



# **BRAVE NEW CLASSROOMS**

*Democratic Education & the Internet*

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## Chapter 14

### Braving the Body: Embodiment and (Cyber-)Texts

*Tina S. Kazan*

While rhetorical situations operate on two levels—the discursive and the corporeal—popular culture reinforces the notion that online communication occurs without bodies and that face-to-face communication is not only a distinctly physical act but one that portrays a drastically different persona from the selves people create online.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it seems that who we are online is not who we are “in real life.” It is not only that we are “different” selves in each of these forums, but also that the media want to valorize one of these selves as the “real” self. Dean (1999) discusses the many fears the public has about the Internet, such as the spread of viruses and the presence of predators who prey on children and women. She argues, we “fear that new communication technologies threaten to destroy reality” and what is at stake is authority: “the need to fix the real, to find that place where it cannot be refuted, where it must be conceded, is rooted in an apparent need to ground authority” (1069).

In rhetorical theory, one’s authority derives from one’s *ethos*, the Greek word for “moral character” and the root for “ethics.” Though “ethos is generally defined as the good character and the consequent credibility of the rhetor,” where such authority resides is debatable. Aristotle located authority in the text, which was to “demonstrate that the rhetor is a person of good sense (*phronesis*), virtue (*arete*), and good will (*eunoia*).” Others, like Cicero and Quintilian, argued that nondiscursive elements such as the rhetor’s “actions and examples in life” factored into one’s ethos (Covino & Jolliffe 1995: 15). For Aristotle, “discourse becomes an active construction of character—or, rather, of an image, a representation of character—and Aristotelian theory seeks to



outline the means whereby such imagemaking is achieved" (Baumlin & Baumlin 1994: xv). The speaker is thus positioned within the text, "no longer simply its origin (and thus a consciousness standing outside the text) but rather a signifier standing *inside* an expanded text. The rhetor's physical presence and appearance, his gestures, inflections, and accents of style, are all involved in acts of signification" (Baumlin & Baumlin 1994: xvi).

In textually oriented forums like email and listservs, one constructs oneself discursively.<sup>2</sup> Yet, nonlinguistic elements also contribute to one's ethos. If one's screen name designates one's institutional affiliation, for example, the rhetor may garner prestige (or derision, as the case might be). How one is reacted to by other participants and with what frequency, for instance, on a listserv, might suggest that one is considered an "expert," or worthy of attention. Although such information may be evidenced only through text, these responses nevertheless reveal information about one's (nondiscursive) reputation. When we interact in cyberspace, we construct an online ethos and this ethos shifts depending on our audience and depending on the "self" we want to create. I am thinking here of what Eva Bednarowicz (2002) calls "*persona*-bility," describing how online tutors must create personas appropriate to the context and must be both personal and personable to be effective. So is it with other kinds of online participants: those who can create a range of personas are the more successful communicators.

According to Baumlin (1994), if one takes:

an incarnationist perspective, one might argue that all discourse, in its essence, is oriented toward (or proceeds from) the body; there is *ethos* precisely *because* there is a body, because there is a material presence that "stands before" the texts that it speaks or writes. (xxiii–xxiv)

Yet, ethos, according to Baumlin, can be approached "only within a set of paradoxes and downright contradictions" (Baumlin 1994: xxvi). These paradoxes and contradictions are perhaps why some people fear the Internet and why popular media seem obsessed with locating the "real self" online. This chapter looks at the body's relationship to online communication, how the body gets (dis-)embodied online, and how ethos and ethics factor into the "selves" writers and readers forge in cyberspace.

As hyper-readers,<sup>3</sup> we are what Bakhtin (1981) would call "concrete listener[s]." Rhetoric, in Bakhtin's conception, "oriented toward the listener and his answer," relies on a concrete listener "who actively answers and reacts" (280). This listener offers a "surplus" integral to the rhetorical act. In other words, meaning does not reside in the typed body, or utterance, but in the

interaction(s) between the various speakers and listeners, with the position of listener an active and dialogic one.

This chapter is primarily confined to textually oriented spaces, such as email, interactive discussions, and discussion boards, but its main argument—that we create embodied personas online and that very creation involves ethical choices—holds true for other forms of electronic communication and might be particularly relevant for e-classrooms, spaces in which teachers and students never meet face-to-face. In email and (a-)synchronous discussions, we communicate as *typed* bodies. These uniform utterances suggest a homogenized body, because in cyberspace, we seem to take on an undifferentiated identity. Physically, each interaction looks the same. Yet, hyper-readers must listen beyond these typing bodies. They must look beyond appearances to the discursive and corporeal substance of the exchange, from diction, grammar and syntax to disclosure and desire.

The challenge of presenting a “self” or “selves” online is a formidable task for both writers and readers. Writers strive not only to represent themselves, but also to decide which “self” or “selves” to present. Hyper-readers struggle with interpretation and determining what they believe or reject. More importantly, they operate in a forum that invites response. Hyper-readers, bombarded by cybertext, have the difficult task of making judgments, formulating responses, and asking questions. This must be done *in text*, and in most pedagogical cases these replies are documented.

### **“You’ve Got No Body”: Cultural Notions of Computer Technology**

I begin my discussion with two popular movies, Nora Ephron’s *You’ve Got Mail* (1998) and Irwin Winkler’s *The Net* (1995), to show how prevailing cultural texts want to fix the “real.” In the first example, I uncover how *You’ve Got Mail* denies fluidity between online and offline personas. The movie tries to excuse the “real life” unethical actions of Joe Fox (Tom Hanks) and locates his “real” self online. In this case, “the online self” is equivalent to one’s expression of feelings. The second example, *The Net*, invokes the popular fear that computers can erase one’s identity. The movie suggests that Angela Bennett (Sandra Bullock) *is* her computer identity, again locating the “real” self online, but in this case, “the online self” is information rather than emotion. Nevertheless, the embodied Angela Bennett is able to subvert this discursive construction. The contradictory relationships between disembodiment and embodiment in these two films mirror the same tension hyper-readers and writers encounter. Indeed, this movie analysis is followed with two teaching examples in which students

make specific choices about their online embodiments. Hollywood's (mis-)conceptions influence students' as well as teachers' understanding of electronic communication and technology in general.

In *You've Got Mail*, as soon as her boyfriend leaves for work and is safely out of view, Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan) runs to her laptop to continue her online correspondence with "NY 152." When she logs on as "Shopgirl," her AOL account tells her, "You've got mail." As film viewers, we quickly learn that "NY 152" is Joe Fox (Tom Hanks) and that, like Kathleen, he has a partner from whom he conceals his online dialogs. More importantly, Joe Fox hails from the family that owns *Fox Books* Superstore, the corporate bookstore that will put Kathleen's *The Shop Around the Corner* (the name of the 1940 film which inspired this remake) out of business.

Kathleen and Joe meet face-to-face for the first time when Joe brings his much younger relatives to Kathleen's children's bookstore. When Kathleen introduces herself as the owner of the shop, Joe identifies himself as "Joe," for he does not want her to know that he is Joe Fox, responsible for the superstore that is being built around the corner from Kathleen's bookstore. Kathleen cannot identify him on either level—as Joe Fox, her business adversary, or as "NY 152," her online "affair." Joe knows that his store will compete with Kathleen's children's bookstore, but he, too, is unaware that she is the "Shopgirl" with whom he is infatuated. The movie continues to exploit the differences between the online selves of these characters and their face-to-face selves.<sup>4</sup> It is only in the final scene of the film that Kathleen learns what we know—that NY 152, the man with whom she has fallen in love online, is in fact Joe Fox, the man whose company has put her out of business and who subsequently tries to woo her. Of course, the two leads must fall in love according to the romantic comedy formula.

But the movie wants to have it both ways. Joe says, "If I hadn't been *Fox Books* and you hadn't been *The Shop Around the Corner* and we'd just met . . ." He pauses, wondering what might have been. But Joe and Kathleen *are Fox Books* and *The Shop Around the Corner*. And they are the identities they reveal online. Otherwise, why would we want them to eventually come together? At the same time, we are to "forgive" the fact that Joe's super bookstore has put Kathleen's independent bookstore out of business. The film suggests that the "real" identity of the two characters is expressed online and that some of the more complicated aspects of their material lives will vanish or should not matter. In the celluloid world, love conquers all, including bankruptcy, but the important point for my analysis is that the film deliberately exaggerates the differences between the online and face-to-face personas of these characters. The film



depends on our being able simultaneously to sustain a belief in these differences while desiring them to be reconciled so the love plot can culminate.<sup>5</sup> The film exalts the cyber persona as the “true” self. In real life, which is much messier, the characters exchange barbs, encounter work challenges, fall ill, and even cry. The characters are not “more” themselves “in real life” than in cyberspace; rather, it is a false dichotomy to pretend that when Joe Fox goes online he is no longer the owner of a bookstore conglomerate. However the film may subvert these boundaries by the conclusion, it depends on our believing they exist in the first place.

We see similar distinctions in *The Net*, a thriller involving Angela Bennett (Sandra Bullock), a program systems analyst who telecommutes. Film critic Roger Ebert (1995) describes Bennett as “a shy, reclusive intellectual who, in the old days, would have been a librarian or a schoolmarm,” and maybe a bookstore owner is another contemporary parallel. Like most thrillers, *The Net* involves a number of betrayals and misreadings, as Angela Bennett tries to discover why some cyber-terrorist group wants her killed. The film revolves around Bennett’s identity—both online and offline, and this identity confusion is played out in a number of ways. For example, Bennett’s mother has Alzheimer’s disease and thus never recognizes Angela when she comes to visit. Even after Angela reminds her that “No, Mom, my name’s Angela,” her mother believes Angela must be one of her former students, thus misreading her.

Even the tagline used to advertise the film captures the fear that many people have of the Internet: *Her driver’s license. Her credit cards. Her bank accounts. Her identity. DELETED.* The film suggests that Angela’s identity *can* easily be deleted. Moszkowicz (1999) describes how Bennett:

is then set up by an adversary from the world of computer networks, who deletes her files from all public records and secures her re-emergence in cyberspace, not as Angela Bennett at all, but as a more dubious character by the name Ruth Marx. Her dislocation within cyberspace is a focus for anxiety, contributing to the film’s success as a thriller by working on popular fears of technology. (214–215)

Everything about Bennett’s identity is taken away, from her social security number to her home; even her corporeal identity has been assumed by an imposter who establishes herself as Angela Bennett at the corporation. Moszkowicz (1999) outlines the plot as concerning “a woman on-the-run from an assassin who wants to cause her physical harm and who uses new technology to bring about her virtual death before an actual one” (210). Both an expert on—and now victim of—technology, Bennett must outwit her pursuer, Jack Devlin (Jeremy Northam), a representative of the cyber-terrorist group infiltrating US institutions like Wall Street and LAX.

*The Net* contains the same tension between embodiment and disembodiment that we see in *You've Got Mail*, a cultural trend of exaggerating the differences between online and offline identities, while desiring to establish the "real" self.<sup>6</sup> Is Angela Bennett her online self, someone who can be reduced to a screen name, a social security number and government records? Or is she a woman who, in several physical confrontations, must defend herself against Jack Devlin? If she *were* only data, then why would Devlin need to pursue her? The film erases her discursively, but also bodily, by putting another woman in Bennett's job. Using the film's own logic, why would someone need to kill Angela Bennett if her "identity" had already been destroyed?

Of course, the film subverts its own premise. If Angela's identity were in fact "deleted," viewers would not need to watch an entire film of the "bad guys" tailing her and trying to kill her. If she could be reduced to a cyber-identity, her physical self would no longer remain a threat. Indeed, we would *have* no thriller if identifying data corresponded to identity, if we were only our discursive selves and not our corporeal selves. The film seems to locate the "real self" more fully online than "in real life," but nonetheless the bodily self must be eliminated. As in *You've Got Mail*, the movie rests on a dichotomy that must ultimately be subverted in order for the film to exist: physical self versus cyberself. In this case, an embodied Angela versus her personal records. However *The Net* may erase Angela's textual identity, it cannot reduce her to a pile of information. Moszkowicz (1999) observes that "experiences of the social—of the film itself—suggest the body still provides fundamental clues to meaning and identity" (225).

### Creating an "Other" Body: Identity Online

Movies like *You've Got Mail* and *The Net* unnecessarily divorce bodies from technology. Some readers may find themselves sympathetic to the contradictions that Hollywood embellishes. On the one hand, the lack of identifying markers and corporeal text in cyberspace offers endless possibility; on the other hand, the dominance of discursive text threatens to obliterate the body, leaving readers searching for clues. The following teaching scenario helps clarify these tensions. In it, a student uses computer-mediated communication to create a "self" online.

During the first few weeks of one fall semester, while I was teaching business writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago, a public research university, I received emails regularly from Mike Johnson.<sup>7</sup> These emails asked specific questions about assignments and class discussions from the business



communications course I was teaching at the time. Since no "Mike Johnson" appeared on my rosters, I wasn't sure what to make of this correspondence. Because the university had a two-week drop/add period, I assumed that maybe this Mike Johnson had added the course and his name would surface on an updated roster. Nevertheless, each time I went into class, no Mike Johnson came to talk to me. No Mike Johnson signed the attendance book. Mike Johnson seemed to exist only in my email inbox. Yet, he knew all the details of the course and had substantial questions online about class activities and homework.

In week three of the semester, a student waited to talk to me after class. Manuel Rodriguez was a Latino male who sat in the very back of the class. He was slightly older than the 20–25 year olds who populated the course. He asked if I had received the email that he had sent that morning. I quickly responded "no" and that I would check again and get back to him. It didn't occur to me until I read my email that afternoon that Manuel Rodriguez in class was Mike Johnson online. As the semester progressed, reading notes from Manuel Rodriguez signed "Mike Johnson" became less unsettling, since I now knew the person with whom I was interacting. I did wonder why this student opted to erase the identity that bodies and names *embody* and instead create the rather generic persona of a Mike Johnson. I was curious as to why Manuel Rodriguez selected a name that would be read differently, a name less likely to be read as "ethnic" by the dominant culture. What online ethos was he crafting in choosing a screen name and persona that encouraged a different reading than did his given name and "offline self"?

By removing the physical markers of participants, cyberspace alters the rhetorical situation. How writers choose to construct themselves in that space is telling. For instance, in many ways, online communication allows one to exploit the gaps between the culturally read body and one's identity. While many identities cannot be read on our bodies, society nonetheless conflates bodies and identities, interpreting them through what Roof and Wiegman (1995) call an "already culturally determined matrix" (193–194). A person with a body that is not "read" as African American, for instance, in a face-to-face encounter, might have a difficult time being believed or accepted by some people as embodying that racial identity. Indeed, some African Americans "pass" as white whether they mean to do so or not. Nevertheless, the written or oral text can be used to reveal chosen identities that the body does not, and computer-mediated communication makes such disclosure particularly easy. Language continues to dominate online communication (though this is slowly changing as graphics become easier to download). When one reveals an identity online, the corporeal

text is not always readily available and so does not compete with the textual identity for meaning.

In his ethnographic work at the University of Hawaii, Warschauer (2000) found that a computer-intensive language course in Hawaiian permitted multiracial students to use discursive text that seemed to conflict with their culturally read corporeal texts. Cyberspace, according to Warschauer, gave these students "an opportunity to fully engage in their Hawaiian selves." Warschauer focuses on one student, Onaona, who was primarily of European ancestry but had a great-grandparent who was Hawaiian. In contrast to the popular notion that cyberlife and "real" life are not connected, Onaona's webpages "allowed her to project herself as a Hawaiian not only online, but 'in real life' as well" (161). I read this "new image" as a new "self" that Onaona has crafted; she has a new corporeal text, one that she can choose to divulge or disguise.

Onaona used cybertext and the "real life text" of her body together, as each supplemented the other. She actually showed coworkers her website, despite the fact that the language was unintelligible to them. The existence of the cybertext prompted a rereading of Onaona, who used her website to re-code her culturally coded body, adding credibility to a reading that her body alone lacked. Through these webpages, she augmented her undisclosed ethnic identity and did so in a public way—in the form of a website and by introducing her friends to this representation of herself. Onaona's experience puts "an interesting twist on the example of 'race-passing'" (Warschauer 2000: 162). Manuel Rodriguez used a screen name that resisted ethnic coding; Onaona chose cyberspace to display her ethnicity. Warschauer does not attribute Onaona's experience, which he notes was similar to the experiences of many of the other students, solely to Internet communication. The teacher used the technology in ways that Warschauer deems "culturally appropriate." In this particular case, the technology was used in ways consistent with Hawaiian values. He cites "informal interaction, community networking, and multimedia learning" and believes "the email exchange and the web publishing project gave students a sense that they were doing something of benefit for the broader Hawaiian community" (163).

Onaona's website used language as the primary form of representation. She crafted an identity rooted in language and one that allowed her to make this identity more explicit in her everyday life. Warschauer (2000) observes that while language is "deeply rooted in personal and social history," it:

allows a greater flexibility than race and ethnicity, with a person able to consciously or unconsciously express dual identities by the linguistic choices they make—even in a single sentence (e.g., through code-switching; see Blom and Gumperz 1972). (155)

These language choices and dialect options allow “people [to] constantly make and remake who they are. A Yugoslav becomes a Croatian, a Soviet becomes a Lithuanian, and an American emphasizes his African American linguistic and cultural heritage” (ibid.). Language thus has more versatility than some other identity markers and it can display this versatility via the *typing body*.

Cyberspace in particular facilitates both disclosure and concealment. In her ethnographic work, Markham (1998) surmises that users “enjoy the capacity to control the presentation and performance of self in online contexts [...] to control the conditions of interaction and to control the extent to which people online have access to the self” (20). Nearly all the people in Markham’s study identified “control” as “a significant and meaningful benefit of online communication” (ibid.). When Manuel Rodriguez goes online as Mike Johnson, he is proposing a certain version of himself that conceals some things and reveals others. Of course, presenting a “self” and being *read* as that self are not the same thing. Markham explains that “whether that self is interpreted by you to be the same (as the) self I presented is unclear, and unlikely” (123–124). Nevertheless, she continues, “I *believe* that I control what others see, read, and therefore know about me, and the channels available to them to think otherwise are limited or nonexistent” (124). This chapter will return to the necessity for interpretation, for an “other” who reads this “self,” in the concluding section. For now, I underscore the ability to use language to highlight certain “selves” and the *perceived* control over disclosure that cyberspace seems to allow us.<sup>8</sup>

The next section looks at specific instances of corporeal identity to discuss how cyberspace both reveals and conceals identities. The concluding section returns to a more thorough application of Bakhtin’s concrete listener and the surplus this listener offers. As the typed body appears to be *no* body or can be unquestioningly assimilated by the reading body, we must read thoughtfully in cyberspace, query carefully, and pursue the “not said.”

### (Hand-)Writing and (Type-)Writers: Is the Text the Body?

[E]very teacher tends to grade up students who resemble him the most. If your own writing shows neat penmanship you regard that more important in a student than if it doesn’t.

—Phaedrus in Robert M. Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Any act of reading involves the *body* of the text. How thought gets embodied in writing—through various fonts, colors, and materials—affects our ways of reading. If we have failed to watch how we read these manifestations, then a student like Manuel Rodriguez *does* inadvertently become a Mike Johnson, or is



interchangeable with any other student. In other words, without Manuel's corporeal text, and however he may represent himself online—the language he sends via computer is conveyed in uniform, typed characters. It imparts the same *physicality*, the same visual rhetoric, as an email from any student. Handwriting “seems” more “bodily” than computer-generated text—more physical than typing, more closely related to one's identity, and even a better determinant of one's ethos. But is it?

Jones (2000) argues that writing bodies are disciplined by teachers and students through the physical act of writing. Jones maintains that the teacher uses a student's handwriting to evaluate a number of categories, including the inculcation of institutional norms. If we think of handwriting as not only the embodiment of a writer's ideas, but as the corporeal presence of the absent writer, we can see how pleasure and pain are inextricably linked when teachers discipline writing bodies. Young students are punished for producing “incorrect” handwriting. Their bodies of writing are rejected for not representing a sufficiently linear, clean, neat material body to read. At the same time, Jones notes the pleasures of producing words. Jones recalls writing with fountain pens and ink and laments that “the post-fountain pen era offers other less fluid pleasures: cheap, mass produced ballpoint pens” (153). On the contrary, the erotics of writing are not diminished with new technologies. Different computer keyboards produce different “clicking” sounds and feel differently under one's fingers. Monitors restrain and release visuals, colors, sizes and sounds. Indeed, typing on a computer keyboard involves more sensory experiences, since computers offer a wider range of colors, sounds, and graphics than ruled white paper does. It is dangerous to consider writing with a fountain pen any more (or less) “bodily” than typing at a computer. Building on Jones' argument that teachers conflate the written word and the writing body, I posit that by conflating the two, teachers are trying to stabilize the student, to get a handle on the student's “real” self and therefore to get a more “accurate” reading of the student.

Recalling her experiences in grade school, Jones says that beyond content, teachers read her “‘beautiful neat’ shapes, significant evidence of my being a ‘good’ student [...] Neat writing came to be, for some girls like myself, the signal of our superiority and capitulation” (ibid.). To (mis-)quote Quintilian, the good rhetor is the one with good handwriting. Jones contends that teachers read the corporeal body into the written word. By extension, then, all readers, not only teachers, seek bodily clues in text, as well as making (non-)corporeal judgments about the writers of these texts. Indeed, when we think about these issues in light of computer text, the very uniformity of typed text leaves hyper-

readers perplexed and pleased. If readers, however erroneously, conflate content and appearance, what happens when hyper-readers have even fewer physical clues? *Whose* body is the typing body?

In exploring this relationship between identity and reading, I failed to mention the *other* physicality of writing—word choice, syntax, sentences, and paragraphs. Jones comments on how “typewritten or word-processed assignments” do not make:

the student body [...] entirely invisible, however; it is still there, its signs evident in the production of the printed text, the order or disorder of the words' arrangement on the page, the evenness of the margins and spaces, the choices of font and point size. (156)

Not only the individual letters that one writes or types, but also what letters (and words) one chooses to use allow readers to formulate opinions. If readers were only studying handwriting, then they would be doing a simple handwriting analysis. A focus on the discourse itself, on the other hand, involves an examination of word choice, syntax, and rhetorical strategies. Writers further embody their texts through the ideas they pose and their perspectives on those ideas. Thus language, handwritten or typed, embodies a particular “self.” Jones maintains that because of “the absent student body,” equivalent to what I am calling the typed body, “the teacher suffers a loss” (ibid.). However, I disagree. Typing bodies do *not* create an “absence of shared interactions with a real person which offer affective texture” (ibid.). The affective texture is inscribed in the typed text, just as it is inscribed in the handwritten text. Handwritten text or typed text does not allow readers a transparent vision of the writer’s “real” self. But both kinds of writing deceive us into thinking that they do. Handwriting seems to offer endless idiosyncrasies and therefore a particular subjectivity; word-processed text presents readers with an imagined “blank slate” onto which to project themselves. While writing and typing may produce different products, both are *meant* to be uniform—the ways in which handwriting is *not* uniform are “mistakes.” In its appearance of objectivity, typed text encourages readers to inscribe their own subjectivity. The typed text, however uniform it might be among users, is not any less material than handwritten text and is not any less embodied; in both cases, writers construct a self through their discursive choices.

Rather than a disembodied forum, online communication, because of its uniformity such as in emails and listservs, deludes hyper-readers into thinking other participants are “just like me.” The assumption seems to be not that the interaction is disembodied but that the embodied act is parallel for all participants, though it is possible certain marginalized bodies realize the other

cyber participants may not be like them. Those users might create personas with the intent of “appearing” like the others. It is possible that Manuel Rodriguez, for instance, used “Mike Johnson” in order to enter what he assumed to be the mainstream. Research shows computer-mediated communication, however romanticized it has been as a forum for unlimited social transformation, is actually a strong norming device (Addison & Hilligoss 1999; Stone 1995). In cyberspace, readers are much more likely to read in a “standardized” manner, especially because corporeal texts are not evident. First, the anonymity leads to a kind of “blind” reading. Second, the lack of physical clues mitigates against the expression of “other” identities. In both these cases, hyper-readers must ask fundamental questions about the typing body.

On the one hand, the norming forces of computer-mediated communication and the unified typing exert pressure that homogenizes and depersonalizes cyberspace, similar to what Bakhtin (1981) calls “unifying, centralizing, centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life” (272–273), though his analysis is of the novel and not cyberspace. Simultaneously, however, the centrifugal forces (“decentralizing tendencies,” according to Bakhtin) in cyberspace, notably discourse, disclosure and desire, disrupt the centripetal forces. These centrifugal forces make the space personal and individualized. How students make use of technology, how they envision the technology in relation to their bodies, as well as the technology in relation to their literacy, may be highly distinctive, despite the norming forces of computer-mediated communication. In fact, the popular notion we see in *You’ve Got Mail* is of online dialog as *more* intimate than its face-to-face counterpart. Such exchanges can exert centrifugal forces against standardization and homogenization.

As a cautionary point, I want to add that computer-mediated education must not (and cannot) become a way to *avoid* the body or the intimacy of the pedagogical act (cf. Ess, this volume). We must question institutions’ motive(s) for promoting the use of technology and the move toward distance education.<sup>9</sup> McWilliam and Palmer (1996) observe:

Increasingly, academic managers of the new corporate universities deem material bodies to be stumbling blocks in terms of the temporal and spatial dimensions of university campuses. Without them, the pedagogical process becomes faster, potentially cheaper, and more accessible. Furthermore, keeping bodies away from each other has the added benefit of militating against charges of abusive pedagogy as overt sexual misconduct. In pedagogical terms, the “virtual” space created by technology is also a *virtuous* space (Angel 1995), devoid of fleshly bodies that could distract the mind. (165)

Technology ostensibly enables institutions to avoid the “messier” aspects of pedagogy.<sup>10</sup>



Given that teaching is a social relationship between teachers and students, between bodies, then a move toward distance education motivated by a desire to eliminate bodies is not only a naïve one, but also a sinister one. Such actions may encourage the Manuel Rodriguezes of the world to masquerade as Mike Johnsons and to do so without critical reflection. "Unmarked" cyberbodies, as it were, seem to be safer bodies. More significantly, to pretend that cyberspace erases sexuality and power relationships is a damaging assumption that reinforces the (false) dichotomy between "online" and "real life." Even in cyberspace, we are in the realm of the physical. Argyle and Shields (1996) describe how "the screen, keyboard and monitor are physically in contact with the user, with the flesh up against barrier after barrier" (68). In affirming "a multiplicity, multiple layers of being, a way to be in the body at all times, to express the whole of the person so there can be no separations," they ask, "[...] how can we eliminate the physical at all?" (ibid.). We cannot eliminate the physical nor can we disregard the power differentials between the participants. Students might explore their otherness (as Onaona did), play with the classroom dynamic, dispute the teacher's authority, or engage in other centrifugal activities that unmask the power structure. It is more likely, however, that students will react like Manuel Rodriguez, trying to assimilate themselves to unmarked forms, thereby increasing the centripetal effect of the interaction and the institution, a probability "the new corporate universities" would embrace.

As teachers, our challenge is to help students see online participation as embodied practice that requires not only the production of text, but also the production of "selves." The challenge, as we incorporate technology into our classrooms, is to find ways to embody our texts online and explore various constructions of "selves," selves which may act centrifugally and centripetally in the academy and the larger society. While we might aim to teach students many things, one primary goal should be to teach students to consciously *embody* their texts, creating a presence through their typing/typed bodies. I see this objective operating on several levels—that we want to "hear" our students in their texts; that we want them to understand writing as decision-making, as they must make choices about *what* they write and *how* they write; and finally, that those choices are ethical ones that they are held accountable for and that impact "real life." Creating an embodied ethos seems especially important in e-spaces, in light of Markham's (1998) observation:

To be present in cyberspace is to learn how to be embodied there. To be embodied there is to participate. To participate is to know enough about the rules for interaction and movement so that movement and interaction with and within this space is possible. Although this may not be so different than what we experience whenever we enter any

strange context, it seems very blatant in cyberspace, perhaps because this process cannot be ignored, and because movement and interaction create embodied presence, not simply accompany it. (23–24)

To teach effectively is to engage in teaching as a situated, embodied practice. How dull it would be if our students disappeared into their texts, whether onscreen or on printed paper. The challenge we face as educators holds true whether we are in a traditional classroom or using computers—helping students bridge their personal voices with their academic voices, their personal interests with a particular assignment, course, and field. To be effective rhetors, students must learn a range of strategies to create persuasive online and offline selves. Or more accurately, they must learn to construct a particular ethos for the particular audience(s) they hope to persuade.

Recognizing that e-spaces are rife with societal prejudices does not mean we should avoid these spaces, but rather that we should engage in them critically. These spaces are permeated with the same social demarcations, assumptions, and codes as “real life.” Online communication offers an opportunity for critical awareness that is less readily available when classrooms meet face-to-face. Julier et al. (1999) note that email provides “*visual* representation” of communicative acts and thus it is a medium that makes interactions accessible “for re-examination and scrutiny and analysis” (318), making it particularly useful for examining the relationship between written text, the body, identity, and social change. Within cyberspace, writers have flexibility in how they construct a self and the more strategies they acquire, the more flexibility they have. Less experienced writers might not be using these tools critically, unaware of how their discursive choices and hyper-reading could be better informed by a sensitivity to embodiment and an awareness of cyberspace’s constraints and possibilities. As students learn and explore, they can make informed rhetorical decisions. Some writers may work against societal norms while others may bow to them, using the discursive text as an act of resistance or assimilation.

### Bakhtin’s Addressive Surplus: Listening for/to “Other” (Written) Bodies

In the novel *Written on the Body*, Winterson (1992) tells the story of a nameless and genderless narrator who loses a lover to cancer. Critics like Burns (1998) praise Winterson’s technique for not asking readers “to interpret the language of love in a gendered manner” (385), whereas reviewers like Kendrick (1993) consider this genderless narrator a “distraction, turning the reader into a reluctant sleuth in search of gender giveaways (I found none)” (131). As hyper-

readers, we might be positioned like Kendrick. On the other hand, what kind of sleuths we are (reluctant? enthusiastic?) will probably be closely linked with our own identities and assumptions. When asked whether she wanted the narrator in *Written on the Body* to have an ambiguous gender, Winterson replied:

Well, no, I just couldn't be bothered. I didn't want to pin it down. I thought, There is no need to do so, so I won't do so. If I put in a gender then it weights my story in a way that I don't want it to be weighted. So I didn't. I didn't expect that a huge furor would arise. I must say that took me totally by surprise. (Bilger 1998: 106)

How our online communication gets "weighted" has as much to do with readers as it does with writers. Kendrick was a reader for whom gender mattered. Indeed, he had difficulty getting beyond that "omission" in the novel, whereas Winterson saw "no need" to assign a gender. As readers, we might choose not to believe either Kendrick or Winterson. Maybe Kendrick was looking for Winterson to make a mistake that would indeed reveal the narrator's gender, perhaps a pronoun or two that would repudiate the novel's premise. And maybe Winterson assumed readers would be eager to know the narrator's gender and that part of continuing to read was to read for gender, while she lured readers toward her larger point about love and commitment. In an e-space, Kendrick might ask a participant to reveal his or her gender. Such a question raises even more questions: Why does one need to know? When and why should we reveal certain identities online? What are the risks of self-disclosure? What are the risks of concealment? And, like Winterson, will there be times when we just can't "be bothered"—when we think the discussion should really be about something else?

In approaching the role of embodied writing and hyper-reading, I advocate what Morson and Emerson (1990) term Bakhtin's "addressive surplus"—"the surplus of the good listener [...] Without trying to finalize the other or define him once and for all, one uses one's 'outsideness' and experience to ask the right sort of questions" (242). In the novel, "addressive surplus" is how characters interact with one another, but it is a concept that works equally well "in real life." Morson and Emerson insist that "we may use it in everyday life, and, Bakhtin intimates, would be wise to do so more often" (ibid.). Bakhtin (1984) describes this surplus as "simply an active (not a duplicating) understanding, a willingness to listen," as "an open and honest surplus, dialogically revealed to the other person, a surplus expressed by the addressed and not by the secondhand word" (299). The two interactions one must *not* engage in are: (1) to attempt to finalize the other, thus furnishing a stable and static identity and (2) to merge with the other, thus negating the possibility of



either surplus or dialog (Morson & Emerson 1990). These two warnings serve us well when we engage in online communication. Given the fluidity and complexity of identity, we must avoid making limiting assumptions about the "typed body" on our computer screens and must resist filling in cyberspace with our corporeal norms. We must contemplate what we might learn about someone's corporeal text that we do not have access to online and reflect upon whether asking about this text(s) is "the right sort of question." Addressive surplus reminds us that there is always more than what we see on the screen, more than can be contained in those typed words. As Faigley (1992) puts it, "electronic discussions" contain "an excess of meaning that defies the effort to dig out an underlying meaning" (197).

An "addressive" surplus reinforces the idea that as we communicate, we are addressing (an-)other person. This principle holds true whether I am talking face-to-face or posting to a listserv. My utterance, according to Bakhtin, anticipates a response. The idea of "response" is an important corrective to the belief that we can "control" who we are in cyberspace. The respondent, who brings an addressive surplus to the act, helps create the meaning. All utterances, electronic or otherwise, are "drenched in social factors [...] on the border between what is said and what is not said" (Holquist 1990: 61). The "not said," perhaps especially in e-spaces, may suggest that the typed body is Every *Man's* Body. Or worse, no body at all.

Similar to mentioning ethos, to invoke Bakhtin is to raise the issue of ethics. As we project utterances into cyberspace, we answer others and are answerable to them. We must listen carefully to what is said and to what goes unsaid, especially given the tendency of e-spaces to be normative spaces, as Addison and Hilligoss (1999) and Stone (1995) maintain. To speak of "ethics" is not an appeal to a norm or a universal truth. A discussion of rhetoric and ethics is not, as Faigley (1992) reminds us, "a matter of collapsing spectacular diversity into universal truth" (239). Using Lyotard's work, Faigley characterizes ethics as "accepting the responsibility for judgment. It is a pausing to reflect on the limits of understanding. It is respect for diversity and unassimilated otherness. It is finding the spaces to listen" (ibid.). Hyper-readers must listen attentively for the "silences" of cyberspace. It is oftentimes within these silences that the body resides. Turkle (1995) says we must ask:

What is the nature of my relationships? What are the limits of my responsibility? And even more basic: Who and what am I? What is the connection between my physical and virtual bodies? And is it different in different cyberspaces? These questions are framed to interrogate an individual, but with minor modifications, they are equally central for thinking about community. What is the nature of our social ties? What kind of

accountability do we have for our actions in real life and in cyberspace? What kind of society or societies are we creating, both on and off the screen? (231)

Some of these ethical questions are ones Bakhtin could not have anticipated, and all are equally applicable to what the present volume terms "brave new classrooms." Turkle contends that we need to see our personas online as part of who we are offline and vice versa.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, we need to see our academic personas as part of who we are "in real life" and vice versa. We must communicate ethically as the embodied beings we are.

If we are aware of ourselves as embodied beings, then we will better understand the fluidity between e-space and "real" space. We will use e-spaces in exploratory ways in the hope that these experiences will enrich our lives and the wider culture. We will experiment with other "selves," foster discussions about how corporeal texts may alter the rhetorical decisions writers make, and help students construct online personas that are rhetorically persuasive. The process is one of both construction and deconstruction, as we interrogate the realities we and others create with rhetoric. Manuel Rodriguez may indeed opt to be "Mike Johnson" online, but he (and his classmates) should be aware of the benefits and risks. He can begin to anticipate what hyper-readers, who possess an addressive surplus, might assume and what "right sort of questions" they might ask. Or, conversely, what questions they might fail to ask about "Mike Johnson" that they might have otherwise asked Manuel Rodriguez and *why*.

As technology progresses, we must judge how to employ these resources. Manuel Rodriguez has the liberty to create a name for himself online, a freedom not as easily accomplished "in real life." Fortunately, electronic communication facilitates the analysis of the concomitant ethical complexities. Recall Julier's observation that email provides a "*visual* representation" of our exchanges. Such a medium is necessary to correct some of the shortcomings of Bakhtin's concept of "surplus." Bakhtin's use of a visual and spatial metaphor necessitates, according to Farmer (2001), "a temporal dimension." Otherwise, Farmer insists, "we would have no way of disputing whatever outside perspective we encounter" (97). That is, we would need time to lapse in order to be able to address this "other's" perspective. Various forms of electronic discourse, such as bulletin boards and email, allow us both the space and time to revisit utterances and to respond to others. Such forums more readily allow us to "take account of all the relevant factors, not merely a single factor," as Huxley (1965: 318) advises us to do when approaching "any complex human situation."

New technologies bring new pedagogies and possibilities. We have many technological options and pedagogical decisions, and both continue to proliferate, as we teach in cyberspace. To conceptualize e-pedagogy as any less personal, as any less passionate, as any less complicated, or as any less embodied than face-to-face pedagogy is to seriously misunderstand the nature of our pedagogical relationships, of rhetoric, and of our relationship to any technology—from papyrus to cyberspace.<sup>12</sup> We should absolutely be concerned with the interconnections among technologies and bodies. We must develop our “addressive surplus,” asking the questions *we* feel are relevant and exploring why those questions matter to us. To debate the advantages and disadvantages of being “Mike Johnson,” to contest computers as liberatory, or to scrutinize the move toward distance education is not to reject technology. As the narrator in *Written on the Body* explains, “Luddite? No, I don’t want to smash the machines but neither do I want the machines to smash me” (Winterson 1992: 98). When we communicate in cyberspace, we bring an “addressive surplus” that exceeds what the text “says” and that extends our bodies, as we can communicate irrespective of time and distance. “Listening” in cyberspace reminds us to be conscious of our bodily senses as we click away at the keyboard, to be aware of the interaction as one that involves “others,” and to heed how the rhetoric we create online (de-)constructs our (cyber-)bodies.

## Notes

I am indebted to Jim Sosnoski for his encouragement on early drafts, and thank Joe Lockard and Mark Pegrum for their tireless support of this collection.

1. I follow Markham’s (1998) lead and do not differentiate between various phrases like online correspondence, computer-mediated communication, cyberspace, etc. As Markham explains, “online communication encompasses many forms of computer-mediated communication,” and “because the meanings of these terms—and the experiences they imply—are still up for debate, I do not want to stabilize them either, or to provide you with a singular meaning” (21).
2. I acknowledge that the web is filled with a range of visuals and people use colors and images to embody themselves online. Still, I focus here primarily on what has traditionally been textually oriented space, like email and bulletin boards, while recognizing that those spaces are increasingly becoming supplemented by images.
3. I am using Sosnoski’s (1999) term “hyper-readers” to refer to readers in cyberspace, taking into account the full range of computer-assisted reading that people engage in. Although Sosnoski does not use the term hyper-readers to suggest “hyperactivity,” I employ it to imply that cyber-reading is a kind of “overactive” traditional reading, as the process is interactive, and the forum is animated.



4. In fact, other forms of technology are involved as well. For instance, when Joe sees Kathleen on the evening news, in a story about her bookstore's struggle with the big chain, Joe says, "She's not as nice as she seems on television." It seems that technology, whether computers or television, radically transforms our identity and offers false appearances.
5. To some extent, *You've Got Mail* plays with dichotomies by blurring the line between the personal and the public, and distinctions between home and work. We see both characters in these settings and we see how the failure of Kathleen's bookstore affects her intimately. But the drama of the movie—the way it can sustain itself—is to play with the idea that Kathleen and Joe are in love online, but detest each other "in real life."
6. Perhaps this exaggeration is a US cultural trend, given that *You've Got Mail* and *The Net* are mainstream Hollywood movies.
7. Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality. This project was reviewed and granted exemption by the University of Illinois at Chicago Office for the Protection of Human Subjects under Protocol #H-98-1028.
8. Computer-mediated communication may not give us more distributive control. Email, for instance, can be forwarded to any number of recipients. However, experienced users *do* have methods to control distribution. They can encrypt, prevent copying, and even enforce timed deletions.
9. Faigley (1999) sees economics as a motive for distance education. The logic informing "higher education on the cheap [...] is economy of scale. What can be taught to 10 can be taught to 100. What can be taught to 100 can be taught to 1000. What can be taught to 1000 can be taught to an infinite number" (137). This notion of online learning as a cheap alternative—which was certainly a motivating factor—has been shown to be false. Jewett and Henderson (2003), who take a positive stance toward online teaching, nonetheless conclude that "mediated instruction can be less expensive than classroom instruction provided that course enrollments are sufficiently large" and estimate the requisite number at 60 students in the case study they examine using data from Washington State University (24). Furthermore, many scholars note the increased demands on their time in online education courses. At Christopher Newport University, Vachris (1999) says that "compared with delivering a traditional course in the classroom, most on-line faculty spend two to three times the amount of time delivering an on-line course (excluding development time) [...] this interaction is more costly in terms of instructor time than is the case of a traditional classroom section" (302).
10. Part of the institution's desire (no pun intended) is to eliminate issues of sexual harassment. In their preface to *Academic Keywords*, Nelson and Watt (1999) note, "a few decades ago [...] no one would have thought an entry for *sexual harassment* should appear in such a book; indeed, until the 1970s the term was essentially unknown, though you could find discussions of male chauvinism as early as the 1930s. But no one would now argue about whether sexual harassment is one of the defining issues in academic life" (ix). Nelson and Watt devote 26 pages to discussing "sexual harassment," the longest entry in the book.
11. According to Turkle (1995), "Without a deep understanding of the many selves that we express in the virtual we cannot use our experiences there to enrich the real. If we cultivate our awareness of what stands behind our screen personae, we are more likely to succeed in using virtual experience for personal transformation" (269).
12. This is the subtitle to O'Donnell's (1998) *Avatars of the Word: From Papyrus to Cyberspace*.



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The early, halcyon days of e-learning are gone. Many who embraced personal computers and the Internet, and who devoted their work to creating new forms of electronic education, have grown dissatisfied with trends toward commodification and corporatization, a paucity of critical thought, poor quality distance learning, and the growing exploitation of teaching labor. Online learning's inherent democratic potential seems increasingly a chimera. *Brave New Classrooms* explores whether and to what extent its original promise can be recovered. It includes sixteen essays from educational practitioners, including some of the best-known theorists of Internet-based education.

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