate authority. Teachers can offer themselves and their students the benefit of individual reflection upon the extent of their role in facilitating our collective intelligence through academic generic alternatives presented in the classroom, including blogs. If teachers understand themselves as coming together in blogs to share experiential knowledge, then they can further facilitate students in infusing their generic practice with their own experience so that we may all reconsider our relationships to the dominant discourse and to our own abnormal discourse—based on our subject experiences as learners, textual producers and cultural members. As experienced textual producers, teachers can also examine the position of privilege from which they violate texts with ideologically motivated critical eyes—and try to teach their students to do

the same—as Min Zhan Lu asserts in her essay, “Redefining the Literate Self: The Politics of Critical Affirmation.” Blogs provide textual opportunities for teachers to reflect on their experience of navigating texts and negotiating and influencing meaning in their academic careers, but also present an alternative to the textual processes which are their norms. In throwing into relief their relationships both with students’ discourse—outside the hierarchy of the academy—and with academic discourse, blogs ask teachers not just to deconstruct the privilege of the academy or dominant discourse, but to confront their own privilege and realize that their experiences—as members of their own abnormal discourse group that is distinct from, but not more valuable than, students’—are not universal (see Lu). And any authority gained is not due to the hierarchy of one individual’s authorized experience compared to another’s, but is vested in them by others in the collective who learn to trust them as knowledgeable sources not through their credentials or position, but through their texts.

Redefining Subjects & Demystifying Texts

Wallace and Ewald further characterize a pedagogy of mutuality as one that implements changes in course architecture to alter students’ and teachers’ roles in generation knowledge that counts and recognize both students and teachers in a variety of subject positions both in and outside the classroom (13-14): “Fundamental to our argument in this chapter has been the notion that subjectivity—the ability to see oneself as a knowledge maker—exists only in discursive practices. Further, the discursive practices of the classroom greatly effect what kinds of subject positions students are able to take” (65). Since genres are ways that we acknowledge and recreate

recurring notions of ourselves as subjects (see Miller, “Genre as Action”), the alternative practice of blogs can also throw into relief the generic subjectivities created by traditional classroom genres and can, concurrently, offer a generic experience governed by the intertextual practices of all participants. As demonstrated previously in Chapter Three, one of the primary foundations of blogs is their intertextuality, the relationships between texts that are established through hypertext, quotations and blogrolls, which allow readers to become writers and interrupt their own as well as others’ texts, thereby participating in creating, altering and influencing meaning. In order to generate what Wallace and Ewald refer to as mutual knowledge in the writing classroom (65-66), students and teachers must both participate in the intertextual process of generating knowledge from re-envisioned subject roles that reflect their individual encounters with previous knowledge, their interactions with others’ texts and their own textual and generic experiences. Blogs as a folk genre are open to teachers and students as a socially relevant, culturally available speech genre (see Haskins on *kairos* and genre) in which participants can learn from each other and do not need to begin in the same subject positions in order to do so (Wallace and Ewald 77). But then all subject positions must be recognized as positive, epistemic forces, and in blogs this is facilitated through the policing of others within the participating collective. While there is never a guarantee of, or necessarily a desire for, consensus in ideological perspectives, there needs to be an agreement that all participants are welcome to join their experience to the collective intelligence as reader, writer, interrupter, interpreter and a general influence on the meaning being negotiated there. In other words, students’ discourse needs a space just as teachers’ discourse needs a space. Halasek describes this as a situation of mutual need in which students may not know the password to open the gateway of the academy, but they also have their own linguistic and sociocultural world to which teachers do not have

access (73). To practice a proficient and productive pedagogy, in Halasek's estimation, teachers must not simply ask students to abandon their discourse, or ask them for the code that would allow teachers to understand students' ways of communicating. Rather, teachers must learn alongside students, navigate new generic experiences together and rely on student-generated (not just student-centered) texts to analyze the differences in discourse (Halasek 180) without reducing their contributions to those of novices.

Blogs are one of the genres in which students and teachers could learn to navigate texts together because of their intertextual features—and the powerful ideology behind them. Blogs open up a level of textual negotiation to the public that emphasizes the flexibility, fluidity and social construction of all texts—both in the ways bloggers create their texts and build and respond to audiences as well as the ways in which others interrupt, respond to and influence their texts to arrive at communally achieved meaning. Within the generic practice of blogs, no text is sacred because no text is final, commands ultimate authority or achieves any kind of influence outside the support of others, through their textual collaboration. The sanctity of texts is not a natural occurrence but a learned behavior in which the academy historically participated as part of the dominant discourse, to establish a more unified, homogenous culture with an understanding of authoritative texts as part of a textual hierarchy already established before students—or teachers, for that matter, entered the scene. But in the blogosphere, there are conversations rather than canons (singular or multiple), and texts are infused with a collective sense of the ongoing conversations and meanings at stake because they can be altered at any time, revisited, hyperlinked and added to any number of conversations for a multiplicity of rhetorical purposes. Halasek maintains that such a process—of engaging with texts, assuming authority over the heteroglot word and investigating (not seeking to critique or deconstruct) the

inherently social nature of all discourse/utterances—is at the heart of a pedagogy of possibility that Bakhtin esteems as an acknowledgement of the generative power of reading and writing to form knowledge (Halasek 143-44). Halasek asserts that a Bakhtinian pedagogy is concerned not with upholding or deconstructing oppressive social systems, but instead with process of the mutual generation of knowledge—because “[reinforcing] the authority of texts...[decreases] the potential dialogue that might take place between texts and students” (187). In order to participate in the epistemic process, students and teachers both need to undergo varying amounts of re-education about the fluidity of texts and the social and cultural constructs that are just as influential in our roles as online subjects as in other areas of our lives.

I am certainly not suggesting that blogs can be all things to all people, all discursive opportunities to all participants, but they certainly can be reaccentuated for other purposes than the ones that are currently in use—including redefining not only how both teachers and students interact with texts in their classroom interactions, but also the kinds of texts that they encounter and create throughout the learning process. In “Rediscovering the Myths of Our Books,” Nick Carbone asserts that teachers “define ourselves by what we read and write, as well as how we read and write [which] determines to a large extent how we understand ourselves. The same holds true as well for our students” (236). If what we read, and how we read it, changes our understanding of ourselves, then the texts we encounter in blogs—as well as the intertextual relationships we rely on there—will change how we understand ourselves as teachers and students, and this change will, therefore, not be one-sided, changing only teachers’ discourse (in the matter of privilege discussed above, in expectations of students’ discourse, etc.). Blogs also offer teachers an opportunity to reaccentuate the genre for purposes within the academic contexts of the writing classroom, namely in helping students understand sources, citation and

collaboration. The intertextuality of blogs offers more than just a reconfiguring of the rhetorical situation; it presents an alternative research environment that is ripe for exploration and examination. Carbone acknowledges the role of online discourse in light of our need to move beyond current models of academic authority, journals and publishing, which still too often position writing as solitary, linear and complete; the author as sole, godlike authority; the primary concern one of copyright and plagiarism; and students as disenfranchised from their own space in which to insert themselves and their discourse (242-246):

...by creating a space for students to write on the Web, we can radically rethink how we introduce students to academic ways of writing, to what we mean by the idea of a community of learners, and how we understand and teach what it means to be a writer and author(ity) in a given community. (239)

In addition to helping us to question which sources count as authoritative and why (as discussed in Chapter Two), blogs also offer alternative experiences to academic mainstays of citation. In an environment in which hypertext links one text directly to another, the question of citations alters, becoming both implicit (without a direct attribute because the link to the original text speaks for itself) and explicit that we rely on others' utterances to make meaning in our own texts. Carbone suggests that, in this intertextual feature, students will "come to know the other members of the community more fully, thus providing them with a better understanding of what it means—and why it is important—to cite and acknowledge others with more care" (237). Hypertext forces bloggers to acknowledge they use sources to create their own utterances and helps us learn how to help our texts benefit from others' words as much as possible. And because there is no set standard of use—hypertext can take the place of a quote, or appear with an excerpt or an

utterance in its entirety—hyperlinks reinforce our generic understanding of blogs as fluid and open to variety (see Barlow 79-80).

An example of such variety exists not in citations, but in the variant forms that blogs can take, one of the most collaborative of which is blog carnivals. Blog carnivals are, in short, blogs that are created by one individual at a time, within a group of bloggers who take turns as creator and editor of the carnival for one issue each (whether weekly or monthly, depending on the size of the group and availability of material, etc.). Ideally, each participating member takes a turn at selecting the carnival's content, whether submitted to the specific carnival or elicited from a member or other blogger for that specific carnival's theme. The entries consist of multiple blogs from different bloggers (not single entries by an individual blogger arranged in reverse chronological order). Therefore, the hyperlinks to those blogs are what make up the blog carnival itself. Each link leads readers to a relevant blog that was selected for inclusion by the current carnival's editor and which exists as an individual's blog on its creator's site—whether the entry was written for the specific carnival or as part of their regular blogging. Blog carnivals are, in a sense, a multitude of blogs rolled into one—with numerous perspectives from individual bloggers, organized by one participatory blogger at a time. Even more so than individual blogs, with hypertext, comments and blogrolls, blog carnivals are a rich resource of collective intelligence available to the public, and they keep the conversation open to endless editions, entries, authors, comments, submissions, readers, writers, etc. The practice of blog carnivals is constructed on this ideal—of collective intelligence at work, created by and for, and received by, *people*. Not academics or students, not normal or abnormal discourse communities—but everyone. Thus, its carnivalesque form—which is heterogeneous, familiar and free—leaves a space open within the generic practice of blogging to give new meaning to the work of blogs, the

new meaning possible when people write themselves within a relatively new type of communication. As a genre, when blogs are, in a sense, outside the usual textual lives in which students engage in authorized academic discourse, they offer another platform on which to construct an academic self that is connected to a wider audience that also participates in the process of authorizing students as sources of knowledge.

Halasek suggests that only by complicating our textual practices in this way can we engage students in a productive, more expansive generic education in which they can hope to participate in richer subject roles: “Pedagogies that require students to generate only academic discourse (abstracts, reports, or researched essays, for example) very likely encourage students into complacent attitudes about their writing” (184). I would add to that teachers as well, who can also suffer from a similar complacency about reified academic discourse and who can also benefit from generic flexibility and a richer understanding not only of the textual moves made available with evolving online genres, but also how re-envisioning the process of creating knowledge and texts in the context of students’ and their texts can illuminate teachers’ previous and potential textual and pedagogical relationships with those students. In short, in the constantly changing subject roles of readers, writers and responders—who affect the ideological message as well as the form it takes when they interrupt or influence a text—teachers have just as much to gain from textual relationships of reciprocity as students do. When negotiating individual experience, social exigencies and contributions to our collective intelligence, we all have something to gain by learning to rely on new modes of creating reciprocal relationships, as in blogs, to jar each other out of textual complacency. What’s at stake in creating a pedagogy of mutuality—and textual relationships of reciprocity—is ultimately how we reconsider the

resources available to us, which genres we choose to practice and when, where we turn for information. Jenkins relates these circumstances specifically to media education:

Many schools remain openly hostile to these kinds of experiences, continuing to promote autonomous problem solvers and self-contained learners. ...Media are read primarily as threats rather than as resources. More focus is placed on the dangers of manipulation rather than the possibilities of participation, on restricting access...rather than in expanding skills at deploying media for one's own ends, rewriting the core stories our culture has given us. (259)

Lévy, on the other hand, focuses on the human aspect—the anthropological rather than the technological—who we turn to for textual knowledge, who we trust to alter our texts, who we are willing to align ourselves with ideologically as we continue to explore the larger implications of ourselves as online subjects:

In the age of knowledge, failure to recognize the other as an intelligent being is to deny him a true social identity. ...For when we acknowledge the other for the range of skills he possesses, we allow him to identify himself in terms of a new and positive mode of being, we help mobilize and develop feelings of recognition that will facilitate the subjective implication of other individuals in collective projects. (15)

Lévy suggests that the way to “unleash a positive dynamic of recognition and skills mobilization” is to recognize and value people’s actual skills as they exist in contemporary practice—not as they are imagined or held up to antiquated or reified expectations separate from human experience or our actual needs (15). Lévy identifies these as actual skills as opposed to “officially validated skills,” which are a minority of the actual skills in play at any given time in

our culture, and what's at stake in acknowledging individuals' actual skills is their participation in contributing to our collective intelligence.

Blogs in a Struggle That Matters

In the blogosphere, the first step to recognizing people's actual skills is to make them public, and the next step is to help ensure that blogs matter to teachers and students. In his 2005 address to CCCC, "Who Owns Writing?" Doug Hesse characterized discourse that mattered to students as self-sponsored, and discourse that held no self-sponsored meaning for students—only material consequence—as obliged (349-50). His discussion of discourse that matters applied specifically to the writing classroom will be helpful here to suggest how, in a pedagogy of mutuality, informed by an understanding of Gale's edifying teacher, blogs as public discourse can ultimately pose a discursive struggle—for meaning, for conversation, for new rhetorical circumstances and purposes—that matters to both students and teachers. Hesse defines obliged discourse as academic and vocational writing required or sanctioned materially by institutional or societal forces, while self-sponsored discourse is personal and civic writing we choose to participate in to express ourselves or create social relationships without "direct material consequence" (350). Hesse made a distinction between the kinds of writing we do based on our choice—whether or not we "have" to because of "direct material consequence." But this assumes that writing we choose to do does not have material consequences, and that writing that we are obligated to perform is disconnected from personal expression or social relationships. This distinction based on choice presents a dichotomy between writing that has material effect and

writing that matters to us personally. Hesse also separated the potential for writing in the future into two equally dismal, disparate categories: (1) writing as it is currently done in schools and scored on a computer and (2) writing that accomplishes something in a world of readers and writers that has very little to do with school (342). In this vision of the future, only writing that's not done in school matters, and while the idea bothered Hesse a great deal, and such dualism of personal choice and cultural consequence concerns me as well—it assumes that students attend school for material consequence only, and only create texts that matter to them when they are outside of an educational environment.

Hesse's central argument is that writing teachers are nowhere to be seen in this circumstance, in which the media, government, corporations and university administrators have situated themselves as determinants of writing students' futures (343): "We have the lens of research and reflective practice... Ours is the knowledge of what writing is and what it can be, the whole of it, in every sphere. Ours is the never-done knowledge of how writing develops, within a person or a populace" (355). As an academic in a room of his peers, Hesse envisions richer writing programs in which students are passionately involved in writing for school that acknowledges them as contextualized individuals in complicated worlds of school, work and personal ideologies (348). What he does not address here is a reciprocal desire on behalf of *students* to make school a place where writing matters rather than maintaining the status quo in which they produce virtually empty texts for fictional audiences in exchange for evaluation and matriculation. Hesse's call for teachers to own writing for their students neglects to emphasize that students are capable of owning the writing they already do, and should not be asked (much less forced) to assimilate ownership of discourse that is neither familiar nor of individual consequence to them. This does not mean that students don't want to learn other ways of writing,

other rhetorical purposes for the genres they already practice, other textual ways of being in the world, or that they only want to learn about familiar forms of writing on their own, outside of school. But the call to own writing that matters must also address the actual skills already in play in students' abnormal discourse—as well as teachers'.

In order to teach blogs as discourse that matters, the genre must be seen in the terms of the goals of an edifying teacher—one who has a constant awareness of her abnormal discursive interactions with both students' abnormal discourse and that of the dominant culture (Gale 5)—whose aim is to keep us from arriving at a set discursive destination and to constantly engage in the struggle for meaning, to keep normal discourse from taking control of both students' and teachers' efforts to subvert it through ignorance or intention (see Gale, Chapter 6, “Edifying Teachers as Enabling Constraints”). We must acknowledge blogs as participating in the dominant discourse in which we are all written generically (from various subject positions, in varying extents), in which our individual texts reproduce recurring notions of ourselves in our cultural contexts. But because blogs are defined by our textual interactions with each other, the authority of the dominant culture does not dictate how blogs will engage various abnormal discourse communities. In the classroom of the edifying teacher, the struggle for conversation at all costs is paramount—and there is no final answer to who owns writing or what blogs can do, only the learning that takes place when the questions are asked, the conversation is open to all and the collision of students' and teachers' discourse leads to an intertextual heteroglossic learning experience that can be reaccentuated in multiple genres. This is an ideal of a writing classroom in which an edifying teacher participates—not dominates—and for whom teaching becomes a process of learning to deal with new situations, new audiences, new problems, new experiences, new cultures, and new discourses. It is a process

characterized by participations, interactions, conflicts, confrontations, negotiations, reconciliations, disagreements, and persuasions among teachers, students, diverse cultures, and different discourses. The edifying teacher is in the midst of all this instead of above it. (Gale 128)

By the end of his speech, Hesse's initial definition of self-sponsored discourse shifts away from his insistence that it has no "direct material consequence" (350), and instead he calls for increased attention to discourse that matters and its connection to social action in the real world of people and events (350-54). He cites blogs as one civic genre that has the potential to matter to students and concurrently have material consequence (351), but I do not necessarily want to offer up blogs as an answer, or the only answer, merely as one answer among many that I have not explored here. Ultimately, everything I have presented about blogs here—their intertextual features, their alterations to the rhetorical situation, their reliance on collective intelligence—I want to add to the conversation about how to keep blogs from stumbling into the pitfalls of traditional academic genres that are interpreted (by teachers as well as students) as linear, static and unilateral. One way to do this is to position blogs in the writing classroom as a genre of textual interactions between students, between students and teachers, between all members of our collective intelligence,

by allowing students to interact with different discourses, different perspectives, and different belief systems so that they come to their own choices and conclusions. In short, to change students' consciousness and their ways of writing requires interactions between students and the teacher, and the focus of the interactions should always be the written text, texts in normal discourses and in abnormal discourses, texts that are microcosms of different worlds. (Gale 102)

I want to suggest that keeping open the conversation about what we as individuals can make blogs do, is what will make them matter as a genre of cultural consequence—as a constantly negotiable way that we recognize to act together in the world, as Carolyn Miller wrote (165) (in this case, the textual world of cyberspace). The reciprocal textual relationships at work in blogs can be of consequence both to students and teachers as individuals who have something to gain in return for adding our own intelligence to our cultural collective. And their position as public discourse with discursive strength in numbers only serves to further bridge the rift that Hesse anticipated, to be writing that students and teachers can do both in and outside of school that matters because it engages us in the act of epistemic reciprocity, which has material consequence for us not only as individuals seeking expressive discourse opportunities, but also as a culture still searching for continually evolving forms of heterogeneous communication that more richly represent more of us in a greater variety of subject roles in the genres we practice—online and beyond.

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