The Virtual Squatter: Homesteading in the Electronic Metropolis

by
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Abstract

Drawing on a survey of 110 Web homepage authors and an analysis of their personal homepages, this study explores how individuals make a place for themselves as producers on the World Wide Web. The study is informed by theoretical perspectives that conceive of discourse as a function of its social context: Pierre Bourdieu's socio-economic framework of language usage, Norman Fairclough's critical language study, and Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress's social semiotics. These perspectives urge us to recognize that, in the social context of the Web, not all potential producers have equal power, resources, or legitimacy. The study finds that both the emergence of such a novelty as personal homepages and much of what actually appears on these homepages can be explained by individuals' invisibility at the peripheries of the established mass media, their conventional roles as receivers, not producers, of media communications. Their varied responses as new producers in the new medium are contingent upon the resources they can marshal to reposition themselves.

For instance, as a result of their well-entrenched marginalization, some participants did not even attempt to meet the expectations of a public position in the media, instead reconceiving the Web, on a more familiar scale, as a localized social space. Others, however, overcame their relative powerlessness by leveraging themselves on the basis of the Web's high appraisal of information; they largely effaced themselves and instead used an offering of specialized information to occupy a Web niche.

Emerging as novices in contemporary media, many participants followed the precedents set by well-established media producers: institutions. To claim some of the legitimacy accorded to institutional status, some participants strove to adopt the discursive trappings of such status through a process of *synthetic institutionalization*, constructing an artificial hybrid of individual and institutional stances. Others, however, in particular younger participants, less likely to be in solidarity with the institutional dispensation of their world, singled out such institutional discourses for parody.

The study concludes by exploring how individuals' unprecedented productive capacity in the new mass medium might elicit responses in society, in discourse theory, and in writing pedagogy.

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A Virtual Environment

As a modestly experienced writing instructor, having taught some 30 courses, I am roughly at that stage in my teaching career where hubris has given way to humility and yet where wisdom is still frustratingly elusive. But I am learning things. I teach primarily professional writing courses. That means I try to create, out of the academic environment, activities and assignments in which my students work in real or realistic professional rhetorical situations. Such experience, I tell myself, will show them something about "real-world" non-academic communication. In some ways, however, some of my students' academic work has been trying to show me something about real-world communication.

Since 1996, I have regularly been teaching an upper-year undergraduate course on professional writing and computer communications. The main project in the course is a Web site, a site that is posted on the course Web site and is thereby accessible not only to current and future students of the course but also to Web surfers worldwide.[1] One of the prerequisites for this course is a business writing course, the main project of which is a research report. Among the criteria of the report is that it take on a real problem and be oriented to a real audience with the decision-making powers to implement its recommendations. Thus, in both of these main assignments, the Web site and the report, my students' work engages a real environment populated by real issues and real potential readers. As well, both of these assignments call on students to take on communication tasks that most have never taken on before: most business writing students will have never even read a report, let alone write one; and while all students will have surfed the Web before and throughout the computer-communications course, few will have composed more than the small-scale Web pages that are called for in their prior assignments.

It has thus been a continuous puzzle to me that students' performance in these two assignments is so stunningly different. In the business writing course, despite the fact that its enrollment is dominated by students with little university-level writing experience, many

produce confident reports, reports that take up a problem in their jobs or their campus or their society and, using primary and secondary research, analyse the situation and propose solutions. In the computer communications course, however, despite its upper-year ranking, students' work is much more diffident.

I'd like to think the problem is not entirely with their instructor and his pedagogy. After all, he does shepherd many fine business writing reports from his students. Nor is the problem, I feel, primarily one of technical inexperience or of preoccupation with the Web's surface, its bells and whistles, to the exclusion of its larger-scale rhetorical possibilities. Though students are often intimidated by the technical barriers during the first few weeks of the course, after they have constructed a few Web pages, they seem satisfied with their command of the technology. Indeed, students may derive some pleasure from the sense of accomplishment in their transition from techno-peasant to urbane, Web-literate sophisticate. To my chagrin, their course evaluations suggest that it is the technical experience, not the writing experience and rhetorical insight, that they most value in the course.

Increasingly, I suspect the problem originates not within the classroom but outside of it, with the Web itself. The Web is, in many ways, the story of the 1990s. Invented primarily as a research tool at the beginning of the decade, the Web entered mainstream society in the middle years of the decade with the advent of popular browsers like Mosaic and then Netscape and Internet Explorer. In its few years of existence, it has become the electronic equivalent of "Main Street" in a booming new town. Increasingly, this Main Street is evolving upscale, becoming more stylish and sophisticated in appearance and more sober in its commercial and civic functions. It is now crowded with national and multinational corporations, governments, universities, and other organizations. The landscape of the cozy boom town of a few years ago is already now dominated by the figurative skyscrapers of these organizations.

In this figurative landscape, the individual pedestrian is a small inconsequential shape, an anachronism amidst the shadows of the endless cityscape. And perhaps that is the problem that is exposed by my Web assignment. My students, mostly young adults, seem to be

stricken with a cyber-agrophobia, a tentativeness toward the international organizational "space" of the medium. It is too big for individual people. It ignores them. They can visit, but building something is another matter. Nothing they can do will make a difference in it. It leaves them so much more out of place than does the local environment of a problem-solving recommendation report. The context of the report offers them a relatively familiar grounding and a meaningful role that is missing amongst the corporate, academic, and political terrains of the world-wide electronic medium.

While I encourage students to consider sites that can profit from their own point of view, such as advocacy sites to advance a social or political agenda, and thematic sites about a particular hobby, interest, or activity, many seem drawn to constructing sites for organizations. They seem to have absorbed the attitude that their interests, agendas, and activities have no place on the Web. The ethos of an organization, however, apparently purchases the legitimacy that they as individuals cannot.

Moreover, what they construct on these sites is not their own or others' experiences of these organizations but rather the evidence of the organizations' own status in its own discourse. They fill their sites with organizational data:

- the various titles and holders of organizational positions,
- the addresses and phone numbers for these office-holders,
- the constitution, regulations, and procedures of the organization,
- the dates and locations of organizational meetings and events,
- background information within the scope of the organization's mandate.

Despite having redefined the assignment to discourage these "data-dumps," I have still had to confer recently with students who have proposed, for this *writing* assignment, a telephone directory, retail price lists, a databank of Canadian airline flights, and other similar data processing projects.

The research project I present here has helped me understand what my students are doing and experiencing with their Web projects. This research is not directly about student writers or

professional writers per se. My work explores what ordinary individuals, outside of academe, are up to when they create and post their own personal sites on the Web. How do they make a little place for themselves in the international electronic environment? By studying the people who have done it, we can perhaps learn more about this environment and its population: what makes it inhospitable for some people, what makes it so promising for others, and what is in store for all of us as the Web increasingly becomes the communications forum of our professional and personal lives.

In this opening chapter, I sketch this social environment. First, I introduce the social perspectives of various commentators on the Internet and its users. Then, I look at contemporary social conditions in which people must establish their relations with the new world-wide network. Finally, I introduce and outline how this research project addresses the issues of new media producers in the new medium.

"Ordinary" citizens in the new media

In what are apparently still the early days of the Internet, much of the discourse about the potential of the new media is untempered by contemporary social realities. The unprecedented scale of communications promised by the Internet, and especially the Web, gives much to be optimistic about. The Web is like a cross between a new mass medium and a vast collective project. People are not just listening and watching, as they have been doing with other 20th-century media inventions like radio and television. Rather, many are themselves occupying the medium, composing and posting their own contributions, establishing and maintaining homepages as their piece of the network. For ordinary people, the Web promises the transcendence of local and national barriers, of political and economic barriers, of social and demographic barriers. It promises an unprecedented advance in democratic participation, a promotion of the vox populi to a prominent and accessible space in the global community.

A figurehead for those optimistic about such potentials is communications scholar-cum-guru Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's foresight three decades ago about the potency of new media has lead, with the recent explosive growth of the Internet, to a revival of interest in his work (Lapham, 1994, p.xi, xviii). Based on his observations of the relations between media and society, and in particular his observations of the still-nascent electronic media, McLuhan projected a new social era occasioned by new modes of communication created by electronic media. McLuhan's insight, often encapsulated in his well-known aphorism, "The medium is the message," offers a useful conceptual link between the agency of communication and its potential agents, acts, and scenes. As McLuhan explains, "[T]he medium . . . shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (1964/1994, p.9). His vision is particularly relevant for its treatment of the hierarchical social structures that have sustained monopolies of power and the marginalization of the powerless. The electronic media, McLuhan predicts optimistically, is realigning the networks of human association to produce a more integrated and more equal world. The pre-electronic social dispensation is marked by

centralism and specialization and is operated by top-down hierarchies (p.91, 93, 185, 253, 306). Electronic media, in contrast with the characteristic exclusiveness of that mechanical order, engender an "interplay of social functions" (p.185), interdependence (p.199), and a broader range of participation and involvement among humanity (p.24, 195, 248). It "gives powerful voices to the weak and suffering" (p.253).

> [Electronic media] alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be *contained*, in the political sense of limited association. They are now *involved* in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media. (p.5; italics in original)

The monolithic center is diffused into a "pluralism of centers" (p.272), resulting in a world of "no margins [, of] dialogue . . . among centers and among equals" (p.273). This decentered world, a fusion of the hitherto discrete elements separated by space, time, and social function, constitutes McLuhan's well-known oxymoron, the "global village" (pp.91-93).

McLuhan's ideas are vulnerable to the accusation of over-determinism, of projecting a whole social dispensation on the basis of a society's communications technologies. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke, for instance, expresses skepticism at McLuhan's view of "the accumulation of agencies . . . as the major aspect of man's motivating scenes" (1966, p.410). Instead of placing new technology *in* its social context, McLuhan places it *prior* to its context, indeed determining its context. However, so stunning is the growth of the Internet that some of McLuhan's mysticism is now recognized as prescience. The new technology is indeed asserting itself forcefully into the social, political, economic, and cultural context of the late twentieth century.

Contemporary observers of the Internet have shared some of the optimism exhibited by McLuhan for the emancipatory potential of new electronic media. However, the voices of some are made more sensitive by the context of late twentieth century social and political realities. They are also made cautious by distopic potentials of both political agnosticism among the wired masses and social control by authorities.

For instance, Howard Rheingold, author of *The Virtual Community*[2], a ground-breaking personal exploration of community-building socialization in computer-mediated discussion groups, shares with McLuhan an appreciation of the scale of the impact the new media will have on society: "[T]he future of the Net is connected to the future of community, democracy, education, science, and intellectual life . . ." (1993). He sees the potential for a reinvigorated "citizen-based democracy" through a redistribution of the publishing and broadcasting prerogative from the hands of the currently centralized, elitist commercial media to individual, socially- and politically-engaged citizens. Individual citizens can thus exercise greater "leverage" in the political, social, educational, and commercial domains of society and in their lives. But Rheingold also recognizes that the Internet might fail to achieve such promise if the citizenry abandon their social and political responsibility. Computers offer enticing opportunities for the kind of escape that TV has long offered; the Internet in particular provides a "simulacrum" of social engagement for people who would less frequently need to leave their rooms and engage their world. Rheingold is especially suspicious that computer networks, with such revolutionary promise and commercial potential, are perhaps too potent to be left unfettered by political powers and commercial interests. Observing the fate of other media, Rheingold warns of a future "shaped for us by large commercial and political powerholders" that might "seize [the Internet], censor it, meter it, and sell it back to us" (1993).

Rheingold also cites Michel Foucault's treatment of the panopticon to warn of a less flagrant but more insidious form of social control, one in which citizens let themselves be observed with the information conveyed about themselves through the very wires that connect them to their computer-mediated world. The panopticon was originally proposed as an architectural system of social compliance in which prisoners, kept from viewing each other and believing that they were being observed by their warders, would discipline themselves into obedience. On the basis of this social technology, Foucault illustrates how the gaze of authority can become internalized and self-administered by the subjects of that authority (1979). The physical architecture of the panopticon exhibits compelling similarities with the social- and cyber-architecture of computer networks. Rheingold sees "the potential for totalitarian abuse"

should citizens willingly or unwittingly make themselves vulnerable or dependent by exposing too much information about themselves and thereby place themselves in the figurative gaze of authority (1993).

Interestingly, the panopticon is also invoked by two researchers of computer-mediated communication (CMC), Russell Spears and Martin Lea (1994), to illustrate how CMC may shape not only individuals' behavior but their identities. Spears and Lea review how some CMC environments share with the panopticon some key characteristics: "hierarchical observation, normalization, and the objectification [such as in terms of numerical measures] and individualization of the subject" (p.439). They use this parallelism to suggest that, though the external impact of social and political power may be diluted in CMC, subjects' internal construction of their own identities may be shaped by such features as their position with respect to on-line groups and the low peer support available from the terminal's, and hence the user's, isolation. They also warn against "romanticizing" CMC for its escapist potential by abstracting it from the real identities and social relations of computer users (p.449). They conclude by abstaining from the deterministic grand narratives of both optimism and pessimism, emphasizing instead how computer users will be influenced by the contextual factors of their real-life positions and their real-life relations (p.449, 453).

Another observer of the Internet, Sherry Turkle (1995), has similarly abstained from a-contextual grand narratives of technological optimism and pessimism in favour of an orientation grounded in social psychology. Based on her field work with users of various Internet discussion forums, Turkle illustrates how the Internet's attractions can be understood for its provisions both of psychological "compensation" to powerless subjects for the deprivations of their real-life positions and of a forum for the political resistance by these same powerless subjects (p.249). She expresses the same concerns as Rheingold, however, in warning of a split between on-line and off-line social engagements, in which the utopian appeal of empowerment and democracy in the former seduces citizens, addict-like, into an apathy toward the real struggles with the latter (p.244).

The perspectives of these observers, from various backgrounds, on the potential social impact of the Internet are all sensitive to the real conditions of real people in their statuses and activities outside of the Internet. They highlight the potential roles that ordinary individuals can enact both on the Internet and, by extension, in broader society. Following their lead, below I sketch both the broad contextual features of contemporary social organization and the more specific features of contemporary media communications into which has emerged the World Wide Web, the newest and potentially most revolutionary network of the Internet. Then, I briefly describe the Web's emergence and growth. Finally, I turn to the positions of ordinary individuals in this environment, reviewing first the kinds of insight we may gain from inquiring into their role and their contributions to the network, then raising questions about their discursive actions of making and legitimating their contributions, and lastly outlining how this project addresses such questions.

Institutions and individuals on the Web

A view of society as heavily populated not just by individuals but by institutions—entities whose purpose, organization, operations, and constituents as wholes are identifiable as more than a sum of their parts—is familiar from a number of critical perspectives. Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, for instance, conceives of much of society as dominated by "apparatuses," either repressive or ideological in application, that are frequently embodied in institutions such as the police force, the legal system, the church, the communications industry, and so forth (1971, p.143). Critical discourse analyst Teun van Dijk contends that social dominance is usually organized and that power is usually exercised through institutions (1993, p.255). Discourse analyst Norman Fairclough proposes that "social space" can be conceived of as constituted of various "institutional spaces," which in turn form the domains of various types of situations (1989, p.150). These institutions provide much of the scene for "power relations" in society (p.17, 164). Fairclough proposes that we make sense of communication events first by ascertaining in which "institutional setting" an event takes place (p.146, 150).

In many industrialized societies, public institutional functions have recently been retrenched; public institutions are retreating from their former roles, abandoning certain social responsibilities to the private sector or leaving individuals to fend for themselves. As public social support is withdrawn, individuals are being encouraged to take on functions which formerly fell within an institutional mandate: to be their own employers, as entrepreneurs; to assume greater responsibility for the care of their health, educational, and social needs as well as those of their relatives. The formerly well-defined solitudes of individual and institutional are thus experiencing some degree of confluence.

One domain of revision occasioned by the development of the Internet and, more specifically, the World Wide Web, is in individuals' roles in public communications. Unlike other Internet networks that operate analogously to private conversations and letter writing and hence do not change traditional orders of communication so much as enhance them, the Web's multimedia

capacity makes it comparable to mass media publishing and broadcasting. The Web supports not just text, familiar enough to all literate citizens, but also graphics, sound, video, and various forms of interactive programs. But unlike in other broadcasting and publishing media, these sophisticated multimedia resources can be produced (or copied) and disseminated relatively easily and with relatively little expense.

With the advent of the Web, the productive roles in media communications may thus be undergoing not just revision but revolution. Conventionally, the production of radio and TV programs, musical recordings, films, magazines and books are monopolized by commercial and public institutions. In all of these types of media, ordinary people are cast always only in the relatively passive role of media consumers, rarely as producers. The Web, then, offers not just more media discourse but a new relation to media discourse. Individuals can now claim the positions hitherto exclusive to institutions, exercising the power to produce and distribute their work to a potentially international audience. Moreover, in the anarchy that is the Web, there is no formal zoning, as in civic spaces, into residential and commercial and industrial spaces. Rhetorician Kevin Hunt, though acknowledging the Web to be an "eclectic" "cacophony" of discourses, finds it conceptually useful to recognize Web sites as belonging to one of two classes: institutional Web sites, usually having a "real world" institutional presence; and "special interest sites," usually authored by individuals, who of course would be unlikely to have a corresponding wide-scale off-line presence (1996, pp.376-77). Yet, on the Web, these personal sites circulate adjacent to institutional sites, all of nominally equal status.

The Web's novel multimedia capacity and its popular accessibility have no doubt accounted for its explosive growth during these first few years of its existence. Founded in 1990 by software engineer Tim Berners-Lee as a means to link electronic documents, the Web was nurtured first among the exclusive population of computer technicians, programmers, and scientists, and then expanded beyond this coterie with the advent of the first popular Web browser, Mosaic, in 1993.

If measured by raw numbers alone, McLuhan's interpretation of the participatory nature of

electronic media is right, at least with respect to the Internet. At the time of this writing, mid-1998, the number of Internet users world wide is estimated to be just over 100 million (CyberAtlas, 1998). Even this figure might be modest. One study estimates that 35% of the adult American population uses the Internet, a percentage which translates to 70 million adult American users ("Study says 70 million," 1998). Not only are these users recipients of electronic communication, they are also its producers. One study reports that half of its (self-selecting) sample of over 10,000 Internet users had created a Web page (Graphics, Visualization, and Usability Center [GVU],1998).[3] Such a flurry of Web construction led *Wired* magazine writer Steve Steinberg (1996) to predict that by the end of 1998 (at that time, two years into his future), the volume of the Web would surpass the then current (1996) volume of the Library of Congress.

The initial contributions of these masses of new producers to the Web have certainly not been universally well received. James Rettig (1997), librarian at the College of William and Mary, laments that the absence of a filtering process, a well-established stage of print publication, has resulted in a surfeit of low-quality material on the Web. Similarly, researchers Oliver, Wilkinson, and Bennett (1997) point to the absence of refereeing and editorial processes to explain the scarcity of high-quality material on the Web.

Yet the contributions of these unsanctioned media interlopers, individual Web producers, should not be dismissed out of hand. It is seldom that the writing of a class of discourse producers outside of a sponsoring institutional agency has been so salient and has carried such social potential. One can well imagine a near future in which a well-maintained personal homepage is as socially necessary and revealing as a good résumé, a good wardrobe, good grooming, and good manners. A personal Web site is one's public face to the world, and has the potential to become a primary agency by which one establishes professional and personal positions and relations, such as facilitating new employment and maintaining distant personal and family relationships.

Nor should we assume that personal Web contributions, freed from the constraints of

institutional production, can be characterized only by the entropy of a laissez-faire environment, unanalyzable, untheorizable, and hence uninteresting for discourse research. These works are implicated with a "microphysics" of power.[4] That they have emerged at all is as a result of power: first, the distribution of power in contemporary industrialized societies that would enable such exposure by the masses, and then the power of their individual authors to secure the resources, know-how, and access needed for Web publishing. Individuals' actions of seeking acknowledgement, constructing legitimacy, addressing their audiences, building community, all involve the exercise of social and productive power. Their individual effects are, for the most part, modest and diffused. But in aggregate, the increasing volume of personal voices published on the Web can engage real-world constructions of ideology and established orders of dominance and power.

As well, not counting institutional production, the existing scope of writing available to the public is rather limited. Most writing available for scholarly study is already complicit with the ghost authorship of its institutional context. Academic writing, for instance, is produced at the behest of educational institutions in accordance with the requirements established over time and in the present by institutions and their functionaries, requirements which set expectations for content, form, submission, and so forth. Workplace writing likewise bears the heavy influence of its institutional co-authorship. Aside from personal correspondence and private journalistic prose, both of which have very limited exposures, and aside from literature, which is already partly institutionalized by literary traditions and by its vetting and editing processes, writing has come to be seen as a means of communication strongly affiliated with and dominated by institutions. Writing appears in industrial societies largely as an instrument of institutional functionality, as a means by which individuals facilitate the relations between institutions and other institutions.

The Web's openness offers a rare opportunity to explore what individuals do with discourse in a public communication environment where they are seemingly uncoerced, unregulated, uncensored, outside of artificial experimental situations and also freed from the discursive imperatives of institutional contexts. Unlike the producers in most institutional contexts, Web

producers represent an increasingly broad demographic cross-section of society: the contributions of the scholar are mixed with those of the high-school student, of the parent with the child, of the American with the European, of the female with the male, of the technical expert with the service worker, and so forth. Personal Web sites potentially offer a rich corpus with which to explore how one's full *society* communicates.

This novelty of individuals' access to mass media production compels questions about the manner and role of individuals' contributions to the new medium of the World Wide Web:

- What motivates individuals to produce for the medium and what compensates them for the time and labour and resources they invest?
- What knowledge, skills, and resources can relatively powerless, unaffiliated individuals, largely without specialized Web or media training, invest in their contributions?
- How do individuals take up a stance that has little legitimate precedent for individuals, that of addressing an international audience from the tenuous position of the lone, unaffiliated individual?
- In taking up a discursive activity which has, as its primary precedents, the multi-media productions of institutions in other mass media, what do individuals draw from these precedents?
- How do individuals carve out their own niche amidst the huge, diverse community of the Web and respond to the pre-eminence of institutional media presences much more sophisticated than their own?

These questions are all occasioned by a new kind of medium sponsoring a new mode of (screen) discourse for producers new to the position of mass media producer and new to public exposure. It is important for our future understanding of a wired world to study now how this transition in the late twentieth century is being enacted.

Outline

To study this transition to the Web and to address the above questions, I draw on both the responses of personal homepage producers themselves and on an analysis of their Web sites. First, in the next chapter, I review several theoretical perspectives that can bring insight not just to the relationship between discourse and power, but more specifically to the discursive potential of the relatively powerless. The chapter explores the development of subjects' communication potential as well as the contextual factors that enable and constrain their contributions. The discussion highlights the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu, Norman Fairclough, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, and Mikhail Bakhtin, and also introduces the sociological framework of Anthony Giddens and, briefly, the dramatistic rhetoric of Kenneth Burke.

To address the questions raised above, these theoretical perspectives are complemented by empirical research on homepage producers and their homepages. Chapter 3 presents the methodology by which I selected a weighted sample from the population of personal homepage producers, obtained e-mail survey responses from 110 of those producers, and analysed their personal homepages. Chapter 4 reports the basic survey results of who "publishes" on the Web and then explores the motivations with which these individuals come to publish. While Web authorship may sometimes be conceived entirely as a technological exercise or as a personal pasttime, I argue instead that it can more insightfully be understood through its social environment. Authorship is, in part, an outcome of the social distribution of resources and power.

While personal Web authorship may be celebrated as an unprecedented opportunity for popular participation in a mass medium, such an opportunity also presents individuals with challenges not faced as acutely by institutional producers: the want of resources, of media savvy, and especially of legitimacy. Chapters 5 to 9 survey the various discursive means with which relatively powerless individuals occupy a mass medium dominated by institutional sites

and by the precedence of institutional discursive practices. Chapter 5 raises the problem of legitimacy "ordinary" unpublished individuals confront in a new publishing medium and provides an orientation to the chapters that follow.

A primary set of resources ordinary individuals have readily at their disposal is their experience in ordinary communication situations, the use of their voice and body language to interact with others. Chapter 6 explores how subjects transcribe this repertoire of familiar embodied strategies into an electronic mode, representing an otherwise ethereal set of Web files as an accessible conversational space. A less common resource that some may have access to is information. With information on the "Information Superhighway," subjects can purchase a measure of legitimacy. Chapter 7 explores the strategy of using valuable information, or what might pass as valuable information, to make a credible place for oneself on the Web.

Whereas chapters 6 and 7 explore the strategies that are largely within the repertoire of many individuals, chapters 8 and 9 explore approaches that are modeled not on the resources and experiences of individuals but on the practices of institutions. Institutional practices have the precedence of a mass media setting and have been honed to accomplish the purposes of public discourse. Chapter 8 explores individuals' strategy of adopting institutional discourses, and thereby of representing a personal site as akin to the Web sites and other legitimate mass media presences produced by institutions.

Chapter 9 continues the exploration of individuals' adoption of institutional discourses, but shows that such a strategy is pursued not just to secure the trappings of legitimacy. Rather, individuals can undermine such discourses by using them ironically, thereby contesting the preeminence of institutional roles in public discourse and creating their own speaking space in juxtaposition to the otherwise dominant institutional spaces.

In the concluding chapter, the findings of this study are extrapolated for their implications for society, scholarship, and pedagogy.

Perspectives on Discourse and Power

In the first chapter, I introduced the idea that critical analysis has had to be oriented, on the whole, to the discursive practices of the powerful, those agents that can command the means of discursive production and the distribution and reception of that production. Because their texts are supported by social, political, legal, economic, and cultural structures and practices, theirs are the texts that have effect. These texts form the corpus of texts that are available to scholars and that compel responsible critical analysis.

Ever contingent on its social context, scholarship has developed the theoretical and methodological tools to address such a corpus of text, tools which would, if indeed responsive to their corpus of texts, necessarily be oriented to works of powerful producers. Some of these tools will of course contribute more acutely to understanding some kinds of textual production than others, but some will also be potentially fecund to textual production of all classes. To achieve such a promise, these tools would have to offer theoretical attention to the development of potential producers, even of relatively powerless subjects, to the resources accessible to these potential producers, and to the kinds of social environments in which subjects can actualize their potential.

In this chapter, I review a number of promising theoretical and methodological approaches to discourse with the aim of highlighting their relevance to the productions of the relatively powerless. The selection of approaches is guided in particular by the insight they offer to the textual production explored in this study: the construction of personal Web sites by ordinary Web users. As perspectives on texts must inherently be perspectives on context, I open the discussion with theories especially sensitive to the social context, the work of two sociologists: first Giddens, who has been identified as "the social theorist of choice" among some discourse scholars (Freedman and Medway, 1994, p.10); and then Bourdieu, who insightfully applies a sociological and economic framework to issues of discourse. Next, I describe two methodological perspectives inspired by Halliday's functionalist approach to

language: Fairclough's *critical language study*, and Hodge and Kress's *social semiotics*. Then I supplement these theoretical and methodological approaches with selected perspectives of two foundational figures in twentieth century scholarship on language: Bakhtin and his vision of language users in a dialogic, discursive world; and Burke and his socially-informed dramatistic rhetoric. In closing, I distill some general positions on discourse, power, and the relatively powerless shared among several of these diverse theoretical and methodological approaches.

Giddens: structuration theory

Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration is relevant both in this study and for discourse research in general for the way it integrates the microcosm of society—agents and their actions—with the macrocosm of regular and enduring properties and practices. His theory of structuration potentially relieves a problem of legitimation for discourse scholarship focused on texts whose influence cannot be readily or convincingly established: that is, for a focus on cases from the microcosm that display little measurable influence on the macrocosm of society and hence do not easily warrant attention. These texts do merit attention, structuration theory suggests, because they themselves instantiate and contribute to the reproduction of social practices that are important (e.g., Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1993, p.495; Miller, 1994, p.71).

To the extent that theories can be characterized dramatically by the roles they emplot for the various "characters" in their conceptual space, Giddens' theory of structuration is noteworthy for shifting attention in social space from entities (such as the bourgeois and proletariat, legal and economic structures, etc.) to practices:

> The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. (p.2)

Giddens thus accords more of a generative capacity not to things but to activities. He goes on to explain:

> Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible. (p.2; italics in original)

What Giddens observes amidst the similarities and variances of accumulated activities are

> properties allowing the "binding" of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them "systemic" form. (p.17)

These properties, which Giddens refers to collectively as *structure*, may be thought of as the software of society, manifesting itself through, and updating itself by, the output of actual practices. Giddens characterizes structure as the "rules and resources" that are applied in action and exist only in the human "memory traces" that guide such action (p.17, 25). Action, in turn, reproduces structure. Structure is thus "both medium and outcome of the practices [it] recursively organize[s]" (p.25). This symbiotic process, which Giddens characterizes as the *duality of structure*, establishes the link between microcosm and macrocosm that is introduced above: isolated actions by unremarkable agents, despite their modest import, both instantiate structure and reproduce it, and are thus, for our purposes, complex and dynamic occasions warranting scholarly attention.

Despite this apparent emphasis on the endurance of intangible structure, Giddens does accord a significant role to human agents and their agency in the world. Structure is not an exact determinant of human action. Human agents are endowed with creative capacities such that they do not merely reproduce past practices but produce under-determined and possibly unprecedented action. The former, reproduction of practices, is enabled by subjects' "reflexive monitoring" of their actions (p.27), such that it is both their "discursive" and "practical" consciousness (roughly equivalent to their know-that and their know-how, respectively; pp.5-7) and not just their unwitting, puppet-like responses to social forces wherein the orientation to these reproduced practices resides.

The latter point, the production of actions not fully determined by conditions external to agents, can be gainfully approached through Giddens' conception of power. In keeping with his orientation not to static things but to activities, Giddens conceives of power not just as something held but as a "transformative capacity" (p.15), a capacity to produce some real effect (p.14):

> To be able to "act otherwise" means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain

> from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to "make a difference" to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to "make a difference", that is, to exercise some sort of power. (p.14)

Giddens goes on to emphasize that power is not just a coercion exercised in the interests of some group over others but is a capacity exercised in all action (pp.15-16). Moreover, all agents, even in those situations that are emblematic of oppression, have some capacity to "make a difference," even if that difference is expressed only in the actions of their oppressors (Giddens, 1984, p.16; Layder, 1994, pp.137-38). Power is relational, which suggests that it is a property of its context (Giddens, 1984, p.16; Layder, 1994, p.137), conditioned by other agents in the context of potential action (Layder, 1994, p.137) and by the adaptability of available resources (Giddens, 1984, pp.15-16). In Giddens' world, human agents are thus catalysts. In particular, they are knowledgeable catalysts, able to act intentionally and to rationalize their action (though not all of its consequences) (pp.5-12).

Giddens' structuration theory is especially applicable to the Web precisely because of the novelty of personal publishing and the anarchy of the electronic publishing medium. Because the environment has not matured enough to provide reinforcement of tradition and established practices, agents cannot simply reproduce preprogrammed actions reinforced by years of indoctrination and social conditioning. In an environment without established "systems," Giddens' relatively "humanist" social world (Layder, 1994, p.139), with the significant role it credits to individual human agency, offers perhaps an accommodating, flexible backdrop to the kinds of actions emerging in such a new environment.

Bourdieu: the socio-economics of language

Unlike some perspectives on discourse, Bourdieu's is friendly to relatively powerless producers in part because of the kind of discourse on which his perspective is modelled. Bourdieu's ideas are informed by research on speech, the most democratic of communications media, admitting producers who may be intimidated by the standards and formats or specialized literacies of written discourse and who are usually excluded from mass media production.

Bourdieu's approach to discourse may be thought of as a mating of a traditional conception of linguistics with a more worldly field of inquiry, sociology. Bourdieu characterizes his approach as applying a "threefold displacement" to linguistics:

> In place of *grammaticalness* it puts the notion of *acceptability*, or, to put it another way, in the place of "the" language (*langue*), the notion of the *legitimate* language. In place of *relations of communication* (or symbolic interaction) it puts *relations of symbolic power*, and so replaces the question of *meaning* of speech with the question of the *value* and *power* of speech. Lastly, in place of specifically linguistic competence, it puts *symbolic capital*, which is inseparable from the speaker's position in the social structure. (1977, p.646; italics in original)

As the last two points suggest, Bourdieu's approach is also inspired by economic metaphors, or, as Bourdieu editor John B. Thompson explains, by a broadly conceived "economic logic" (1991, p.15). In this spirit, I describe below, first, what may be thought of as Bourdieu's macroeconomic framework, and then, second, the microeconomic domain of individual producers and production within this framework.

Bourdieu conceives of the context of much language usage as, variously, a *field* or a *market*. Thompson informally glosses the commonality of these as "a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'" (1991, p.14). Though these terms are used somewhat

synonymously (Thompson, 1991, p.14; Bourdieu, 1977, p.651), *market* seems the more generalizable of the two, generous enough in scope that it would apply to the Web. For example, Bourdieu characterizes a *linguistic market* as any environment in which "someone produces an utterance for receivers capable of assessing it, evaluating it and setting a price on it" (1991, p.79). He extends its scope even to casual interactions between friends (p.80). As such, we might reasonably conceive of the Web as a linguistic and multi-media (graphics, animation, sound) market or, indeed, a set of several overlapping commercial, scholarly, political, and cultural markets.

If the context of discourse is a market, then discourse production may be conceived as oriented to the conditions of the marketplace: "[A]ll speech is produced for and through the market to which it owes its existence and its most specific properties" (1991, p.76). Extending the marketplace metaphor, we may insightfully approach linguistic production not by its meaning but as "*signs of wealth*" (1991, p.66; italics in original). The *value* of a linguistic (and, by extension, symbolic) product is established both by a particular market (Thompson, 1991, p.18) and by the power and authority of those who have the capacity to produce it (Bourdieu, 1977, p.652; 1991, p.67). Thus, the market model is also a political and social model, implicating power as one of the ingredients moving the marketplace.

At the microeconomic level are the individual agents of symbolic usage, who are endowed with both valuations bequeath by their society and dispositions developed through their experience. The former are various forms of symbolic capital, which are cultural or social attributes, qualifications, or positions (such as education, prestige, and so forth). One's variety and degree of capital determines the kinds of positions one can occupy (Thompson, 1991, p.29), one's "place" and "sense of one's own social worth" in "social space" (Bourdieu, 1991, p.82). In actual discourse production, one's degree of symbolic capital is often directly related to one's capacity to produce the more valued linguistic contributions (Thompson, 1991, p.18), in part because, as discussed above, the determiners of value are precisely those agents who have the power and prestige to establish their own practices as the standards of excellence in the first place. As well, one's symbolic capital, with its close relationship to one's social

power, can be exercised to compel the reception of one's productions. Hence, the efficacy of linguistic production, its force "to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished," is a function not just of its content but of the relative capitals of its producers and receivers in a market (Bourdieu, 1977, p.648).

The latter, the dispositions developed through a subject's experience, are what Bourdieu calls *habitus*. The concept is similar to Giddens' concept of *practical consciousness* introduced above, though sociologist Derek Layder argues that habitus has the greater clarity of the two (1994, p.143). As a concept, the habitus offers an innovative resource for critical approaches to language. In lieu of conceiving of the agents of discourse production by, say, a generalized and impenetrable view of their subjecthood, it can be useful to focus instead on those potentials or inclinations that specifically influence their discursive productivity, a much more pertinent and kinetic variable. John Thompson describes its effects almost as if it were separate from the agent:

> The habitus . . . provides individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives. It "orients" their actions and inclinations without strictly determining them. It gives them a "feel for the game", a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not, a "practical sense" . . . . (1991, p.13)

While the habitus may seem like a black-box concept, a necessary conjecture that glosses over the gap of otherwise untheorizable complexities of individual differences, Bourdieu enriches the concept with his sociological perspectives. Among the characteristics of the habitus are its contingency on the social environment out of which it is shaped (Thompson, p.12). As well, the habitus is the product of countless influences and experiences that, though individually they may have had an imperceptible influence, collectively manifest their "inculcation" in one's disposition (Thompson, 1991, p.12; Bourdieu, 1991, p.51). As such, the concept reveals in language production the socialization process that, Bourdieu proposes, is much more insidious and durable than are some of the rhetorical tactics that language producers borrow and exercise consciously:

> There is every reason to think that the factors which are most influential in the formation of the habitus are transmitted without passing through language and

> consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life. Thus the modalities of practices, the ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking ("reproachful looks" or "tones", disapproving glances" and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating. (1991, p.51)

Thus, the habitus usefully captures the traces of past experiences that create the socialized discourse producer, bridging—as Giddens does with structuration theory—cumulative past experiences with their manifestation in current and future acts, articulating the connection between the socialization process and the discursive production process.

The main capability inculcated by the habitus is the capability not so much to use language but to use language effectively. In drawing a distinction with Chomsky's abstract assumption of a competence to produce sentences, Bourdieu refers to the inculcated capability as a *practical competence*:

> Practical competence is learnt *in situations*, in practice: what is learnt is, inextricably, the practical mastery of language and the practical mastery of situations which enable one to produce the adequate speech in a given situation. (1977, pp.646-47; italics in original)

This practical mastery is geared to securing co-operation from one's audience:

> A speaker's linguistic strategies . . . are oriented . . . not so much by the chances of being understood or misunderstood . . . but rather by the chances of being listened to, believed, obeyed, even at the cost of misunderstanding. . . . (p.654)

Extending Bourdieu's economic metaphor, we can conceive of the weighing of one's chances in a communication situation as an assessment of the potential opportunities for one's effective linguistic investments. Bourdieu speaks of these gains from linguistic production as "profit":

> The habitus integrates all the dispositions which constitute expanded competence, defining for a determinate agent the linguistic strategy that is adapted to his particular chances of profit, given his specific competence and his authority. (p.655)

Thus, the speech contribution that emerges from the assessment of a situation is shaped by dispositions that are sensitive to the success or failure of a ventured contribution. Indeed, such is the influence of anticipation on the attributes that we typically conceive of as our personality that Bourdieu links such personal qualities as "self-assurance," "timidity," "insecurity," "indecisiveness," "poise" (1977, p.655, 658, 660), "shyness," and "confidence" (1991, p.82) with our allocation of symbolic power; these "personality" traits become imprinted through cumulative experiences of profit and loss.

While one inculcates a competence to use language effectively, one simultaneously develops a propensity to abstain from ineffective contributions, to censor oneself. Such a self-imposition—distinct from the more external impositions proposed by some of the other approaches to discourse discussed in this chapter—is applied for the sake of acceptability that is instilled in one's habitus: one makes "concessions . . . to a social world by accepting to make oneself acceptable in it" (1991, p.77). For example, Bourdieu writes of a "permanent linguistic insecurity" developing among those who recognize their inability to produce the dominant language of their social milieu (1977, p.656). Of special relevance to the context of personal Web production are Bourdieu's observations of how the scope of one's contributions and thus the exercise of one's discursive competence or of one's self-censorship vary with the formality of a situation.

> At the basis of self-censorship is the sense of the acceptable . . . which makes it possible to evaluate the degree of formality of situations and to decide whether it is appropriate to speak and what sort of language to speak on a social occasion at a determinate point on the scale of formality. (1977, p.655)

Because formal contexts provide vivid, ritual support for the prevailing values of a market, the clear hierarchy of valuations readily sustains the positions of dominant producers of that market. Bourdieu observes that dominated individuals will nevertheless find private spaces where these formal market conditions do not apply (1991, p.71). As contexts decrease in degrees of formality, however, so too does the relative profit potential between dominant and dominated habituses decrease (p.71). The Web, of course, introduces an open, seemingly free-for-all mass medium into a media world hitherto monopolized by institutional productions

guided by various standards, regulations, restrictions, established practices, and commercial interests. It may be precisely this new potential for at least a modest symbolic profit that has enticed so many individuals, with little capital with which to intervene profitably in established media markets, to produce for the attainable market of the Web. We return to this issue below in chapter 4.

Bourdieu's interpretation of practical competence, self-censorship, anticipation of profit, and personality traits unites two solitudes of communication that are not easily or convincingly combined in other theories of discourse and power: production and reception. Indeed, in other approaches, classes of subjects are sometimes cast as those who produce and those who receive. Power is sometimes conceived as a monopoly to be guarded and exercised wantonly, or as an imposition to be suffered and resisted. The power to produce and distribute written or multi-media text is of course usually exercised in the absence of an audience; thus reception is not as salient for those exercising such power. Moreover, having access to the media in the first place is usually a consequence of previously established symbolic, economic, or political power, a power often accompanied by the prerogative to promote one's own interests. Thus, the alienation of production from reception is a consequence both of the medium of communication and the social distribution of power. By conceiving of the dispositions of the habitus manifesting themselves both in the anticipation of profit and the competence to produce profit, Bourdieu links past and projected receptions with the conditions of production (1977, p.649; 1991, p.76). However, in using the spoken language as the basis of his social and economic model of discourse, Bourdieu draws on production and reception that occur together in space and time. With its contextual richness and immediacy of feedback, speech generates deeper impressions on the habitus than writing or other mediated communications could. As well, the usual co-presence of participants in speech situations more visibly exposes the exercises of power that may be more successfully hidden in mediated communications. In other media, while a general anticipation based on knowing whether one belongs may be quite strong, an anticipation based on the profitably of specific interventions may not be as acute or precise because of a lack of experience in that medium or a lack of feedback to nourish one's habitus. The productive range of ordinary individuals is thus probably more circumscribed

than their receptive range. In its productive capacity, the habitus is primarily a resource for speech. The implications of this are explored in chapter 6, where we consider the omnipresence of spoken discourse transcribed into the written presentations of personal homepages.

Fairclough: critical language study

Fairclough's approach to discourse may be characterised as a mating of linguistics, in particular functionalist approaches to text, with a Marxist-informed social framework. In *Language and Power*, he articulates the theory and methodology of what he calls *critical language study*, an applied series of approaches oriented to exposing and explaining the operations of power and ideology in texts (1989, p.5).

With a stated objective of exploring how language is implicated with power (p.1), it is not surprising that Fairclough focuses much of his attention on modelling and analysing the discursive productions of the powerful. With power is produced and reproduced domination by the powerful (p.1), as well as constraints on (p.46), and the consent of (p.4), the powerless. Of particular relevance to the discussion in later chapters of this work is the spectrum of constraints that powerful members of the discourse community can impose directly or indirectly on the discourse of their relatively powerless counterparts: constraints on the *contents* of what discourse is produced; constraints on the *social relations* that language users can establish with each other; and constraints on the *subject positions* that language users can occupy (p.46). These local constraints, applied successively and thus reproduced, can appear naturalized and hence sustain long-term effects on, respectively, subjects' conceptions of their world, subjects' relations with others, and subjects' own identities (p.74).

That Fairclough seems to paint a fairly bleak view of a subject's own capacity to engage actively the dynamism of power and ideology—emphasizing power's agency and hence the subject's passivity—is itself a function of Fairclough's agenda in *Language and Power*. Among his stated objectives is not to promote better discursive production but rather to encourage more enlightened, critical reception. Fairclough expresses the hope that a greater consciousness of the operations of power in discourse will be a "first step towards emancipation" (p.1). Much of his work is oriented to developing for readers a practical methodology for describing, interpreting, and explaining the operations and effects of power

in discourse. Hence, the general passivity of the relatively powerless in Fairclough's narrative, and his selection of cases of domination rather than of resistance, are to some degree a function of Fairclough's particular agenda with *critical language study*.

Fairclough's theoretical framework, however, provides plenty of potential for an approach that emphasizes subjects' capacity to respond meaningfully amidst the network of power surrounding them. Though he seeks to "correct . . . delusions of autonomy" in the assumptions that subjects hold about their views of texts and of their world (p.162), emphasizing the pervasive influence of ideology in forming and sustaining what we may naively conceive of as our own common sense, Fairclough also emplots a creative capacity for the dominated as agents in this world. For instance, inspired by Jurgen Habermas's optimism, Fairclough draws a suggestive distinction between the discursive strategy of the powerful in insidiously naturalizing their power, a strategy he calls *inculcation*, and the discursive strategy of the dominated in forthrightly and rationally confronting and exposing applications of power, which he calls *communication* (p.75).

Fairclough also seems to have been inspired by Giddens' theory of structuration, or at least by some of the same intellectual current that fostered, and was, in turn, fostered by, Giddens. Though he does not refer to Giddens explicitly, Fairclough's model of the relationship between reproduction of current social systems and production of new systems, as well as his model of the relationship between the determining capacity of existing systems and the creative capacity of social agents, shares some of the symbiotic character that is the trademark of Giddens' theory of structuration. Fairclough explains that instances of discourse are both determined by prevailing social structures and social practices, but can, by their iterations, either reinforce or revise those structures and practices (pp.163-64).

This engagement between systematic precedent and potentially determined, or potentially creative, individual discursive acts is in part mediated through what Fairclough calls *members' resources*, the resources that individuals bring to textual interpretation and production, such as "their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit,

values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on" (p.24). Because much of Fairclough's agenda is focussed on developing interpretive procedures, he generates a more elaborate model of the critical reception of texts than of their production. However, he does make clear that members' resources also enable agents' production of text (e.g., p.24, 161, 165). As well, he states that the reception and the production of texts are "parallel" processes (p.161). As the similar concept of the *habitus* does for Bourdieu's perspective, Fairclough's concept of members' resources provides his perspective with the always-difficult mediating role between, on the one hand, the cumulative influence of socialization, social structures, and social practices and, on the other, the instantiation of each individual case of text reception and production. The former exerts a determining force on the latter, and the latter contributes to the reproduction, or revision, of the former, all via the blending of individual and social in members' resources (p.163).

On the whole, however, Fairclough gives more attention to the reproduction of established ideologies than to their revision. The agents of potential social revision, society's members, tend to be dwarfed by their discursive environment, which Fairclough represents almost exclusively in large-scale narratives: prevailing "relations of power" that exert a determining force for stasis; and the ongoing processes of "social struggle," which, though they would feasibly exert an equal imperative for change, are represented by Fairclough as being effects, not causes, of changing discourse (p.163). Revealingly, what determines whether a subject in a given situation either reproduces or revises discursive norms is social, not individual, in essence, based on whether the subject finds herself in an unproblematic or problematic situation, respectively. The degree of problematization is based on the fit between an established situational "type" and the given unique situation. It is as a result of this comparison that the subject would draw on standard procedures for this or that type of situation or a more remote and, hence, "creative" applications of her members' resources (p.165). Thus subjects, in this model, certainly have the capacity to act but seem to do so somewhat mechanically, when their situation jars them into such action.

Everything in Fairclough's perspective that might be said to be seemingly individual is in fact

the locus of the social. Indeed, Fairclough represents individuals as somewhat alienated from their "own" members' resources, speaking of their "relation" to their members' resources (p.165). Thus, despite the possessive—*members'* resources—these resources are only nominally members' own. They reside "in people's heads," but Fairclough emphasizes their social constitution:

> [Members' resources] are social in the sense that they have social origins—they are socially generated, and their nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated—as well as being socially transmitted and, in our society, unequally distributed. People internalize what is socially produced and made available to them, and use [these] internalized [members' resources] to engage in their social practice, including discourse. This gives the forces which shape societies a vitally important foothold in the individual psyche, though as we shall see, the effectiveness of this foothold depends on it being not generally apparent. Moreover, it is not just the nature of these cognitive resources that is socially determined, but also the conditions of their use. . . . (pp.24-25)

Fairclough thus underscores the pervasive ideological influence on members' resources: these resources are members' primarily in their current location ("in people's heads"), but not in origin or in essence or in their application in situations; these features are all social (p.166). For instance, Fairclough identifies one exigence to produce text as the resolution of problems, but "[w]hat are experienced as individual problems can be interpreted socially as indicators of the de-structuring of orders of discourse which occur in the course of social struggles" (p.172). Moreover, the creativity that might be engaged in an individual's resolution of problems is also constituted socially: "[T]he creativity of the subject is socially determined, in the sense that creativity flourishes in particular social circumstances . . ." (p.172). Indeed, Fairclough offers a interesting socially-based interpretation of creativity by conceiving one dimension of it as a "restructuring" in response to the problem-inducing "de-structuring of orders of discourse" mentioned above; creativity, or "restructuring," does not produce new discursive resources so much as new combinations of existing discourse types, hence the label *restructuring* (p.171).

Thus, on balance, Fairclough credits subjects with less of an inventive capacity or generative, catalytic role in engaging their world than do other theorists discussed in this chapter, such as Giddens. However, as suggested above, such an allocation of initiative to the social environment and away from the individual may be seen as a strategic assumption of Fairclough's program. *Critical language study* must presume that the discourses of the powerful have a pervasive influence on their masses of recipients. It thus has little cause to elaborate a vision of a relatively free-thinking independent subject. Moreover, the emphasis on a socially contingent subjecthood also counterbalances the intellectual current of triumphal individualism in Thatcherite Britain at the time of Fairclough's writing. Yet, despite this emphasis, Fairclough nevertheless accommodates subjects with meaningful roles as potentially creative agents in society. His perspective offers a very useful framework for the kinds of conditions under which subjects, through Web production for instance, formulate meaning, shape their social relations, and develop a subjecthood.

Hodge and Kress: social semiotics

In comparison with Fairclough, whose agenda is to develop a methodology to critique the discursive production of the powerful, Hodge and Kress are much more sanguine about the potential contributions of the relatively powerless. This openness is in part a function of the broader scale of texts to which we can apply Hodge and Kress's social semiotics. The repertoire of social semiotics encompasses not only written texts, which, because of their concentrated and expensive means of production and distribution are almost exclusively the prerogative of powerful producers, but also visual texts, social practices, and so forth. Among the texts that Hodge and Kress (1988) introduce as illustrations and case studies are several easily within the productive range of ordinary people: speech, clothing, body language, family photos, parent-child conversations, student-teacher conversations, children's drawings and homework, graffiti, and comic books.

Like Bourdieu and Fairclough, Hodge and Kress mate a well-established though largely introspective discipline, in this case semiotics, with a social framework, which in this case seems to be partly an inheritance from Durkheim's sociology (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p.40) . The resulting model shows its sociological inspiration with its conception of a society constituted not of discrete individuals but of clusters of individuals, groups: both formally-constituted groups and, perhaps more significantly, fluctuating groups based on demographic variables or other ideologically-laden markers of identity. What is noteworthy about individuals, then, is how their identities position them socially at any instant as embodying some kind of group in their relations with individuals representing other kinds of groups. Individuals' semiotic acts are thus interpreted as manifestations of their social status and positions based on such group identities and relations.

In a society functioning on the basis of groups, the social dynamic that develops can be explained by two general relations among groups: power and solidarity. Semiotic usage is partly motivated by the struggle to gain power from, or maintain power over, other groupings,

and by the need to create or reinforce solidarity among and within groupings. Hodge and Kress establish a handy distinction to highlight these social orientations of meaning from the more traditionally accepted sense of meaning derived from references to reality. They call this latter level of meaning, the common-sense referential level of any given text, the *mimetic plane* of meaning. By contrast, the orientations to power and solidarity are manifest in the *semiosic plane* of meaning, the level of meaning that derives from and engages with its social environment (p.5).

Much as meaning is oriented to the social environment of power and solidarity among groups, so too is the activity of producing and receiving meaning implicated in the social order. Key to the relations of power and solidarity among groups are representations of reality oriented to serving the interests of a group. Such ideological representations of reality also encompass subjects' legitimate engagement with semiosis, the acceptable ways and means of producing and receiving meaning (p.5). Hodge and Kress use the term *logonomic systems* to refer to the "set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings" (p.4). They also introduce the more specific *production regimes* and *receptions regimes* to refer to those rules oriented specifically to producers and receivers, respectively, in their engagement with semiosis (p.4, 266).[5]

That rules specifying the means of communication would consolidate at all is a consequence of some kind of domination; a dominant group can maintain its dominance by influencing the means of communication to best serve its own interests. These rules may be both formally encoded (e.g., in legislation) or reproduced and enforced through socialization and social practices (e.g., standards and practices of politeness) (p.4). While Hodge and Kress underscore the overt nature of these rules and of their enforcement (p.4, 266), at least in theory, they also suggest, like Bourdieu for instance, that these rules maintain their influence by more indirect means, such as by the prevailing conceptual systems of classification (p.267), as conveyed "through messages about [producers' and receivers'] identity and relationships" (p.40). As well, they subscribe to an understanding of hegemony that includes not just sheer oppression but also the "active participation of social agents," the consent of the socially

vulnerable to their own marginalization (p.123). Indeed, some of their case studies feature semiotic production that would as likely have been shaped by the socialization instilled in the habitus as by "rules" learned for specific contexts of production. Such a generous interpretation of tacit logonomic "rules" and specialized production "regimes" is important in the case of the Web, for beyond its technological capacities and coding formats, the Web has generated no explicit publishing "rules" and no credible means of enforcement. Yet, as is discussed in later chapters, homepage producers do operate with some conceptions of how to proceed appropriately for producers of their status in the new medium.

Members of less powerful, dominated groups can contest logonomic rules as part of their social struggle (p.4, 7, 267). Hodge and Kress make a point of noting that resistance is not always co-opted (p.8), a view which remains open to a meaningful role for the relatively powerless to make effective contributions in response to their condition of subordination. Indeed, these "smaller-level shifts in power [produced by resistance] have significant effects, leading to modification in the structures of domination . . ." (p.7). It is Hodge and Kress's recognition of this capacity for such meaningful resistance that makes their perspective particularly useful for this project. Relatively anonymous, "ordinary" individuals occupying the Web ultimately compel our attention not by their compliance with power, but by their efficacy as agents at least partially independent of the precedents and practices of the dominant mass media.

Bakhtin: a dialogic world

In his approach to language, Bakhtin sets up everything required for a theoretical framework bridging language and power without following through with the final ingredient: power. He nevertheless shares many of the same social perspectives on language with the theorists discussed above.

For instance, Bakhtin conceives of words as social objects, each wedded to a particular type of situation, social group, era, and so forth—a representation of language demographics that is harmonious with Bourdieu's economy of language distinctions. With his concept of heteroglossia, the multiple-meaning potential of words, Bakhtin stresses language's contingency upon its environment, an orientation that is, in general, common to all theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter. As well, he shares with Fairclough and with Hodge and Kress some of the functional view of discourse that they inherited from Halliday:

> When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions—this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested *use* to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning. (1981a, p.401; italics in original)

He also recognizes instances of discourse as having a fundamental property of rhetoric: of being addressed, "presuppos[ing] a special conception of the listener, of his apperceptive background and the degree of his responsiveness" (1981a, p.346), "orient[ed] toward a specific conceptual horizon" (1981a, p.282), "oriented toward the response of the other . . . determin[ing] others' responsive positions" (1986, pp.75-76). Bakhtin's foundational work on genres parallels some of the later work of other scholars on registers (e.g., Halliday) or, more plainly, discourse "types" (Fairclough). Though he does not treat the rewards or prohibitions that may accompany the reproduction or transgression of genres, Bakhtin does acknowledge

that genres have a "normative significance" that would presumably corral the discursive liberty of a speaker (1986, p.80). Finally, in his vision of the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language, sustaining respectively the consolidating and entropic tendencies of a language, Bakhtin often calls forth, as examples of the centripetal forces, the discourses of the powerful, and, as examples of the centrifugal forces, the discourses of the marginalized. A similar dichotomy is prominent in his work on Rabelais (1984), but nowhere does he formally theorize the generative force of centralizing tendencies to be power or the generative force of divergent tendencies to be resistant to power. Yet, despite the absence of a formally articulated account of power, Bakhtin's ideas share a strong kinship with those of the other theorists discussed above.

For the present purposes, Bakhtin's unique and most useful contributions are his vision of a world populated by contextualized and interacting words and utterances and his accounts of the development of and functioning of the language producer in such a world.

In Bakhtin's vision, we emerge into language from amidst an environment of discourse as if it were the air we breath. He characterizes our intellectual development as "an intensive struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values" (1981a, p.346). Our consciousness itself is constituted of language (1981a, p.295; Volosinov, 1973, pp.14-15).[6] When it comes to producing discourse on our own, the linguistic resources available from the discursive environment are already well-established in their demographic status, through their affiliations with certain types of users and certain contexts of use. Linguistic resources are, in a sense, always already proprietary, and hence resistent to a producer's efforts to establish ownership as one's own (1981a, p.294). The resources that an individual can bring to production are in essence digested versions of already-consumed discourse, "assimilated" from the social environment (1981a, p.341, 345). Thus, Bakhtin characterises the producer not so much with a creative capacity but with a capacity to absorb, "re-accent," and respond to the voices of the discursive environment:

> [T]he unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in

> continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation*—more or less creative—of others' words (and not the words of a language). Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (1986, p.89)

Hence, production is tied to reception, a link Bourdieu makes along the lines of social acceptability and that Bakhtin posits, less politically, to be a quality of a *dialogic* linguistic environment:

> [A]ny speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances—his own and others'—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener)." (p.69)

Like Bourdieu, Bakhtin represents the language producer as skilled but as deriving her skills unwittingly, from the discursive environment. Also like Bourdieu's speaker, Bakhtin's speaker has not so much a knowledge of words per se, as a know-how of "utterances" and genres, the complete expressive units with which to get things done in different situations:

> We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*. Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skillfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory* (p.78).

Thus, as Bourdieu does with his concept of the habitus, Bakhtin furnishes the language-producing subject with a discursive socialization: one who is herself a product of the discursive environment and whose "unique" contributions may insightfully be understood as appropriations of and responses to the socially-positioned voices of that environment. In the

novel and unregulated environment of a mass medium such as the Web, a public forum admitting private citizens as producers, the fertile mix of voices can produce a complex juxtaposition of discourses. Bakhtin's conception of discourse as demographic and dialogic thus offers insight for much of the analysis below.

Burke: a dramatistic rhetoric

Kenneth Burke's wide-ranging and generative perspectives have significantly advanced the twentieth century study of rhetoric. Though much of his work, developed on a corpus of philosophical and literary writing, more readily contributes to a critical reading of society's more highly regarded writings, some points are equally useful for understanding the works of society's less-distinguished citizens. For instance, his dramatistic approach to the analysis of texts informs some of the discussion below in chapters 6 and 7, in which we explore how some representations on a homepage can strategically shift attention either toward or away from the homepage's author.

Two points from the Burkean repertoire are particularly relevant to this discussion of the potential of individuals' contributions: Burke's concept of action, and his definition of the human agent. Burke introduces *action* in part to help legitimate his dramatistic perspective. In contrast with things, which may engage in motion, only humans can engage in action (1966, p.53), a capacity which Joseph Gusfield characterizes as

> impl[ying] assessments of situations and the people with whom the person interacts. It implies reflection upon one's interests, sentiments, purposes, and those of others. Human beings are animals and have biological natures, but they differ from other animals in the range and significance of their use of symbols, of language. They understand their world by depicting it in symbols and by placing meaning on events. Animals respond to stimuli directly; human beings interpret the events. (1989, p.9)

Though seemingly obvious, this distinction between human action and non-human motion carries implications for our understanding of the potential of the human actor. Deterministic perspectives of the social world may seek to reduce the typical human agent to little more than a puppet, behaving as if by rote in accordance with the prerogative of society's rulers, or a deity, or a historical dialectic, or material stimuli, or other such determining factors. In this chapter, I have been attempting not so much to deny that these factors have a significant role in the human world—for clearly several theorists discussed above place significant weight on

the ubiquity of the social context—but to open up approaches with which to accept the individual human agent as indeed a meaningful catalyst in the social world. Burke's reliance on human action as a key assumption of his dramatistic approach—like Giddens' emphasis on human agents' "knowledgability" and "intentionality"—admits an enriching complexity into the inquiry into the discourse that human agents produce.

Related to Burke's assumption of human action is his well-known definition of the human as producer of discourse. Burke's final formulation of this definition points to the key ingredients and conditions with which we can account for discourse, its orientations, and its users' motivations:

BEING BODIES THAT LEARN LANGUAGE
THEREBY BECOMING WORDLINGS
HUMANS ARE THE
SYMBOL-MAKING, SYMBOL-USING, SYMBOL-MISUSING ANIMAL
INVENTOR OF THE NEGATIVE
SEPARATED FROM OUR NATURAL CONDITION
BY INSTRUMENTS OF OUR OWN MAKING
GOADED BY THE SPIRIT OF HIERARCHY
ACQUIRING FOREKNOWLEDGE OF DEATH
AND ROTTEN WITH PERFECTION. (1989, p.263)[7]

The characteristic described in the third last line ("goaded by the spirit of hierarchy")[8] suggests a possible orientation that would account for discursive production in general, Web production in particular. Plainly, discursive production in whatever context and by whatever producer is oriented to promoting an order just by virtue of its selective representation of reality. More significantly, as suggested in the previous chapter and discussed in later chapters, most individuals enter the Web at what would be popularly recognized as the low end of the hierarchy, having little publishing visibility or status that would warrant their contributions to a mass medium. Their collective efforts may thus be seen as motivated by or at least not indifferent to the possible reordering of the prevailing hierarchy, a reordering which might promote them to positions at least nominally on par with the "instruments of our

own making," the institutions that dominate public discourse and the higher end of the social hierarchy. Private Web producers' unprecedented challenge to this hierarchy is taken up throughout this work.

A theoretical pastiche for the Web

The six perspectives discussed above elaborate a set of overlapping scenes and stories for what might otherwise appear as inconsequential acts of language by minor actors. They bring recognition and import to these seemingly isolated actions by showing symbolic actions to be engaged with their social environment. They also emplot meaningful roles for seemingly ordinary producers of these acts, three-dimensional characters who have grown through their past language exposure and who have creative potential to change their environment with their symbolic actions. Though these theoretical approaches each ask different questions and propose different solutions to issues of discourse, we may nevertheless distill a majority consensus in some fundamental areas: first, discourse's relationship to its social context, and second, discourse producers' development and dynamic potential in that social context. Below, I summarize each of these issues in turn: first, the relation between discourse and its context, and second, the relation between discourse and its producers.

At least three of the above perspectives can be characterised as a bridging of the well-established though somewhat introspective fields of traditional linguistics and semiotics with social and political frameworks: Bourdieu's socio-economic account of language usage, Fairclough's critical language study, and Hodge and Kress's social semiotics. We can similarly discern evidence of a bridging or expansionist vision in Bakhtin's conceptions of words' demographic properties and heteroglossia, and in the near-universal scale of Burke's new rhetoric. Each of these perspectives brings discourse into a larger social narrative, a narrative that adds not just insight into our understanding of language but legitimacy for our pursuit of such a line of inquiry. Discourse, these perspectives urge, is a far bigger issue than might otherwise have been recognized in "mere words" per se.

One feature common to most of these narratives is their agonistic "plot." Through the perspectives of Bourdieu, Fairclough, and Hodge and Kress run vectors of power and inequity; these alignments depict a social context on the epic scale of tension and struggle among

groups and classes. Parallel themes can also be found in Burke's postulate of hierarchy as a foundational human motive and, more faintly, Bakhtin's account of language's centrifugal and centripetal forces. In various ways, this social dynamic insinuates itself into the seemingly tranquil world of language: by assessing values on certain kinds of symbolic usage, maintaining various regimes of situational norms, and enforcing constraints on discursive liberty. An understanding of discourse is thus incomplete without an accommodation for these determining forces from the world about it.

However, discourse is not just a pawn in this story; it is instrumental in maintaining the ideologies that mollify the harsher elements of social power and inequity, and in constructing new actions and ideologies that can modify society's "plot." Thus, for instance, with Giddens' conception of individual acts contributing to the reproduction or revision of structure, and with Fairclough's and Hodge and Kress's allowance for creative acts of resistance that can contest, override, and eventually revise prevailing systems of domination, discourse is accorded an active role in making and remaking its social environment.

Just as discourse, in the plurality of these theoretical perspectives, is both a function of and a creator of its social environment, so too are the agents of discourse both functions of and also creators of their social environment. Each of these perspectives develops some accounts of subjecthood formed or constituted of experiences in a discursively-charged social environment. Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, Giddens' practical consciousness, Fairclough's members' resources, Hodge and Kress's logonomic systems instilled through social practices, Bakhtin's discursively composed consciousness, and even Burke's "bodies that learn language," each represent the cumulative product of past social-discursive experiences acting on a subject. Collectively, they emphasize a subjecthood whose seemingly unique and autonomous essence—qualities such as "personality," intellectual development, behavioral dispositions, and skills in managing oneself in situations—is in fact distilled from, and thus contingent upon, a more knowable, accessible social environment. These conceptions also provide a vocabulary for the inventory of past experiences that is engaged when subjects produce each new discursive act, thereby adding meaning to these isolated acts

by their placement in the broader, unfolding narrative of socialization.

Yet while they are consequences of their social environment, subjects, in these theoretical perspectives, are not fully subsumed by that environment. Subjects are granted the role of three-dimensional characters, the wherewithal of protagonists in changing their social conditions. Burke and Giddens propose the most generous "humanistic" visions of subjecthood, the former with his assumption of the human agent's capacity for reflective action (in lieu of automated motion), and the latter with his assumption of the agent's "transformative capacity" "to make a difference." Though human liberty is not as prominent as human bondage in the agenda of the other theorists, each allows for some degree of human creativity in response to the social environment. For Bourdieu, the habitus "orients" dispositions without fully determining exact actions. For Hodge, Kress, and Fairclough, resistance and social struggle are key activities for dominated groups and individuals. For Fairclough and Bakhtin, a form of "cut and paste" creativity enables agents to produce innovative combinations from existing discourses. By virtue of these capacities for resistance and innovation, even "ordinary" human agents are thus cast in important roles in society's epic narrative.

Out of this diversity of theoretical perspectives on discourse, its context, and its agents, we may compose a fairly coherent pastiche of general principles that are foundational to an exploration of everyday discursive production by ordinary discourse producers:

- Discourse can be insightfully approached as a function of and engagement with its social context.
- Discourse production can be insightfully explained as an application of and response to inequity, power, and domination.
- Discourse producers can be insightfully understood by their experiences and positions within their past and present discursive contexts.
- Relatively powerless agents cannot be fully subsumed within the narrative of power and the powerful; the relatively powerless can elude the roles cast for them and can make a difference with their discursive production.

The analysis and discussion in the later chapters takes as assumptions these general principles. As well, it draws selectively from the perspectives of individual theorists discussed above at points where their unique insight can usefully address the issues of private production on the Web.

Methodology

In chapter 2, we have seen how a critical approach to a text can benefit both from an understanding of the social context of that text, and from an understanding of the processes by which the author of that text developed a literacy for communicating in such a context. In the case of the former, a text can be approached, for instance, through the market into which it is offered (Bourdieu), or through the logonomic systems which validate certain acts of production and reception (Hodge and Kress). These frameworks articulate some of the dimensions by which power and ideology are exercised in individual communication events.

In the case of the latter, the production of a text can be approached through the producer's inculcation of a language habitus (Bourdieu) and the exposure to and acquisition of genre knowledge (Bakhtin). The development of such practical know-how, the "tacit knowledge" of one's practice, is, of course, related to the manifestations of power and knowledge discussed above, but it can be useful to consider these approaches separately, especially for communications in which the relatively powerless have the opportunity to be producers.[9] As has been discussed in chapter 1, much of the textual corpus available to be studied is produced from positions of power, positions which benefit from access to the resources of information, time, capital, technology, distribution, and so forth. Moreover, texts produced from positions of power will more likely have the influence to shape a broad range of social relations and events and to shape generic conventions and expectations, so the causes of such texts are often less at issue that the consequences, the effects.

Texts produced by the relatively powerless, however, benefit much less from such a fecundity of resources, or at least the right resources. As well, powerless producers may not have acquired a socially or professionally legitimate communicative know-how. The text that does get produced by such producers often does not have the impact that a comparable production by the powerful would have. Therefore, the effects created by the offerings of a powerless producer are often less at issue than the causes, the processes by which an unlikely author

came to acquire the resources and the right to produce a text.

The advent of the World Wide Web has created the conditions for, among other things, an unprecedented redistribution of power in the mass media. As we saw in chapter 1, the capacity to be a producer of a multi-media text, a text readily accessible to much of the population of industrialized countries around the world, has hitherto been restricted largely to institutions and a relatively select group of institutionally sanctioned media specialists. With the recent phenomenal growth of the Web, with the equally phenomenal growth of computer resources and accessibility in schools, libraries, and work places, and with the relative simplicity of Internet-related computer applications, the capacity to be a mass-media producer has expanded to encompass millions of students, employees, hobbyists, and others.

To study critically these mass media texts being produced by such relatively powerless individuals, I have sought to explore both the approaches these individuals took in becoming Web producers and the texts they produced in and for this new communications environment. To do this, I conducted a survey of authors of personal homepages and analysed the homepages they produced. Below, I discuss first the population of homepage authors and the resources which were available to obtain a meaningful sample from such a dispersed population. Then, the objectives and design of the survey questionnaire are explained. Next, the operational definition of a personal homepage that guided the sampling procedure is presented and explained. Finally, I map out the procedures by which I obtained a sample of participants, their survey responses, and their personal homepages.

The homepage population

Since Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the Web at the beginning of the decade, the Web has been growing at exponential rates. From 1993, when Mosaic, the first popular Web browser with graphic capabilities, was introduced, the Web's growth expanded beyond the early subpopulation of computer scientists, technicians, programmers, and hobbyists to encompass, increasingly, segments of the population hitherto excluded or alienated from the exclusive world of computer technology and applications. Measuring the scope and demographic characteristics of this population is especially challenging because of the characteristics of the medium and of people's access to and use of it. As has been discussed in chapter 1, the Internet is a fast growing and fast changing technological medium, so that any estimate of the scale of any of its networks or of the population using these networks is likely to be quickly outdated. As well, the Internet's decentralized structure renders the task of arriving at such measures quite problematic, for surveyors cannot rely on the power of bureaucracies that, in centralized social and political domains, would manage such a technology and its population. Moreover, the multinational and multilingual breadth of the medium challenges the resources of most surveying organizations, which are designed to measure local and national populations to serve the marketing needs largely of local and national commercial and political organizations.

In chapter 1, I reported that, by one estimate, the world-wide population of Internet users is just over 100 million (CyberAtlas, 1998). Because of the concentration of computer and network resources in the developed countries, the distribution of these 100 million does not live up to the "world-wide" billing of the optimistically-named World Wide Web. One 1997 study reported that of the 13 million Internet servers world wide, 99% were based in North America, Western Europe, and Japan (CyberAtlas, 1998). The United States is widely acknowledged to dominate the Internet, especially the Web. For instance, one 1998 English-language survey that solicits its survey respondents directly from the Internet reports that 84.4% of respondents identified their current location as the United States (GVU, 1998).

Various studies of the population of American Internet users in recent years have shown growth in the number of American users from a 1996 range of 15 to 35 million, to a 1997 range of up to 45 million (CyberAtlas, 1998). As mentioned in chapter 1, the most recent 1998 study at the time of this writing pegged the population of adult American users at just over 70 million ("Study says 70 million," 1998).

Just as the Internet population is unrepresentative geographically of the world-wide population, so too is it unrepresentative of the age and gender distributions of the general populations from which it derives. The well-respected semi-annual "WWW User Survey," run by the Graphic, Visualization, and Usability (GVU) Center of the Georgia Institute of Technology, has consistently reported an anomalous peak of users centered on those in their 20s and, more broadly, extending from the teens to the middle-aged. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, this peak may gradually be flattening over time as an increasingly greater proportion of the population uses the Internet.

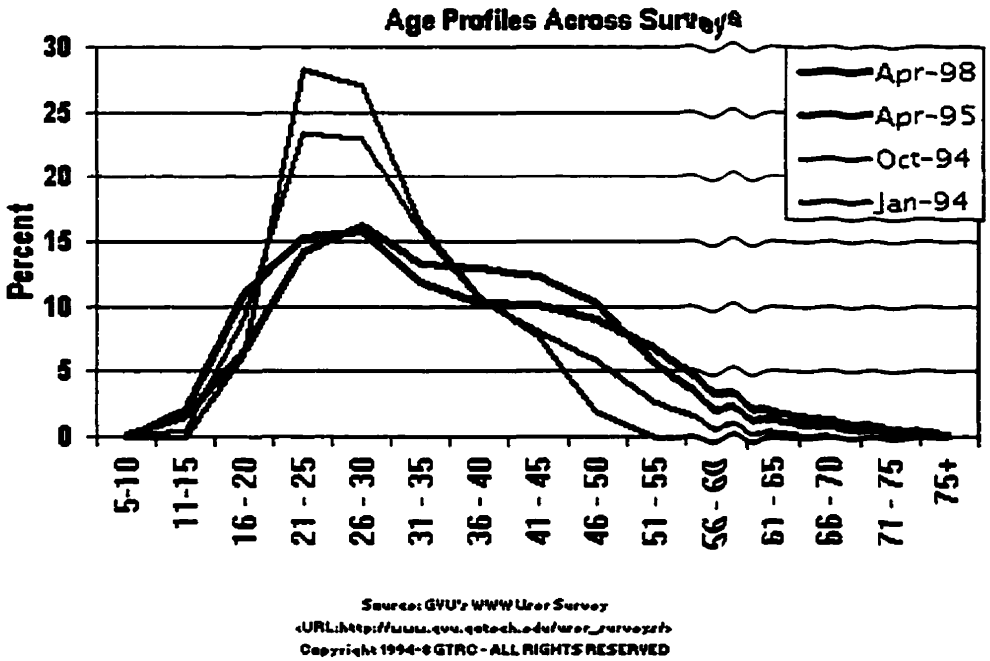


Figure 3.1: Age distribution of Internet users, 1994 - 1998.

The GVU surveys have also shown a consistent though decreasing under-representation of females (or over-representation of males) among the population of Internet users. As can be seen in Figure 3.2, the proportion of female users has grown from a low of just over 5% in 1994 to just under 40% in 1998 (GVU,1998).

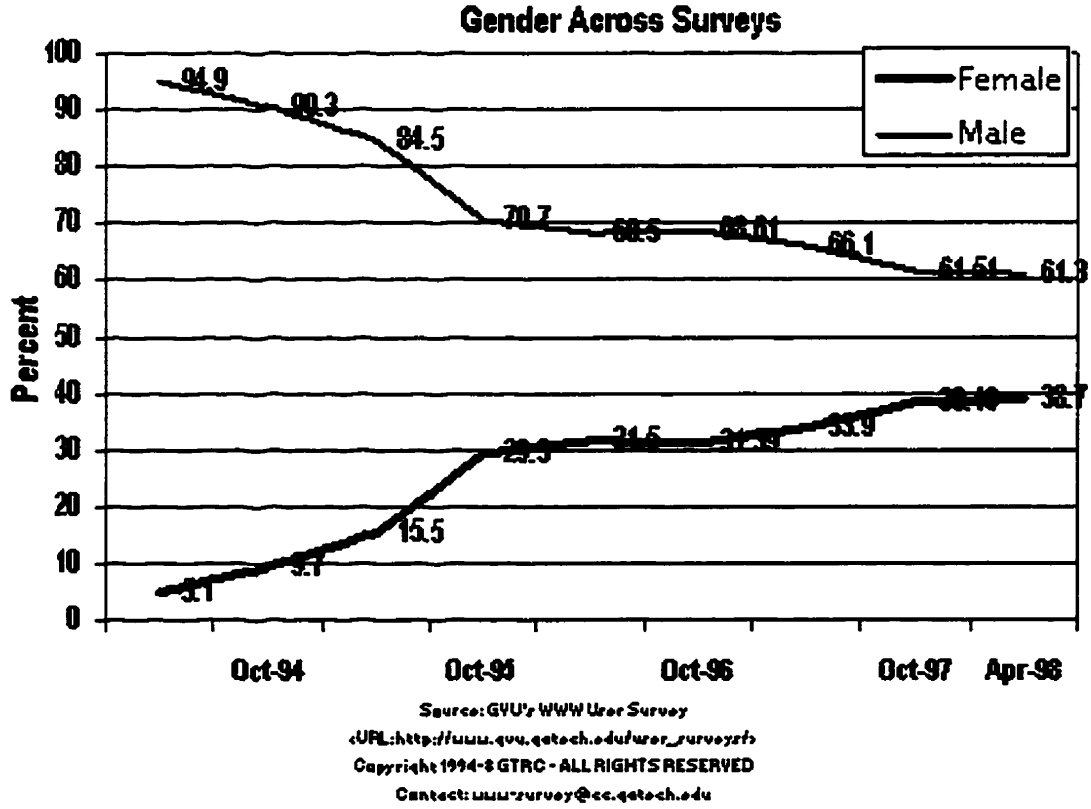


Figure 3.2: Gender distribution of Internet users, 1994 - 1998.

Other studies show that, as of 1997, female users numbered just over 40% (CyberAtlas, 1998). However, the latest GVU survey (1998) also reports that the proportion of female users is closer to parity with males among Americans and among teens, both of which groups are perhaps best representative of the Internet population of the future.

As challenging as it is to measure the population of Internet users, it is even more so to measure the subpopulation of those who might be recognized as personal homepage authors. In a later section of this chapter, I present the operational criteria used in determining whether

Web sites qualified for inclusion in this study of "personal homepages." Among the concerns in circumscribing the population of personal homepage authors are the potentially arbitrary criteria for defining "personal," "homepage," and authorship. In determining the criteria for a "personal" site, would one include, say, a site for a self-managed business or a student's site for course work? In his survey of personal homepage authorship, John Buten (1996) operationally defined personal homepages to include sites that are not necessarily "personal" in content or purpose, such as a faculty member's research site, a consultant's business site, a non-profit group's collective site.

The boundaries of a "homepage" are no clearer. What exactly is *one* homepage, when some individuals share images and hyperlinked files among the sites of family members or friends or among two or more separate URLs on which they have an allotment of server space. Similarly, what is *one* homepage in cases in which, to save money, family and friends and local clubs and grass-roots organizations share one server account?

Equally problematic concerns undermine the determination of authorship. Who constitutes a homepage author in cases in which, for example, pages are ostensibly "constructed" by very young children but are largely ghostwritten by their parents, or in which work written off-line by one individual is encoded in HTML and posted by another, or in which images or text are copied from one site and displayed, perhaps slightly modified, on another? As Foucault suggests in his influential essay "What is an Author?" the notion of author is, to some degree, a construct based on our notion of a text (1977).

Most Internet surveys do not inquire into the Web authorship of their respondents, as most survey organizations' primary objectives are oriented usually to providing marketing information to commercial organizations; thus, determining the population's characteristics as consumers, not as producers, takes precedence. The carefully executed 1996 study by John Buten is one notable exception. By selecting his sample from an exhaustive review of Internet servers based in Pennsylvania, Buten was able to credibly extrapolate his results to apply to the United States population as a whole. He estimates that there were (in early 1996) about

600,000 personal homepages in the United States. He adds that this estimate is probably low since the sample did not include nation-wide Internet service providers which would, of course, also serve the Pennsylvania population. On the other hand, because of his generous definition of "personal" homepages (discussed above), the number of sites that have personal as opposed to, say, commercial content or objectives may actually be somewhat lower. Buten also found a gender imbalance among the population of homepage authors, an imbalance far more pronounced than that found in Internet user surveys of that time. Only 14% of his respondents were female, as opposed to proportions of about one-third reported in 1996 surveys of Internet users (CyberAtlas,1998). A more recent survey (GVU, 1998) that includes a question of Web page creation (not necessarily personal homepage creation) reports a similarly pronounced gender imbalance, with male respondents more likely to have created a Web page than female respondents (57.5% and 40.3%, respectively).

As no comparable demographic information was available for the international population of personal homepage authors or for the 1997 population (the time of my study), I made informal but reasoned estimates of my own. The population resource I drew from is the listings of personal homepages available through the Yahoo! Web directory. Yahoo! is widely recognized as the largest and most popular Web directory (Carroll and Broadhead, p.285). According to *HotWired* journalist Steve G. Steinberg (1996), an average of almost 800,000 people (in 1996) made daily use of Yahoo! Unlike search engines, which use exclusively technological means to catalogue the textual features of the Web, the Yahoo! directory is organized and catalogued by Yahoo! staff along the lines of what Steinberg refers to as Yahoo!'s "ontology—a taxonomy of everything." Yahoo! staff view and classify sites, some of which are found by Yahoo!'s "spider," and the majority of which are submitted by e-mail from the site producers themselves (Steinberg, 1996). One such classification is that for personal homepages (http://www.yahoo.com/Entertainment/People/). Because it is largely upon the onus of Web site producers to submit their URL to Yahoo!, because Yahoo! classifiers had, in 1996, fallen behind by an estimated half-million sites (Steinberg), because Yahoo! was at that time still largely an English-language service, and because some of the more ambitious personal homepages may have earned a thematic classification rather than a

"personal" classification, these listings offer a large though not necessarily fully accurate representation of the Web's "personal homepages." They were, however, and still are the best resource available.

Though at the time of my study, in early 1997, Yahoo! did not display a numerical tally of its personal homepage listings, by the summer of 1998, Yahoo!'s posted tally was above 70,000. In early 1997, I had estimated the listings to encompass 80,000 personal homepages. Though these Yahoo! listings are the largest such listings ever compiled, these numbers still represent only a small fraction of the 600,000 personal homepages Buten estimated for the United States alone.

The Yahoo! listings of personal homepages are arranged alphabetically, with separate files for each letter of the alphabet. The alphabetic listings are derived from the site titles submitted by their Web page authors. While a significant minority of these pages are identified by imaginative or thematic titles, the majority are identified by the names of their creators. As such, we may use these names to get a rough approximation of the population of personal homepage authors. The vast majority of these names appear to be occidental and, in particular, of Western European ethnic extraction, an observation which is not surprising given the widely acknowledged American predominance among the early Internet population. However, different portions of the alphabetic listings seem to exhibit different demographic characteristics, making any representative sampling problematic. The listing for the letter *K*, for instance, seems to encompass a greater proportion of Asian names (relative to occidental names) than is found in other parts of the alphabetic listings, an observation which becomes important when preparing a sampling procedure.

Using a small sample of those listings that featured recognizable (e.g., occidental) male and female names, I found that females were outnumbered by males by a ratio of over ten to one. As was the case with the 1996 Buten study, this imbalance is substantially more pronounced than that found by surveys of Internet users in general, one of which reported that during the same period (early 1997) that the male-female ratio was roughly 65%-35% (GVU, 1997a).

Nevertheless, this incongruity does echo in general the results of studies across all domains of computer-mediated communication, which show repeatedly that females have less access to computer-mediated communication than do males (e.g., Spears and Lea, 1994, p.450). Indeed, when considering that women in many Asian countries may have even less access to equal social and cultural participation than do their colleagues in the US, my estimated gender imbalance in homepage authorship may well have been even greater if my informal sampling could have drawn from a more representative international population of homepage authors.[10]

In sum, the population of personal homepage authors seems highly unrepresentative of the population at large and even of the population of Internet users, which itself is unrepresentative of the population at large. A number of factors might contribute to such pronounced demographic imbalances:

- economic and infrastructural requirements for widespread computer access, which would leave unconnected most of the non-occidental world;
- American leadership of the international computer industry, which could in turn account for the dominance of American public participation on the Web;
- language barriers on the still largely English World Wide Web, which might discourage access to or use of the then mostly unilingual Yahoo! directory;
- the learning curve for acquisition of computer know-how, a result of which the homepages of early 1997 are the manifestation of accumulated computer know-how from the first half of the 1990s, during which time the Web was a domain largely exclusive to computer scientists, technicians, and engineers;
- socialization within the education system, in which females have lower participation rates in the male-dominated computer-intensive disciplines of engineering, computer-science, and so forth;
- gender-marked socialization networks, from which males are more likely to have access to other male friends and mentors for motivation and guidance with a new technology;
- gender-marked communication differences, by which, in spoken communication, for instance, males have a greater proclivity to display and hence perhaps carry forth the

same proclivity in electronic media.

In chapters 4 and 10, I further consider some of these possible explanations for the demographic imbalances in Web homepage authorship. In the next section, I explain how the survey questionnaire took into account the demographic profile of the population being sampled, and in the subsequent section I discuss how, based on the Yahoo! listings of personal homepages, the selection criteria and the procedures for obtaining a sample of homepage authors and their homepages were established.

Questionnaire

To elicit information about how Web homepage authors come to be Web homepage authors and to do their authoring, I used a questionnaire that inquired into the activities and strategies of writers from their initial exposure to the Web to their plans for future work. The questionnaire is organized in two parts:

1. demographic information about the respondent,
2. the Web composing process of the respondent.

(See Appendix A.)

The first part asks for the age, sex, and nationality of the respondent. Such information was solicited for two reasons. First, such demographic information allows the grounds of generalizability to be established for a sample from a population that is fast changing and difficult to measure. As is discussed above, the portion of the international population using the Internet is known to be disproportionately young, male, and American. As we saw above, however, recent survey research is finding that, for each of these three demographic dimensions, the imbalances are gradually diminishing. A study based on a sample selected in 1997 may or may not be representative of the homepage-producing population ten years hence. Both this researcher and researchers of the Web in the near future at least will need to account for the possible biases of results ensuing from the unusual demographic profiles of the available homepage-producing population. Knowing such demographic variables of a sample better enables us to determine, first, the Web homepage population of 1997; second, and equivalently, the non-Web homepage population of 1997, those who, for whatever reasons, are not producers in this medium; and third, the generalizability of the results for this fast changing communications environment.

Second, as is discussed in chapter 2, a text is not just a result of a writing process per se but also of the distribution of power within the situational, social, and cultural contexts of its production. This distribution of power is, in part, determined by the age, sex, and nationality

of the discourse producers. Though age, sex, and nationality are not here conceived of as independent variables, they may be implicated in the composing processes or the posted Web product of participants. By soliciting information on these markers of power, I can better account for possible textual manifestations of power (or the absence thereof) in the sample of Web sites.

The question on nationality was selected in lieu of a question on location because of the scope of the Web medium. In the case of location, test sampling found some sites authored by, for instance, foreign students studying in the US. Moreover, the predominance of the young and the educated among the Internet population—a more mobile segment of the full population—suggested that respondents' current geographical locale might not be as revealing as their nationality, which may better reflect their social and cultural formation as discourse producers and receivers.

The second part of the questionnaire inquires into the process of homepage authoring. Much research into the writing process in the mode of print has found that the process may best be characterised as recursive (e.g., Rymer,1988). There is no reason to presume that the same operations would not hold for the electronic medium. Nevertheless, to present an accessible experience for respondents, the survey questions were arranged in what could be conceived as the most readily meaningful chronological order available. To elicit the possible role of genre knowledge in the respondents' composition of their homepages, initial questions asked about respondents' exposure to other Web sites prior to the composition of their own, and about the possible role such exposure had on their thinking about their own homepages.

Next, to bring to light the conditions of production of homepages, questions were asked about what might be characterised as the prewriting, writing, and revision activities of homepage composition. These included questions about planning, about the decision-making processes involving various features typical of Web pages, and about revisions since the first posting of the homepage. Because the conditions of production of homepages are outside of the language habitus of most writers, special attention was devoted to the decision-making

processes in composing with the relatively new features of communication. In the logonomic systems of the print medium, access to, practice with, and control of such features as page layout and design and the use of graphics is largely the prerogative of publishers and their specially trained employees. On the Web, these semiotic features, as well as the capacity to create hyperlinks, are easily within the purview of anyone with access to the appropriate computer applications and a bit of know-how. In order to elucidate how producers who are hitherto excluded from using certain semiotic tools make use of these tools, questions were asked about their decision-making processes in composing layout and design, hyperlinks, and graphics.

As well, the questionnaire inquired into the temporal dimension of developing a Web text, a dimension truncated from the habitus of print communicators. In contrast to the conditions of production of text in the print mode, in which closure is typically achieved by an externally imposed deadline, closure may be said not to exist on the Web. Novice surfers quickly become familiar with the ubiquitous "under construction" signs that represent the future aspirations of so many Web sites. Victor Vitanza, in his textbook *Writing for the World Wide Web*, advises readers that all Web sites are generally assumed to be continuously under construction (1998, p.184). Most composers of personal homepages would operate under no deadlines except those of their own choosing; their production processes are not subject to the imposition of a power over the texts' development in time. To elucidate the degree to which respondents conceived of their projects as relatively stable and timeless, as with most print texts, or as relatively mutable and time-sensitive, as with much Web-based text, questions were asked both about past revisions or changes and anticipated future changes.

Finally, in order to understand respondents' conception of the rhetorical nature of their work, questions were asked about the purpose and audience of the homepage. Though composition scholars and instructors recommend that the exploration of such framework issues precede the composition itself, other concerns warranted the placing of such questions at the survey's close. Most practically, the more concrete questions earlier in the survey may help trigger recall for these more abstract questions. Moreover, the novelty of the medium may obscure its

rhetorical possibilities and perhaps one's own rhetorical motivations, especially for novice producers whose most salient concerns at the beginning of the process may be to overcome the medium's technological hurdles and cumbersome HTML formatting code.

As Fowler recommends (1993, pp.100-102), the survey was pretested on a small sample of homepage authors (a sample that produced 9 respondents) and was revised to best meet its objectives. In sum, the survey seeks to elicit information about the conditions and processes by which a new type of text is produced in a new medium by producers new to mass media communications. It inquires, first, into the demographic characteristics of homepage producers. Then it inquires into producers' familiarity with the medium and its discursive possibilities, producers' decision-making processes in using the resources made available by the medium, producers' past activities and future intensions in a production process freed from fixed temporal constraints, and producers' conception of the rhetorical nature of their endeavour.

Operational definition

Above, we saw how the criteria for what constitutes a "homepage," a "personal" homepage, and homepage authorship resist easy definition. Both the practices of authors and their products are beyond the regulatory and normative influences of institutional production regimes. The environment of the Web offers few explicit forces or incentives that could produce the regularization and normative practices common in other media environments. It is quite possible that "personal homepages" may never achieve a degree of regularity to become recognizable as a genre. To compensate for these ambiguities, I here propose an operational definition of the "personal homepage." As each of the criteria listed below may exclude what some regard as "personal homepages," I follow the definition with an explanation of each of its main points.

Operational definition of a personal homepage

A personal homepage is a set of interlinked HTML files, together with java script, graphics files, sound files, and other multimedia files, which display the following properties:

- **Authorship**: The set of files has been, and perhaps continues to be, constructed, composed, or collected by one individual or by individuals who have a sense of collective identity outside of the Web site project per se (e.g., a family, roommates, friends).
- **Textuality**: The set of files provides some indication of unity, of being one Web site (e.g., by sharing a common index page), with the capacity to change over time.
- **Purpose**: The set of files does not primarily serve instrumental functions for commercial or institutional practices (e.g., it is not a site for a small business, or a site produced by a student for a course).

For language scholars accustomed to definitions based on users or uses or features of language, this emphasis on the material organization of the genre—with HTML files, graphic files, and so forth—may seem odd. After all, we do not normally include in a definition of the

novel, say, its properties as an assortment of bound or glued sheets of inked paper. However, in a hypertextual medium, the whole is less salient than the dispersion of the parts; it is precisely the plurality of files that has raised some of the problems discussed above about the integrity of a homepage. Moreover, the visual and aural manifestation of any Web page will vary from browser to browser, and with different browser settings, rendering unworkable any definition based primarily on the sensory manifestation of the electronic bits. In essence, the arrangement of these bits at any single moment of time is the only stable element of a personal homepage. These bits are organized as files; hence, the centrality of files in the definition.

Authorship

The property of authorship is an important one in this study, with its emphasis as much on the capacity for relatively powerless authors to produce mass media text as on the actual text that does get produced. Strictly speaking, this aspect of the definition is not operationally verifiable, based on a homepage alone, for there is no guarantee that a homepage has not been ghostwritten, or, more plausibly, that parts have not been copied from other sources. Indeed, because of the widespread practice of copying graphics files from other sites, I have included "collecting" as an activity of authorship. The survey serves to elucidate the practice of Web authorship. As is discussed in chapter 8, for instance, many homepage authors "borrowed" graphics files from other sites.

As well, test samples of personal homepages revealed considerable evidence of shared authorship roles among family and friends, and hence the seemingly anomalous allowance of "collective identity" in the definition of *personal* homepages. Moreover, the humanistic notion of the personal, rooted solely within one unified and distinct subject, has been challenged by approaches, such as feminism and cultural studies, that give greater scope to the social constitution of the personal. As such, the inclusion of collectives within the definition of a "personal" project is well warranted.

Indeed, in limiting such collectives to those that exist outside of the Web, some may object that I have not gone far enough. For instance, alliances are being created among Web authors

in the form of "rings," in which sites that ostensibly share a thematic or demographic characteristic link to a common circuit that allows surfers to navigate easily from one site to the others. As well, we might conceive of common Web construction spaces in which Web authors, not necessarily known to each other, link electronically to build one Web project. Such was the vision of Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the Web, in his early conceptions of the Web's potential ("The Web maestro," 1996).

As inspiring as such a cyberspace collective spirit may be, however, at the time of this study it was nowhere near as salient as the more local, real-space collective efforts of individuals acting with family and friends, or the individual efforts of singular Web writers. Moreover, if the collaborative potential of Web construction is not circumscribed by a grounding of collaborators in real space and time, then by the very dynamic intertextual capacity created by hyperlinkings, the Web could, by definition, be conceived of as one large collaborative project, one vast interconnected homepage. Though visionary, mystical, and "McLuhanesque," such a conception cannot for the most part advance our understanding of how individuals struggle to make their own private contributions to the Web.[11]

Textuality

As suggested above, the circumference of a Web site at any given moment in time can be quite ambiguous. The cause of this ambiguity is both technical and social, the former a function of a context in which hypertext undermines the notion of distinct, linearly-ordered texts with a fixed beginning and ending; and the latter a function of a context in which the commercial motives that dominate textual production in other media, motives which give precedence to copyright and ownership, are relatively diluted in the medium of the Web. It is theoretically appealing to celebrate the demise of discrete texts, a death that hypertext makes conceptually possible. For the purposes of conducting an empirical study, however, some form of unit needs to be circumscribed so as to enable sampling and analysis, and the operational definition attempts just that.

The unity of a corpus of interlinked files becomes especially problematic in cases in which several individuals, who perhaps share one server account, all put up pages or sets of pages with varying degrees of interdependence and independence from other pages. As well, unity becomes especially problematic in cases in which individuals who have accounts with more than one server interlink files from their separate URLs. In these cases especially, the circumference of a personal homepage can be determined only by a judgement based on an examination of the files for "some indication of unity," as the criteria specifies.

Just as the criteria addresses the synchronic dimension of textual unity, it also recognizes the equally important diachronic dimension of textuality. On the Web, sites can not only be easily changed, but they are expected to be changed. Style guides and textbooks such as Sun Microsystems' "Guide To Web Style" (1996) and Victor Vitanza's *Writing for the World Wide Web* (1998, p.61) recommend such features as a revision date to indicate the currency of a page. With such a capacity for change, the question arises as to when a homepage is still the same homepage with revisions, and when it becomes a different homepage.

Specifying the limits of diachronic unity of a changing personal homepage does not figure in the procedures of this study. Although the survey asks respondents about past changes and anticipated future changes to their homepages, the study does not at this stage examine the changes actually made to the homepages. Hence, the criteria acknowledges simply that change is possible.

Purpose

This study explores the mass media texts produced by individuals who are normally excluded from productive roles in the mass media, and as such it is especially concerned with the productive capacity of power: who has power to produce what text about what to whom. Not all text produced by individuals on the Web is free from logonomic systems of powerful institutional bodies or of commercial practices. For instance, a student who creates an

academic Web site to fulfill a course requirement, or an individual who creates a company site (even if she is the sole proprietor of the business) to promote sales, is not acting outside of the logonomic systems that prescribe academic or legal constraints on what might be said and the manner in which it might be said. For these reasons, I have introduced a criteria that distinguishes personal homepages from sites serving such "instrumental" functions.

The distinction is not absolute, but rather one of degree, for several sites include a mix of texts serving private or grass-roots community purposes with texts serving institutional or commercial purposes. The criteria is phrased in the negative (i.e., what purposes are excluded), for it does not aim to prejudge the many possible purposes that personal homepages may serve, but just to minimize the degree of one kind of purpose, namely instrumental functions on behalf of institutional practices.

Sampling procedures

Above, I have discussed the demographic profile of the Internet population and have made some conjectures, based on Buten's (1996) study and on test samplings from the Yahoo! Web directory, about the subpopulation that has posted personal homepages. These profiles reveal that the Internet population is unrepresentative of the whole population and that the homepage subpopulation seems even more strikingly unrepresentative. Among Web homepage writers listed by Yahoo!, occidental names seem disproportionately numerous and males significantly outnumber females.

We have also seen some evidence that the demographic profile of the homepage population may be open to demographic shifts. For instance, as the Internet has been achieving increasingly widespread popular participation, surveys have shown that females are slowly narrowing the gender gap. As well, as the American growth potential approaches a saturation level, it has been projected that the early American lead in Internet use will dissipate and the proportion of Asian, European, Latin American, and other users will increase (CyberAtlas, 1998). Such changing participation profiles in what is a relatively young communications medium invites consideration among researchers of their sampling objectives. Should researchers select a purely random sample of the existing population as it happens to present itself at the time of the study? Should researchers instead construct a weighted sample that better represents potential members and minority members of the population?[12]

Some options are precluded, or made prohibitively challenging, by the international scope and relative anonymity of communication on the Web. For example, attempting a sample weighted according to the geographic location of the Web author would be infeasible, both because of the international reach of some Web service providers (such as GeoCities, which offers 3 megabytes of free server space to anyone who requests it) and because of the absence of geographical clues on many homepages themselves. Similarly, selecting a sample weighted for almost any of the commonly measured demographical variables would not be feasible, as

many homepages provide little or no evidence of the age, ethnicity, education, or occupation of their authors.

One demographic variable, however, is relatively easy to identify on Web homepages: the sex of the author. In test samples, it was found that the sex of the homepage author(s) was almost always apparent, through any one of a number of clues:

- a personal photo,
- a first name that is unambiguously of one gender or the other,
- an identification in a gender-marked legal or social role (e.g., "husband," "mother"),
- a reference to a personal sexual or biological activity (e.g., pregnancy).

Hence, in light of the practicality of obtaining a sample balanced for sex, and in light of the potential research benefit of including participants from a conspicuous minority of the current homepage population (though perhaps not the future homepage population), I used a sampling procedure designed to select an equivalent number of male and female participants.

Floyd Fowler, Jr., emphasizes the importance of considering how the sample frame, the set of people that have a chance of being selected in a survey, corresponds to the total population that one would like to study (1993, pp.10-12). For this study, I used the Yahoo! Web directory's listings of personal homepages which, as discussed above, I estimated to include, at the time of the sampling in early 1997, approximately 80,000 entries. These listings, as we saw, are not without shortcomings in the thoroughness of their representability of the full population of personal homepage authors. As discussed above, Yahoo! at that time was largely an English-language service based, as it still is, in the United States and thus perhaps under-representing non-American and almost certainly non-English-speaking homepage authors. As well, Yahoo! relies on submissions by the homepage authors themselves for its homepage listings, a procedure which effectively results in self-selected listings of only those wishing to publicize their authorship. This procedure may account for the apparent under-representation of homepage authors by several orders of magnitude, if the homepage population numbers reported by Buten are accurate. Nevertheless, despite these and other shortcomings in the comprehensiveness of the Yahoo! listings, these listings are the most

exhaustive compilation of personal homepages available. As well, the inclusion of many non-English-language sites in the listings attests to their international scope.

As explained above, the Yahoo! personal homepage listings are arranged alphabetically according to the surname or site title submitted by the author. The listings are subdivided into files representing each letter of the alphabet, some at least as large as 800 kilobytes (the letter *S*). Parts of the alphabetic listings seemed to contain varying proportions of surnames from different ethnic groups. Fowler cautions against selecting a sample from a list that is ordered by some characteristic that might produce sampling distortions (p.15). Though the ethnic distribution of names throughout the alphabet would only produce minor distortions in the randomness of the Yahoo! listings, the international scope of this study warranted that these potential distortions be considered. To mitigate against a potential bias and thus to best ensure a sample that was ethnically diverse, a procedure was devised with which to sample from throughout the entire alphabetic listings.

To select the sample, I followed a procedure that Fowler identifies as systematic sampling (1993, pp.14-15). I proceeded through each alphabetic file, alternately selecting a female and then a male. The first selection from each file was made 10 screen-depths down from the top of the list. A screen depth will vary with the size of the browser window and with the browser settings; typically, my Netscape browser screen showed 12 to 20 homepage listings (some occupying two lines). After a first selection, I proceeded down a list 20 screen-depths at a time, alternating female and male selections. If the bottom of a list appeared at some point in the count between zero and ten screen-depths, no selection was made. On the other hand, if the bottom of a list appeared at a point between 10 and 20 screen-depths below the previous selection, then the final selection for that list was made at 10 screen-depths below the penultimate selection. This 10-20-10 procedure offered a reasonable guarantee to satisfy a key sampling criteria emphasized by Fowler (1993, p.13), namely that most portions of the listings were equally likely to be sampled. The two "bookend" selections (the two "10s"), when added together, offer an alphabetical interval equivalent to up to 20 screen-depths, roughly matching the other intervals. As well, the procedure offered an easy-to-implement transition

from one Yahoo! file to the next, and a means of sampling at least once from the less-frequently used letters of the alphabet, such as *Q* and *Z*, (neither of which were 20 screens deep).[13]

Each homepage visited had to satisfy four classes of criteria in order to be selected:

1. offer the instrumental means for further study,
2. fall within the guidelines defining a personal homepage,
3. meet the demographic parameters of the sampling procedure,
4. be of sufficient scope and currency to merit pursuit.

Below, I discuss each of these in turn.

First, as the study draws on analysis both of the homepages and of participant responses to the e-mailed survey, a selection could be made only when the instrumental means for accessing both were reasonably promising. Sites that were not accessible on the first attempt were passed over, as, of course, were sites that had been erased. As well, some sites offered no e-mail address of their author, precluding any possibility of contact for the survey. Finally, sites that were completely or almost completely composed in a language other than English had to be passed over. Though the Web's promise is multilingual and multinational, the vast majority of the sites reviewed during the sampling process were significantly or completely composed in English. Sites by non-Anglophone authors were not uncommonly bilingual, with two parallel sets of files, one of which would be English. This English requirement was established only because of the limited resources available to support this study; the vast range of second languages available would have drawn on a number of translation services.

The second criteria was that the site be a personal homepage, as defined above. All but a few sites satisfied the operational definition. The exception were those that failed to satisfy the third property of a personal homepage, namely, that the site does not serve primarily instrumental functions for commercial or institutional practices outside of the Web.

The third criteria in the selection process was that the homepage meet the demographic

parameters established for the sample. The alternating female-male selection process is described above. Because of this process, a substantial number of male sites were passed over on those turns of the sequence in which a female site was required. Sometimes, a site representing a group of people, usually a family but occasionally friends or roommates, would come up in the sequence of examined sites. If such a group included at least one member of the needed sex who seemed to have played a significant role in composing the site, then that member was included in the sample, and it was she (or he) who would receive the e-mailed solicitation about the survey.

The alternating female-male selection protocol produced an interesting side-effect: a higher proportion of such group sites than would be present in the full population of Yahoo! homepages. Sites by couples, for instance, could satisfy either of the male or female turns in the selection process, and in practice supplied a number of the females selected for the sample. Approximately 15% of the sample comprised such group-sponsored sites, usually a husband-wife team of co-authors who shared at least a common server if not a common index page or more.

One other demographic condition was considered, namely that the prospective participant be at least in his or her teens or older. The relatively high degree of computer literacy among the young, together with the sensory appeal of the Web, has produced some Web authors who are just of elementary-school age. In the interests of maintaining ethical research procedures (e.g., Fowler, 1993, p.132) the few who were identified as such were passed over.

The fourth set of criteria was that the homepage be of sufficient scope and recency to merit the potential survey respondent's labour in completing the survey. The minimum size was set at an equivalent of roughly a few paragraphs of text, with or without graphics, often dispersed amongst a few headings and lists and isolated lines. A small number of sites were passed over for their limited size. A slightly larger number were passed over if there was evidence that they had not been attended to since the previous summer (the sample was selected from February to April of 1997). Since the survey inquired into a respondent's composing

processes, the staleness of the recollection of those processes might not be conducive to accurate or meaningful responses. Moreover, it seemed a reasonable assumption that Web authors no longer interested in their sites would also not be interested in completing a survey about the composing of those sites. However, a rigourous application of this criteria was not attempted and would not have been feasible, as many sites do not include a revision date.

A site that did not meet all four sets of the criteria was passed over for the next site listed in the alphabetically ordered sequence. As a consequence, more sites were passed over than were accepted, primarily because of the sex selection criteria. In total, 302 sites were selected.

The recruitment of potential participants to the study and communications with the recruited participants followed the guidelines for ethical research as proscribed by the Office of Human Research at the University of Waterloo.[14] In accordance with these guidelines, each of the 302 potential participants was e-mailed a recruitment letter. Eleven e-mailed messages bounced back, presumably because of expired e-mail accounts or network failures, resulting in a total of 291 messages apparently reaching their destinations. Respondents who indicated their interest in participating were sent an information consent letter by e-mail and then the e-mailed questionnaire (see Appendix A). In total, there were 110 returned questionnaires, a response rate of 38%.

Following the return of the questionnaires, the Web sites of these 110 participants were visited and downloaded so as to establish an accessible and stable corpus of texts, representing each site at one moment in time, for later analysis. As discussed above, the circumference of a Web site is not always easily determined, and the operational definition of a personal homepage, in particular the authorship and textuality criteria, served to inform my decisions. These decisions were complicated by the fact that some participants had multiple sites and that a few of those participants had responded to the survey questions with all their sites in mind or with a site in mind that was not the site selected from the Yahoo! listings. Therefore, in the few such cases, all of the relevant sites were downloaded. Four of the sites could not be

accessed despite repeated attempts, and had presumably been taken off line or had changed URL address. As a result, the corpus of Web sites includes the work of 106 of the 110 survey respondents. The questionnaire responses of these four participants have nevertheless been retained within the set of 110, and are included in the quantitative results reported in chapter 4.

In keeping with the practices of ethical research (e.g., Fowler, 1993, p.134), every effort has been made to preserve participant confidentiality. Because of the technical capacity of Web search engines, preserving full confidentiality would require nothing less than an abstinence from any quoted material from participants' homepages. Such a restriction would, of course, render a study of Web discourse relatively meaningless, and would effectively remove the medium of the Web from the range of much scholarly research. Web pages themselves are, as a consequence of having been posted on-line, within the public domain, a status which mitigates some of the concerns about confidentiality. Nevertheless, in the few cases where I quote from Web site passages that reveal specific identifying information, such as a participant's surname, I have substituted equivalent pseudonymous information, such as part or all of my own name, *John B. Killoran*, in its place. As well, following Fowler's recommendation (1993, p.134), to preserve participant confidentiality in discussions of both the questionnaire responses and the Web sites, this study refers to each participant by an identificatory code (see Appendix B).

Becoming a Web Author

As reported in chapter 3, the sample for this study includes 110 surveys and 106 personal Web sites. The "data" from these 106 Web sites forms a large corpus of texts: over 4600 files, including an estimated 1500+ HTML files and 3000 graphics files. The total volume is well over 50 megabytes.[15] Comprising the 1500+ HTML files are discourses of various types: autobiographical profiles; self-composed fiction and poetry; lists of hyperlinks; graphics; publicity pages for local businesses, non-profit organizations, and community events; and other discourses. Some of the corpus is composed of paragraphs; much, however, is constituted of isolated phrases and words and other semiotic material, displayed in and accompanied by an enthusiastic diversity of font sizes, styles, and colours; bulleted, numbered, and indented lists; lines and spaces; tables; plain and animated graphics; background colours and "wallpaper" graphics; blinking text and scrolling marquees; video and sound clips; java applications; and of course hyperlinks. Indeed, for a population whose primary textual experience is composing passages of writing in black ink on white paper, the real opportunity offered by the Web may be not so much an opportunity for even more writing but rather for the more exclusive authorship of multi-media production: colour, graphics, layout, sound, motion. The participants in this study made use of that opportunity. How they proceeded with that opportunity is the focus of much of this analysis: what approaches to discourse emerge when individuals are given access to this new mass medium, and what contextual features can account for these approaches?

To properly address these issues, we must first understand the people who create personal homepages and their motivations for engaging in such work. This chapter addresses each of these points in turn:

1. the demographics of personal homepage producers,
2. their motives for publishing a homepage.

Who publishes

Three basic demographic measures of homepage authors were obtained from the survey: the sex, age, and nationality of participants (See Appendix B for the complete list of 110 participants along with their sex, age interval, and nationality). As expected with a participant selection process designed to balance the number of male and female candidates, an equal number of male and female participants, 55 each, responded to the survey questionnaire.[16]

The age distribution of respondents is shown in Figure 4.1. The bell-shaped distribution, peaking in the 20's, differs noticeably from the much more even age distribution of the population as a whole. (Note that the peak would be even more pronounced than it appears visually if age intervals of equal span were used.)

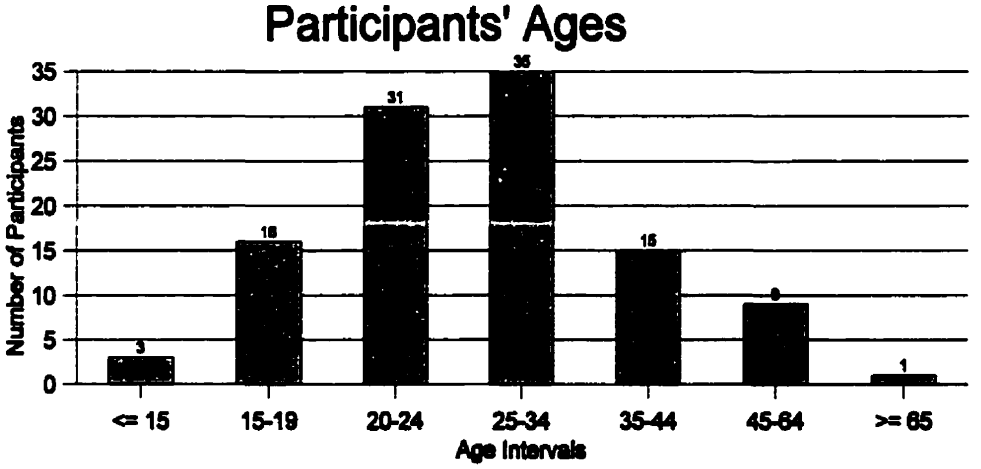


Figure 4.1: Age distribution of participants

Indeed, almost two-thirds of the respondents are in the 15-year band of young adulthood from age 20 to 34. If the teenagers from 15 to 19 years of age are added to this band, 75% of the respondents would fall within this 20-year band from age 15 to 34. A recent GVU survey (1998) similarly reports that respondents in one of the youngest age intervals (11-20) were far

more likely to have created a Web page (not necessarily a personal homepage) than those in the oldest age interval (50+), 60.2% and 32.7% respectively. After peaking at 62.4% for the 21-25 age group, their data show a general decline in the likelihood of Web page authorship as age increases. The clustering of Web authorship among teens and young adults confirms the popular assumption that the Web is primarily a pursuit among the young. Indeed, that popular assumption often emphasizes the techno-savvy generation of teenagers, who, in contrast with older generations of users, became "fluent" with computers and computer technology in their childhood as if it were their mother tongue. The one anomaly in such an interpretation, the relatively modest number of my 15 to 19 year old respondents as compared to 20 to 24 year olds (who number almost twice as many), may be a side-effect of the methodology, such as a degree of self selection among prospective participants (i.e., the teens' disinclination to participate in an academic study) or the vagaries of a small sample size. However, it may also be due to the distribution of computer and server access throughout society. Buten (1996) reports that 73% of personal homepage authors he sampled were students. Because post-secondary students are frequently offered free server space from their colleges and universities, the peak of respondents in the five-year range of 20 to 24 years may be a consequence of their technological and economic access to Web publishing, an ease of access that is denied to both younger and older generations.

This peak of participation among young adults also contributes to a relatively young average age among Web authors. Assuming the midpoint of each age interval would approximate the average age of respondents of that interval (and using the ages 14 and 65 for respondents of the *under 15* and *65 and over* intervals, respectively), the overall average age of respondents would be approximately 29. This is in line with the average ages reported by Buten (1996), who found that homepage authors on educational domains had an average age of 25, and those on commercial domains, 31. All these numbers show somewhat younger average ages of authorship than the averages reported in surveys of Internet users as a whole. A GVU survey taken in April and May, 1997 (a period roughly parallelling the period of my survey) found that Internet users' average age is 35.2 years old (1997a). As well, the GVU Center reports a continuous increase in average ages over several of their semi-annual surveys (1998).

Because Web users would likely require some time to become familiar with the medium and to learn the basic HTML coding format of Web page construction before themselves becoming Web site authors, the population of 1997 homepage authors may actually be more representative of the younger population of general Web users from 1996, 1995, and earlier (despite the fact that they would have aged in the intervening years). Buten (1996) found that personal homepage authors have a longer background with the Internet than do general Internet users. Indeed, 86% of the homepage authors in his study had been on the Internet for at least a year, and an astonishing 38% reported being on the Internet for at least four years (i.e., 1992 and earlier, when the medium was still relatively esoteric). Recent GVU surveys report similar findings. A strong correlation was observed betweeen Web page creation and years of experience on the Internet; almost three-quarters (73.6%) of those with four of more years of experience reported having created a Web page, as opposed to just 17.9% of those with less than a year's experience (1998). Despite the finding that over a third of the Internet population had begun using the Internet only in the preceding 12 months, these new users accounted for only 19% of Web page creators (GVU, 1997b).

In my study, respondents' answers to the question about their exposure to other Web sites prior to beginning composing their own site supports this pattern of Web authorship begotten of the experience of Web readership. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, at the time they had started constructing their personal homepages, the majority of these new authors had already seen dozens if not hundreds of other Web sites. Buten (1996) observes that homepage authors report having seen more Web sites than Internet users (both authors and non-authors) in general. Thus, the population of new homepage authors would seem to draw from the general population of surfers from the months and years prior to their authorship. Despite the fact that they would obviously have aged from the time of their initial foray onto the Internet to the time of their homepage authorship, the relative youth of the population of Internet users from earlier years would maintain a relatively low average age of authorship.

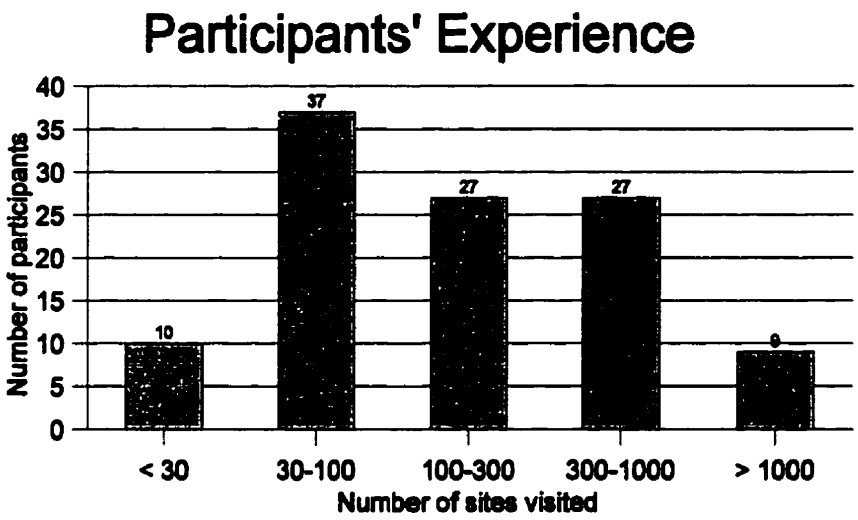


Figure 4.2: Number of sites visited prior to beginning homepage construction

Nevertheless, other factors may also be instrumental in maintaining a low average age of authorship. The relatively low status and powerlessness of youth in contemporary society, for example, may render the Web's opportunities and egalitarianism all the more enticing, a possibility which is explored below. As well, youth's marginalized "real-life" positions with respect to the institutions that dominate the communications media and, more generally, their world may also be a factor in enticing them to construct homepages, an issue which is explored in the chapter 9 discussion of participants'orientations to these institutional precedents.

Finally, participants were asked about their nationality. The question did not produce a clear set of answers, as respondents, perhaps because of their experience with other surveys' questions of demography, frequently reported not their nationality but their skin colour, their ethnic background, and their location (See Appendix B). Nevertheless, about three-quarters of the respondents appear to be American, a reflection of US dominance of the medium and of the language (English) of both the survey and the main Yahoo! directory from which survey candidates were selected. Canadians form the second-most numerous nationality, with eight

participants (including one dual-nationality participant). The remaining participants are mostly European. All but one of the participants appear to be nationals of or living in industrial countries, OECD-member countries. The only clear exception is a nominal one, a 20-year-old Philippine computer systems operator employed by an American multi-national corporation; the evidence of her Web site suggests that her socio-economic status is on par with that of her "Western" colleagues. The *World Wide* Web, at least as is suggested by the demographics of its producers, is "world wide" in only the most superficial sense. Indeed, while some of the American-based sites in the sample exhibit their author's pride in being American, or display or mention other clues of American affiliation, there is in the entire sample no direct statement identifying the US as the geopolitical locale of the author or of the author's town or state. By contrast, almost all sites based in non-US locations feature the country name. The dominant US presence on the Web has, presumably, rendered the mentioning of the country redundant. The US is the default geopolitical home of the Web. Other geopolitical locales are marked.

Why publish

Given the time and labour required to develop a Web site, and the apparent lack of material benefit accruing from having one, it is a puzzle that personal homepages have emerged at all. Institutions have financial incentives to be on the Web. Not only does the medium offer a potential for new sales, but it reduces existing expenses such as printing and mailing costs and the labour of responding to information inquiries, and, perhaps most importantly, it builds presence and ethos, symbolic capital that can be translated into material profit. By contrast, only a few participants seem to have attempted to gain a financial payback from their Web sites. People will certainly invest in spoken conversation, but the dynamic engagement, human companionship, and relative ease of conversation provide ample rewards for such behaviour. By contrast, a Web site would offer few such rewards, or only diluted versions of such rewards. Typically, much of the writing that most people engage in is composed at the behest of institutions: academic essays for their teachers, workplace writing for their employers, and so forth. What would motivate people to compose Web sites in the absence of any obvious coercion or any clear material or social incentives?

In the prophetic vision of Marshall McLuhan, the agency of technology itself causes people and society to act in the ways they do (e.g., 1964/1994, pp.67-68). People create homepages, McLuhan might claim, because the technology, their prosthetic bodily extension, has created the exigence for public participation. Such a deterministic view of technology, though elegant, reduces subjecthood simply to mechanical responses to technological stimuli. As we have seen in chapter 2, social theorists such as Anthony Giddens, as well as discourse theorists such as Kenneth Burke, would posit a more active role for human agents.

When asked, the human agents of homepage production themselves offer a diversity of reasons for their actions. Buten (1996) reports that between a quarter and a half of the homepage authors selected each of the following reasons (listed in order of descending frequency) from a list of reasons for constructing a homepage:

- means of self expression
- to learn / practice HTML
- to distribute information to friends / people I know / people I meet
- to distribute information to people I don't know with similar interests
- to make it easier to get to places I want to go on the Web
- to distribute information about myself to professional contacts or potential employers

Though most of these reasons seem oriented to the Web's instrumental function, its utilitarian value, we need not conclude that personal homepage publishing exists in a relative social vacuum. As with all other forms of semiotic production, Web site production emerges from and is implicated with the distribution of power, power both in the broader environment of the mass media and, more locally, in homepage producers' real-life positions.

As we saw in chapter 2, texts can be insightfully interpreted and explained through their social context. For instance, Bourdieu draws on an economic framework to explain how discourse is based in part on the symbolic capital of its producers and their anticipation of profit for its production. Hodge and Kress read texts as both manifesting and producing social cohesion within groups and social competition between groups. Fairclough reads texts predominantly as manifestations of the power and interests of their producers. Burke posits, in his definition of humans as symbol-using animals, that the symbol user is in part "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy" (1966, p.16); hence the symbol user is liable to produce text not just for reasons of this or that, but for more (or less), better (or worse)—the advantages to be wagered and gained with symbolic production. To these perspectives of discourse, we can add that of Michel Foucault, who, with his concept of power-knowledge, contextualizes discourses by tying their emergence to the application of power (1979). While Foucault discusses such applications across the broad scale of time and society, one interpreter of his ideas, Wendy Hollway, adopts a more focused perspective and a pragmatic orientation in positing that individuals' "investments" in any one discourse are motivated by the potential emotional or material payback accruing from engaging in the discursive position (1984, p.238).[17] Collectively, these various theoretical perspectives call attention to roles of the broad social context and of the immediate situation of social agents in a social scene to help account for the emergence and

orientation of discursive acts.

The motives for going through the effort to compose and post a homepage are similarly implicated with the context of Web producers' positions in society, their socially defined identities, the efficacy of their communication outlets in other media, the social and symbolic advantages to be accrued from having produced a Web site, and so forth. These contextual elements could provide both the motives and the rewards for the time and labour that individuals invest in the medium.

For example, in their responses to the survey question inquiring into what lead them to construct a homepage, a few participants suggested that having access to free server space provided them with the opportunity which they then took up. One 1997 study reports that 37% of Internet users have subsidized access; in 1995, an even greater proportion, 61%, had subsidized access (FIND/SVP, 1997). Free server space is typically available, for example, to students of colleges and universities; and as mentioned above, students are reported to make up a majority of homepage authors, 73% according to Buten (1996). Given the relative youth of the homepage-composing population in general and of students in particular, and hence their relative lack of economic resources, free access would effectively be a strong precondition of Web publishing. It provides the basic conditions of production to individuals who would otherwise be marginalized, as they are in the traditional media, from participating as independent producers of their own messages. Hence, homepage production is in part a function of its social setting, the social conditions that upend the traditional production regimes of the mass media and that enable relatively powerless individuals to have access as producers in their own right, rather than just as labourers of corporate production.

Evidence from both the surveys and the Web sites suggests that a person's real-life social network is also instrumental in determining who can make the leap into the new technology. Indeed, because of the novelty of the medium, composing a Web site can be a social rather than a private act, with a writer drawing on the collaborative efforts of family and friends for motivation, inspiration, and technical help. Participant g-hg reported in her questionnaire that

it was her boyfriend and her roommate who motivated her to put up her site; t-mt reported that she got ideas for her site from her boyfriend prior to composing the site; f-fr reported that her daughter gave her the playful idea for her (the mother's) site, written entirely from the point of view of the family's pet iguana; d-md reported that the content of his site was established through discussions with his wife. Though the issue of collaboration wasn't directly raised in the survey, several other participants also indicated in their survey responses or directly on their sites that they have received help from family or friends with such composing activities as generating content, coding the site in HTML, creating graphics, and offering feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Such experiences suggest that despite the stereotype that the Internet is a refuge for those with weak social skills, the act of constructing a Web site may itself be a result of social activity. The constructing may, for instance, be the occasion or the excuse to draw on and reinforce one's social network. Such social networks are perhaps increasingly important since recent multimedia additions to the Internet have made the computer network much more sensorily engaging, attracting to the medium people who would not formerly have been interested in the unfriendly technical esoterica of computers. That these people could make the leap would be due in part to the mentoring of their acquaintances. The dominance of American-based software, hardware, search engines, and Web sites in the first half-decade of the Web's development, as well as the disproportionately high percentage of American homepage authors, suggests how the "World Wide" potential of the Web has been restrained by social factors off-line. Americans can participate in part because other Americans, their friends and relatives, have participated. They provide each other with the technological support and the social incentive. People in other countries may be less likely to have such informed and experienced contacts to rely on. The disproportionately high percentage of young participants in this study, participants between ages 15 and 24, suggests that access alone has only a limited influence in determining Web participation. Rather, one joins the Web population in part because one's generation is joining the Web, thus providing a supportive social network for Web novices.

Indeed, evidence from the sample of homepages indicates that once they have secured their own access, many participants bring others into their Web spaces. The demarcation that identifies a site as an individual's or a collective's is difficult to make. Sixteen sites indicate by their titles that they are sites representing a collective (in all but one case, the collective derives from the nuclear family). Many of these purport to speak on behalf of the family as a whole. One feature common to most of these sites is the use of the third person, rather than the more usual first person, to refer to the participant himself or herself, as well as to the family members (or in one case, the roommates). Hence, all members appear equal, at least superficially. Other sites that might be characterised as semi-collective are dominated by one producer (often a parent) but have one or more pages produced by and for individual family members or friends. Others still are the result of families who share the same IP address but whose members produce sites independently with only a hyperlink joining one to the others. In sum, a Web franchise frequently draws on an individual's social network and, indeed, is sometimes about that very network.

Another reason participants mention for constructing a personal homepage is that a Web presence can occasion and facilitate contact with new acquaintances. Buten (1996) reports that at least 80% of the personal homepage authors he surveyed had received e-mail about their homepages. Such a social channel can serve as an alternative to the means and range of human contact in "real life." For an individual living in an industrial society, as almost all Web authors would necessarily be, person-to-person contact is often determined by one's institutional affiliations. One's home town or city may well have a population in the thousands or millions, but the small percentage of acquaintances one will have among that population is limited primarily to those with whom one shares or shared institutionally-structured activities. Conversations, alliances, partnerships, friendships, and marriages are generated through the institutional roles and spaces that directly or indirectly bring people together. In many ways, we are likely to know the person in the next office better than the person on the next street, despite the fact that only a minority of our hours are spent in our educational, employment, and other institutions. Such venues of course simultaneously create social constraints: students can meet other students, but only if they first satisfy an academic

institution's registration requirements and financial costs and the department's course prerequisites; employees can meet other employees, but only if they first satisfy an employer's personnel requirements and hiring qualifications and actually get hired. Individuals are thus significantly subject to the institutional dispensation of their lives that in effect circumscribes with whom they will have contact.

However, with access to the Web and the know-how to construct a personal homepage, individuals can circumvent these institutional orders and present their own interests directly to potential correspondents. Several participants wrote of their interest in or satisfaction from hearing from people who know them by the interests displayed on their homepages:

- [I posted a homepage to] interact with other people I normally would never have met. And also to see if other people out [there] share my same interests. (g-hg)
- [My homepage is a] way of meeting people who are interested in me to begin with. (s-es)
- I thoroughly enjoy getting e-mail from people I have not talked to in years, and in some cases more than 30 years, who just happen upon my page. I have also met some very interesting people on the Web who share my interests. As an Amateur (HAM) Radio operator WA3HWY for more than 30 years where one contact in 50 would be interesting, I have noticed that the signal to noise ratio on the Web is much higher. I really do enjoy meeting people on the Web. (t-tg)

Common to the responses of these and other participants is their Web site's role in creating the occasions to facilitate contact from others about their interests. In effect, the Web enables them to create their own scene for social contact, and thus to wield a bit of power over their social environment.

Overall, in accounting for what lead them to construct a personal homepage and their purposes for that homepage, participants frequently offered one of two types of reasons:

- to express themselves,
- to be part of the social phenomenon of the Web.

Following Hodge and Kress's strategy of reading semiotic production through a social

framework of power and solidarity, we can speculatively interpret the first of these as the securing of an occasion to exercise power, the prerogative to monopolize a communications topic with meanings relevant to oneself without necessarily accommodating other powerful interests. Likewise, the second can be interpreted as the creating of a means of solidarity, of establishing a membership in a social development much larger than oneself. The discussion below takes up each of these points in turn, and then explores how these Web-based motives implicate, or defer, real-life identities.

Self-expression

In explaining their own motives for initiating Web construction and their purposes for maintaining a Web site, several participants wrote of their wish to express themselves or to display their talents. For instance, participant d-h explained that the subject matter of her page was selected "to show more of my personality." Participant t-jj, whose site is devoted solely to her introspective prose poems, explained that the activity and objective of her Web site was, in part, "therapeutic": "I had some things on my mind and one of my friends had a Web page with an online diary. I thought it might help me a bit." Buten (1996) reports that self-expression was the most frequently chosen reason for constructing a homepage, an option selected by roughly half of his survey respondents.

Though seemingly insular and hence absolved of the social environment of power negotiation, self-expression or self-display in fact emerges from, and the success of their catharsis is contingent upon, the social environment. For example, Fairclough observes how producing discourse about oneself is in part an effect of the ubiquity of promotional discourse in the media and in public affairs. Promotional discourse from these social venues infiltrates the manners of self-representation in subjects' own discursive production:

> The colonization of discourse by promotion may also have major pathological effects upon subjects, and major ethical implications. . . . [I]t is increasingly difficult not to be involved oneself in promoting, because many people have to as part of their jobs, but also because self-promotion is becoming part-and-parcel of self-identity . . . in

> contemporary societies. (1993, p.142)

In effect, promotional discourse becomes implicated in the practices out of which subjects form themselves.

Social psychologist Kevin Murray (1989) recognizes self-expression as fundamental to what he describes as a subject's "personal identity project," but that project, rather than being introspective, is instead contingent upon a supportive social environment: "[T]he expression of individuality is something for which there is a certain time and place. Finding the right time and place remains a necessary part of the personal identity project. . . ." (p.196). In addition to the raw components of the right setting, self-expression can also be mediated through social and cultural practices, including those of popular culture, practices which Bourdieu recognizes as "opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space . . ." (1984, p.57). Social and cultural practices, such as Web publishing, may thus feasibly be read by the occasions they furnish for individuals to achieve recognition of their subjecthood.

Psychologist Peter Gollwitzer observes that since a recognition by others is crucial in the formation of one's identity, subjects' self-development is necessarily a social enterprise (1986, p.144, 146). Other social scientists make similar observation about the social criteria of selfhood (e.g, Baumeister and Tice, 1986, p.63; Markus and Nurius, 1986, p.956), in particular the recognition by others of one's socially desirable selfhood (e.g., Baumeister, 1982, p.3; Slugoski and Ginsburg, 1989, p.45). Kenneth Burke makes similar, more general observations about the addressed nature such basic elements of human subjecthood as "conscience" (1950/1969, p.223) and socialization (p.46). In recognizing such seemingly non-rhetorical, foundational elements as contingent upon an audience, Burke argues, we may bring them into the realm of rhetoric. In effect, we may conceive of selfhood as addressed, seeking an validation from an audience.

Gollwitzer goes on to reason that since individuals need witnesses to consummate what he calls their "self-symbolizing" (their acquisition of the symbols that represent certain identities), their identity-forming behaviour will be geared to securing an audience:

> Since self-symbolizing that is noticed by others appears to be more effective in providing a sense of possessing the intended identity than self-symbolizing that remains unnoticed by others, individuals oriented toward achieving a particular identity should be especially concerned with finding an audience for their identity-related striving. (1986, p.147)

Moreover, individuals apparently need not be fussy about which audience their symbolizing is received by, for it is the acknowledgement offered by having an audience, of being witnessed, that individuals require (p.149). Self-expression before any audience is a means of "self-fashioning" for oneself.[18] In a sense, the symbolization precedes the self that makes it, and becomes the means of reifying that self: "I symbolize before you, therefore I am."

Such approaches to the constitution of the self offer suggestive parallels with the role of self-expression in personal homepage publishing. Because it brings together strangers, the Web provides a setting that warrants individuals' self-presentation in the first place. Indeed, Web publishing would seem to be an ideal venue for identity-forming behaviour, with the relative ease of access it offers even to socially marginalized individuals and its provision of a fast-growing anonymous audience who can represent the vicarious social acknowledgement one needs for self-authorship. It is thus perhaps in their continued efforts to develop and reaffirm dimensions of their identities that individuals invest their time and energy to express themselves to a potentially vast but undifferentiated and anonymous public.

Moreover, if we accept Roy Baumeister's conclusion that individuals are more oriented to communicating information (about themselves) than to seeking information (1982, p.22), then the phenomenal growth of the so-called Information Superhighway may be significantly motivated by individuals' (and perhaps even institutions') desire to be witnessed; information becomes the agency with which to entice recognition and acknowledgement from others. Evidence of this presents itself in the high frequency of Web counters, appearing on 64 of the sites in the sample. Counters track the number of requests made of a file by client computers.[19] Some participants expressed, both in their surveys and on their sites, their pleasure in tracking the increase in their counter number. Participant g-hg, for instance,

described how it was this index of contact she observed on a roommate's homepage that first lead her to construct a site of her own: "[M]y roommate . . . was getting so many hits a day from it I thought it would be great to hear from so many people." Participant g-ncg described that the purpose of his site was "the pursuit of hits which make me feel cool." On his site, he also encourages surfers "to click here insessently [sic] to add numbers to [the] Home Page counter" of a friend (underlined text is hyperlinked).

That such acknowledgement is available through the Web suggests how the medium supports a different distribution of power than do other media. Of speech interactions, for instance, Hodge and Kress observe that the appearance of discourse about oneself can be seen as a manifestation of the power of one's position, one's leeway in monopolizing the topic of the exchange (1988, p.44). Of spoken conversation, Bourdieu argues that one must first and foremost win the right to speak, to secure the consent of an audience to indeed fulfill its function of audience attending to one's self-expression. As discussed in chapter 2, Bourdieu views such power as exercised through the symbolic capital one can manifest in a situation: one's language usage, one's social class and status, and so forth. For many people and perhaps especially for the young, the symbolic capital required to secure adequate acknowledgement is unavailable from their positions in their local environments. For these people, the Web offers a public stage nevertheless, a forum within which they are placed on at least a nominally equal footing with higher status individuals, and can produce without being interrupted or visibly rejected.

Concomitant with such accessibility of the vox populi to the Web is, of course, a diminution of the Web's capacity to retain its initial aura of exclusivity, its ascendancy in the hierarchy of social activities. Access to publishing without effective rights of passage or vetting weakens the social value of personal homepages. They have acquired some of the stigma that adheres, in other spheres, to the activities of the relatively powerless and their undifferentiated works. A recognition of this is shared by Web authors themselves. A few participants forthrightly placed the motive for their sites in self-expressive needs that are not commonly perceived as virtuous: "vanity" (s-gs, g-kgi), "an ego boost" (s-es), "pure and simple ego gratification" (a-

ka). Participant s-gs asserted, "I decided I wanted the pages to be 'vanity' pages... things that describe myself rather than thematic [topics]." As participant h-eh explained in justifying her own site, a site dominated by representations of her life (e.g., photos, links to friends pages, etc.), the genre itself can be defined by the motivations of its authors: "Homepages are basically ego enhancing fluff...." (h-eh). The stigma attached to the genre also opened it to criticism from a participant whose site—a genealogical archive of records, documents, and information relating to Pictou County, Nova Scotia—perhaps proactively abstains from any personal appearance or representation of its author (though it is apparently motivated by a family background in Pictou County):

> Most of the home pages I surfed seemed to be *ego-driven*--[that is] this is MY family, if you are connected to MY family please contact ME. Not many at all were interested in "fleshing out" the historical aspects of the families [sic] locale, etc. I thought that was rather selfish. I personally don't respond or work well with people who are that self-involved. (r-mr)

Perhaps mindful of the social stigma of appearing self-absorbed, several participants, in their surveys, accounted for the display of their photos, identities, tastes, and experiences not purely in personal terms but in interpersonal terms. Appendix C lists the responses of a number of participants to survey questions about their sites' content and purposes and their own motives. These responses reveal an orientation not to their sites per se but to other people. The responses represent information about oneself as an offering to other people so that these people may "view" and "become aware" and "know" the author. Some participants express their motives in a discourse that highlights their agency with others: "I wanted people . . ." (k-sk and p-kp); "I wanted them . . ." (v-j). They are highly conscious of having an audience, in particular, a pliable audience. With a homepage, individuals can vicariously exercise such an arms-length engagement with other people, preparing a setting for their activities and knowledge, and in so doing emplotting public recognition of themselves. It is a rare opportunity for acknowledgement for a large segment of the population who may otherwise seldom have the relative degree symbolic capital to warrant special recognition.

To a degree, the diffused sources of production in the medium, spread among millions of people, makes authorship itself an issue and thus provides some legitimacy to self-represent. The initial homepages of the first half of the decade often had little to say aside from "Hi, this is me and here are my favourite links." Such is the expectation of a brief personal profile that one participant (g-kgl) introduces himself by pointing to the supposed generic expectations of a homepage: "Well, I guess I should include an Info page about myself, as every personal Web page includes, right?" By indexing these perceived norms, he can then proceed with himself legitimately.

Apart from such generic expectations, legitimate social occasions for autobiographical indulgences in front of strangers are relatively rare in the discursive experiences of most people. In the absence of an external exigence that would call forth such display, viewers may be disposed to assign motive to the agent: this author must be self-centered—or worse, needing attention—to be preoccupied with publicizing himself or herself. So as to "get on with it" while preserving face, some homepage authors shift the motive of such self-representation away from themselves by indexing a discourse or occasion in which self-representation is socially valid.

One strategy is to draw on the voices of personal introductions from familiar social occasions. For example, two participants introduce their profiles with very recognizable statements from polite social discourse:

- "Allow me to introduce myself." (i-li)
- "Let me introduce myself." (w-pw)

These statements, though diluted of literal meaning on a Web page (How could we, reading these, either allow or disallow someone we don't know to pursue the act of having written the page we are currently reading?), act by indexing the environments of polite society with which they are associated. As Bakhtin would suggest, these utterances belong to those environments, and are recognizable to language users as objects of those environments. These utterances construct a favourable subject position for their author by drawing on the familiar voice of, say, a charming socialite, gregariously extending his or her hand in greeting.

Another strategy is to shift the onus of one's self-display onto the reader, as these two participants do in introducing themselves:

- "So, you want to know more about Big Mike. Well, here are [sic] some stuff you might need to know plus a couple of pictures." (a-mar)
- "Ok ok ok, so you want to know more about the Daphmeister [referring to her alias *Daphne*]. Don't we ALL?" (a-ka)

On the one hand, these shifts onto the reader are not without reason. Both of these introductions greet readers who surf in from the participant's site index pages to the personal profile page. The index page hyperlinks are clearly labelled, and so unless a surfer clicked on the link by accident or arrived at the page by a route that didn't intersect the index page, the surfer must presumably be curious about the site owner. As such, these statements make justifiable claims about their readers. Nevertheless, a plausible assumption about readers' interests, however valid, does not itself motivate the printing of that assumption. But making the statement does shift the motive of self-representation from the writer's ostensible needs for self-expression onto the reader's own suspect, prurient curiosity in the lives of strangers, hence leaving the writer with one up on the reader. Moreover, having constructed as the exigence for one's display an audience eager to know about oneself, the author can then proceed, not within the unfamiliar situation of public self-display but within the familiar situation, and hence with a familiar discursive disposition, of offering a response to the implied question from a keen listener.

Yet another strategy is to frame the event of self-representation as casual, breezy, ironic. For instance, three homepage writers, all teenaged or young adult males, adopt the same familiar cliché to link to or entitle a page profiling themselves:

- "Everything you wanted to know about Termie [a diminutive of his alias] but were afraid to ask" (header title of p-jp's personal page)
- "I hope you find everything you ever wanted to know about me but were afraid to ask. . ." (near the opening of f-tf's profile page)
- "Everything you've ever wanted to know about me" (g-kgl's index page link to his personal profile page)

Literally, of course, the statements offer at best a charitable representation of reality. (How would writers know we "always wanted to know" about them? How could they offer "everything"? Why would we be "afraid" to ask?) Among the generation that these homepage authors belong to, the phrase is likely most familiar as the cliché that Woody Allen appropriated to entitle his 1970s film spoof about sex. As such, the cliché suggests lighthearted revelry, and the use of a cliché—any cliché—gives the appearance that the authors do not take their self-display too seriously, but display nevertheless. We might contrast the exaggerated cliché with a more prosaic, slow-witted, but accurate alternative: "To read about me, click here." Unlike this alternative, the cliché lets its authors express an ironic view of their public display, itself an indirect part of their self-expression.

A similarly humourous framework is adopted by participant g-kgi, for instance, to introduce a list of 12 trivia statements about himself, most of which use simple sentence structures beginning prosaically with "I": "Much of my life is documented on the World Wide Web. The following allegations are true" (g-kgi). The appropriated legal discourse frames the self-display as an irreverent public confession and hence orients what, again, might otherwise be read as a need for acknowledgement as, instead, a self-effacing display of wit.

In all of these examples, we can observe how finding a socially-valid frame for self-representation can legitimate what otherwise may be perceived as the weakness of public leakage. Through these means of validating their self-representation, writers secure both the exigence to begin comfortably and, of course, a "positive face," and thus construct for themselves a subject position of relative social power.[20]

Participation

In chapter 2, we saw how Hodge and Kress place semiotic production within a social context constituted in part by social groupings. One of the functions of semiotic production is to shape, consolidate, and reinforce such alliances, to index and produce solidarity. In much traditional public discourse, dominated by institutions which have access to the resources of media production and distribution, real large-scale groupings are formed and engaged.

For individual producers of personal homepages, by contrast, largely without the power to shape the world beyond their own locale, the act of producing on the Web can be a means to consummate at least one small-scale bond of solidarity: their own membership in the social phenomenon of the fast-growing World Wide Web. For instance, personal homepages need not necessarily be thought of as discrete units but perhaps as, in the conception of one set of Web experts cited by Hunt, "electronic tribes," groupings formed of Web producers on the basis of their mutually hyperlinked sites (1996, p.383). Rings would be one type of informal "tribe," joining Web producers on the basis of a shared Web theme or commonality of authorship. Authors can easily link up their homepage to a ring on the basis of a perceived match with that ring theme. The ring sequence is operated from one server such that a surfer can hyperlink through the sequence from node to node. Ten sites in the sample are nodes of rings; some of the characteristics of the membership they confer are discussed below in chapter 8.

Even the act of posting a Web site can confer a sense of membership. Burke observes how an activity can come to symbolize a status for its performer by virtue of its social orbit: "[A] specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. 'Belonging' in this sense is rhetorical" (1950/1969, p.28). One becomes "consubstantial" with a new group or development by engaging in some defining activity that is, for instance, exclusive to that status.[21] The public gesture of having constructed and posted a Web site can thus be seen as the symbolic action by which to join the Web, to stake one's claim to its membership, to truly belong to it.

Several participants described their motivations and the purposes of their Web pages along such lines, as means by which to embody their membership with a phenomenon much larger than themselves. Some participants spoke of wanting to be "part" of the Internet (a-mar, b-sb) or of a "growing group of Web page owners" (b-to), of wanting "to be involved in the [I]nternet" (c-dc), "to get in on the action" (l-bl), to make their "mark" (c-jc, e-el, l-bl, m-lm), and to "stake out [their] place" (v-s). Other participants indicated they were inspired by their already-established lines of solidarity:

- "Everyone else was doing it" (l-tl)
- "Friends were doing it." (e-ke)
- "Everyone else I worked with had one. . . ." (a-kal)

The degree to which a personal Web site is not so much about a message as a membership is revealed in participants' explanations of how they decided that their site was ready to be posted. At least 37 participants, one-third of the sample, suggested that their site was on-line from very early in its drafting stage. Several reported that they had essentially composed the site on-line, since its initial conception. They seem to have been inspired by the rush not to communicate something but to achieve the position of Web communicator:

- "I placed it on the internet [sic] as soon as I could. Just wanted to get out there, be a part of it." (a-mar)
- "As soon as I had a few links and information I placed it online so I could 'stake-out' my place on the Interent [sic]" (t-jst)
- "I put it up as soon as I had just my name on [it]. Didn't wait for any epiphany or perfection" (d-cd)
- "[A new Web page goes on-line as] soon as I type <HTML>!!!" (s-as)

The very emergence of the Web seems to have presented these participants and others with a new way of belonging. As participant b-jbo writes in her survey, "[The purpose for having a homepage is so] I can say 'I have a home page'." The new medium is thus perhaps used as much for its status as for its communications potential. As a new means to construct solidarity with something bigger than oneself, its collective message is, "We belong."

Detours from real-life identity

Curiously, while the actions of expressing oneself and of consummating one's membership in a social phenomenon no doubt provide some real personal satisfaction, these seemingly personal actions can be accomplished without necessarily implicating one's real-life identity. In only slightly more than half of the sites (59) in the sample is the site author's full name made readily accessible to surfers. The rest of the sites maintain varying degrees of anonymity. In their research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) in task-oriented groups, Spears and Lea observe that the anonymity of CMC "may have a number of liberating and equalizing effects. It may reduce inhibition, feelings of accountability, and deference to others" (1994, p.430). They go on to discuss how the CMC environment muffles the cues of status and power and hence reduces their influences on participants. Thus, at least in such laboratory settings, CMC offers a social environment of low power differential and a potentially high capacity for solidarity. For individuals unaccustomed to having a public presence, the anonymity of the Web may offer a similar liberating environment.

Of course, the Web also offers the vulnerability of potentially unwanted exposure. One reason to maintain anonymity is to preclude the possibility of being traced in real life outside of the security of the Web. One unnamed participant, r-gj, whose site contains no "serious" content—the site is a bizarre collection of inside jokes, fanciful definitions, and seemingly meaningless activities—explained that his choice of site content was determined by the criteria of anonymity: "[I] [t]hought about what I could write about myself without sacrificing privacy." As in "real life," on the Web security is especially a concern for female participants. Participant h-eh, a woman in her early twenties, explained how she took precautions on her site: "I tried not to reveal too much info about myself because I don't want an internet [sic] stalker." She identifies herself with only her Internet Relay Chat call sign (an alias). Another female participant, h-dgr, whose name appears only on her resume page, related that she had received an "obscene e-mail one night--at the time I got nervous that it revealed a little too much information about me." She went on to explain that, as a precaution, she took her resume off-line for a while.

Anonymity produces not only a "freedom from" but a "freedom to," a freedom to adopt positions without maintaining and defending the image of a self-consistent person in both one's on-line and "real-life" identities. A name is one locus point holding a supposedly singular subject to his or her full corpus of attitudes and actions. As Burke points out,

> To give a proper name to one person . . . is to recognize some principle of identity or continuity running through the discontinuities that, of themselves, would make the world sheer chaos. (1945/1969, p.96)

Burke thus identifies the name as one method of "reduction," of circumscribing the world (p.96). Personhood may indeed not be so singular, but in our rhetoric a person must be consistently explicable. A setting in which a person needs not meet this requirement can foster discourse that might not otherwise appear. For instance, participant v-s, whose site has become a pivotal Internet centre for would-be vampires, introduces her "real-life" position on her homepage by confronting the issue of socially valid identities:

> "I seem to confuse a lot of people. Most can't understand what I am, somewhere between vampire and human. I call myself a Vampyre, meaning that I am mortal but have the heart and soul of a vampire."

In her survey response, she points to anonymity as the enabling condition for her vampire discourse:

> "It's a way for me to express a side of me that isn' [sic] accepted in real life. I can express myself in writing almost anonymously[;] no one can see my face when they read my work."

To the degree that the effort in creating these sites—each of the four sites mentioned above is large or well-researched and the resourceful vampire site, a meeting place for the community of on-line vampires, must require extraordinary devotion for its continual maintenance—is justified with some pay-back, it would likely be in part a satisfaction from having ventured and having done so safely, for these participants can receive no explicit recognition for their labour. In the case of the first participant mentioned above (r-gj), his site is one of nine in the sample that either features no name of the author at all, or a name that is too buried within the site or mentioned too indirectly to convincingly establish the site's ownership. The three

female participants are among 16 participants (both female and male) whose sites identify them by an alias, either with the complete exclusion of the real name or clearly dominating the appearance(s) of the real name. The "Vampyre" (participant v-s), for instance, introduces her alias as her "literary foil." Her e-mail link also introduces another personal pseudonym as her "alter ego."

Such anonymity is also a regular feature of other parts of the Internet. In her study of participants of Multi-User Domains, Sherry Turkle observes how the anonymity of CMC has unleashed individuals' experimentation with alternative genders, personalities, and statuses: "We are encouraged to think of ourselves as fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process" (1995, pp.263-64). The Internet furnishes a setting for these fecund selves to be produced. With its provision of anonymity, subjects are not beholden to the forces that compel identities to be singular, such as the social imperatives of consistency and self-unity, and the practices of institutions that, in real life, channel individuals into stable categories and statuses. The Web offers subjects the power to write without the potential victimage of having been written, of being identified and regulated and judged.

* * * * *

In chapter 1, we saw how the Internet has been both celebrated for its liberating potential and criticized for its apolitical, escapist potential. With a few exceptions, this chapter has presented a fairly optimistic view of individuals' conquest of the Web. The Web offers individuals a venue to exercise a degree of power that is not easily equalled in their real-life positions and activities. However, the new medium is not a panacea for the invisibility and inefficacy of individuals in contemporary society. Indeed, on the Web, individuals' spaces are much as they are in real life, at the peripheries and less-travelled roads of cyber-geographies dominated by well-constructed institutional spaces. In finding their space in a mass medium they share with institutions, individuals are confronted with the problem of the illegitimacy of their contributions. We turn to this problem in the next chapter.

Self-Publishing and Self-Censorship

Rites of publishing

As we saw in chapter 1, the Internet's potential impact on society has been the subject of much thoughtful speculation. While its possibilities as a new medium of commerce, of education, and of polity have been the object of much speculation and prophesy, these possibilities are perhaps not the most novel and ambitious of the Internet's potential. Commercial enterprises, educational establishments, and governments already have access to and effective control of most other media. These sectors of society have long since come to exert their collective dominance of the majority of print material that reaches the public: advertisements, newspapers, tax forms, product documentation, textbooks, and other institutionally-sponsored texts form the bulk of what most people would encounter in their daily reading material. Other media programing, such as on TV and radio, require sophisticated technological equipment, skilled labour, large-scale production and distribution systems, and substantial financial investments. With such resource requirements, access to these media is, for the most part, precluded to all but large institutions; and to recoup such investments, these institutions frequently offer, in the guise of entertainment, experiences that support the objectives of marketing strategies: advertisements, product placements in films, marketing of soundtracks and product spin-offs, and so forth. For these institutions that have, collectively, dominated print and electronic media, the Web is just one more medium through which to achieve such objectives.

For individuals, however, the Web is an opportunity to communicate that has no parallel. Before the development of the Web, and even now, in what are likely still the early years of the Web's emergence, individuals' participation in the communications of electronic media has been largely in the role of recipients, passive watchers of television, listeners of radio, readers of newspapers, viewers of videos, and so forth. As producers of their own texts,

individuals have been largely excluded from the media, communicating mostly one to one with a relatively small circle of relatives and friends who share their spatial-temporal locale and also others with whom they come to interact through their mutually compatible institutional affiliations: students, for example, with other students in their classes, or with a professor in their role as students of that professor, or with the librarians and staff at the library as student members of that library, and so on. Their communication is circumscribed by institutional practices and their positions within institutions. Only individuals who are acting in the roles prescribed by institutions, roles such as TV quiz show host, radio disk jockey, business reporter, have access to participate directly in the mass media, and even then only within the limits of those roles. Individuals without access to these positions are largely excluded from the mass media, except in well-defined roles in which individuals play not so much themselves but rather identities of anonymous members of the public: radio phone-in callers, TV person-on-the-street interviewees, game show contestants, and so on. It is only through such alliances with institutions that individuals can gain access to the media that dominate much of their lives.

The Web is potentially different than this class of media. The Web offers individuals not merely more communication or different communication but a different way of participating in communication. On the Web, individuals can be the writers, designers, artists, and producers of their own media communication. Individuals can act in support of or against or with indifference to the institutions that otherwise dominate most of the communications media they are exposed to. Individuals can in principle outmanoeuvre the institutional dispensation that moderates their social lives as communicators by reaching people of different cities, different nationalities, different social statuses, different institutional affiliations, different demographic profiles, to become communicators to a potential mass audience whose mutually shared interests will validate their own interests and identities. As one participant wrote in his survey response, "We were . . . fascinated that we could 'publish' a page that would, in essence, be available to the 'whole world'" (participant b-kcb).

With this unprecedented opportunity to publish, to become publishers, individuals confront a problem with which most will have had little experience: what to publish. Individuals may have long since been inculcated with means and content of successful discursive production in their personal lives, and may indeed have lots to say, within that environment. What the Web offers that is so radically different from other media is not just a change in technology but a change in what Hodge and Kress refer to as "logonomic systems," the social rules that guide how and by whom texts are manufactured and consumed (1988, p.4, 266). As we saw in chapter 2, by approaching communication in its full social context, Hodge and Kress provide a framework through which we can explain not just language and text, but also the social and ideological conditions that enable the human behaviour of being the writer or producer of a certain kind of communication, the participant in a certain medium. As Hodge and Kress explain, "The behaviour of the participants is constrained by logonomic systems which operate through messages about their identity and relationships, signifying status, power and solidarity" (p.40). It is through the logonomic systems that individuals understand and often accept their positions not as producers but as consumers of mass media communication, as producers only of private one-to-one communication, in small informal alliances that are shaped by family identities, circles of friendships, and institutional roles.

The new technological opportunity to become publishers on the Web does not necessarily or easily absolve the accumulated messages subjects would have received and absorbed about their proper place and role at the periphery of the mass media. As we have seen in chapter 2, these messages are formative, contributing not merely to a conscious obedience when power is manifested, but, more insidiously, to a construction of a consenting self. As Bourdieu points out, one develops "the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space" (1991, p.82). Bourdieu explains how this dimension of subjecthood reproduces itself not by an explicit coercion or repression, but by one's own perception of one's place in the social dispensation:

> "Dominated agents . . . tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us'), adjusting their

> expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them, in a word, condemning themselves to what is in any case their lot, . . . consenting to be what they have to be, 'modest', 'humble', and 'obscure'." (1984, p.471)

The acceptance that gradually crystalizes as one's habitus produces an effect not dissimilar to that of Foucault's conception of the panopticon, discussed in chapter 1. Once individuals have been constructed as dominated agents, even the removal of the agency of domination (the gaze from the centre of the panopticon) will not necessarily unleash an ostensibly authentic, unfettered self. Rather, a subject will, in his or her actions and discursive production, maintain a degree of self-censorship that may become inextricably self-formative. Such self censorship, in principle, may be discernable, in subjects' productions on the Web for instance, in the range of what does get said as opposed to what could feasibly have been said.

Thus, an explanation of what appears on the Web might consider the paradigmatic dimension of discourse: the potential of what could appear in these spaces. Similar media offer a clue as to what we might expect. MUD's (Multi-User Domains) and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) groups, for example, provide opportunities for person-to-person socialization that is perhaps, because of anonymity, even more diverse and inventive than the socialization among participants at a typical social gathering. Though there exists with these networks the capacity to archive the discussions, users often tend to participate in exchanges as they do in other exchanges that are ephemeral, such as spoken conversations, for example. When contrasted with the contributions made in print media, contributions to these networks are made relatively quickly, and the use of lower-case in lieu of upper-case letters, incomplete sentences, and emoticons is generally intended to index the informality of social conversations.

A homepage, however, despite its widely recognized status as a project under perpetual construction, is also perpetually accessible, 24 hours a day on all days of the year. More than

in other computer-mediated communications networks, a homepage is, as the name implies, one's "home" on the Internet, potentially as permanent as a real-life home (and, of course, as succeptable to repairs and renovations and remodelings as real-life homes). Given the endless number of things that could be published—the collection of all the things we speak and hear each day; our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes; the activities and events that fill our days and lives—and given the ease with which a Web site cumulatively grows upon itself, the surprise is not just that individuals have published on the Web but rather that so relatively few have published on it and that those few write relatively little. Based on an exhaustive and carefully executed study, Buten (1996) estimates that just under 6% of Internet users had posted a personal homepage. In contrast to the apparent loquacity of the other Internet media discussed above, and in contrast to discourse in real-life homes, discourse on Web homepages is rather taciturn. In a medium celebrated for its unfettered free speech, why is so little seemingly being said?

In want of legitimacy

Though the e-mail survey of 110 participants did not directly probe the possible constraints or reservations or inhibitions participants may have felt about their messages to the world, some participants nevertheless suggested, in accounting for the content of their homepages, that their contribution or potential to contribute was mediocre or limited. Some participants characterized their own homepages as "boring" (d-bdd) and as lacking in original material to contribute (e.g., m-m). Participant r-cr, for instance, whose site at the time of this study was simply a one-page expression of her infatuation with golfer Tiger Woods, wrote, "I realized that i [sic] didn't have anything helpful or beneficial to talk about, so i knew i could only talk about personal issues."

Other participants characterized their contributions as typical of personal homepages, but suggested that the genre itself, as a whole, has little to offer:

- "Most of the home pages I surfed seemed to be *ego-driven*. . . ." (r-mr)
- "Homepages are basically ego enhancing fluff, so [mine] is mostly autobiographical, [with] favorite links, intrests [sic], pictures" (h-eh).
- "I *just* put what I had seen on other people's personal Web pages on mine. *Just* the usual stuff: a little about me, some links. . ." (w-jw; emphasis mine).

The environment of the Web, then, is not fully one of unfettered free speech. Though posting anything is, in principle, quite possible, it is not necessarily perceived as making a valid contribution. The new medium has evidently started to produce its own contextualized logonomic system, its set of tacit guidelines of how individuals are to make legitimate contributions, and what they are to contribute.

Some participants indicated a growing recognition of such "standards," describing with hindsight their initial contributions to the Web as relatively invalid in light of their later efforts to achieve legitimacy:

- "My first page was my 'household entropy' page, basically just entertainment" (g-l).
- "We initially started with a 'boring' page that was strictly 'about us'. We looked it over and decided no one would ever want to vist [sic] such a page :), or come back" (b-kcb).

This recognition that good personal homepages should not necessarily be "personal" or "home"-oriented points to an irony that has developed in the ostensibly unfettered domain of popular free speech that the Web is often represented as being. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, has observed how personal homepages have evolved in a way that was unanticipated in his earlier vision of the Web's potential for personal and family domains:

> "[T]he personal home page is not a private expression; it's a public billboard. . . . It's openness, and it's great in a way, it's people letting the community into their homes. But it's not really home. They may call it a home page, but it's more like the gnome in somebody's front yard than the home itself." ("The interview," 1996)

Tim Berners-Lee's distinction between the home and the gnome is suggestive of the incongruity between the logonomic systems that shape one's discourse in private contexts among family and friends and those of one's published discourse on the Web. Few formal rules would apply in the relatively intimate atmosphere within the home, but the public exposure of the "gnome" on the Web may invoke a variety of rules for suitably circumspect behaviour from associated situations of public display.

For instance, in their survey responses, several participants suggested that what might otherwise be characterised as a writer's invention process is in part a censorship process. Participants seemed to conceive of themselves and their represented selves as quite separate and wrote of deciding how the latter might be put in the service of the former, by deciding

- "what I wanted people to know about me" (d-n),
- "what stuff about myself that I wanted to put on display" (a-mar),
- "how much I wanted other people to know about myself" (l-ajl),
- "the person I wanted to be reflected as" (a-ca).

Such a process of deliberate self-fashioning is similar to that which sociologist Erving Goffman has theorized as the construction of a "front" in an individual's performance in the presence of others. In Goffman's dramaturgical framework, the front is "the expressive equipment . . . intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his [or her] performance" (1959, p.22). The heart of Goffman's thesis is that in self-presenting, one "defines the situation" of one's performance. The front one constructs contributes to that definition of the situation (p.22).

With such a novel medium as the Web offering such unprecedented mass communication opportunities to private citizens, the situation of the communicating individual is indeed initially undefined and open to contention. Berners-Lee's image of the gnome in the front yard evokes visually and socially the positions we make claim to when we go on-line with a Web site. The gnome is a publicly sanctioned human image, perhaps eye-catching or at least interesting, something the neighbours will notice, but not exactly in the proportions of its owner. Its electronic equivalent, the homepage, is a construction of that subject position, the socially valid position of having the home with the *correct* gnome in front of it.

Berners-Lee's interpretation of the development of homepages underlines how having something to say and having something legitimate to display are separate conditions. We can elucidate this distinction with Bourdieu's economic framework for language usage, introduced in chapter 2. A communications market will develop valuations both for the contributions made to it and for its contributors. Among the valuations offered by participants as criteria to be satisfied by their own work are that their sites be "eyecatching," "entertaining," "educating" (a-ma), "interesting," "funny," "thought provoking" (k-ck), "creative," "attractive" (o-so), and so forth. Contributors' profit potentials can be modified by the symbolic capital they can invest in their contributions, capital such as technical know-how, artistic talent, and writing skills. Contributions are also conditioned by contributers' anticipation of profit (e.g., 1977, p.655), a circumspection which, in some markets, may result in self-censorship (e.g., p.656).

On the market of the so-called Information Superhighway, one of the most liquid types of symbolic capital is having access to—as the name suggests—information. Based on a 1995 study using the database for the Web search engine Open Text, Tim Bray (1996) identifies the most frequent site destinations of Web hyperlinks, producing what is in effect a popularity pole dominated by universities, research centers (such as NASA), and computer information resources (such as Yahoo!). These institutions, with their material, financial, and personnel resources, can control and produce what is popularly recognized as legitimate information and can construct and maintain sites that are perceived to be informative. Institutions thus dominate the marketplace of the Web and their information becomes one of its predominant currencies. This attitude to information was revealed in the survey, where several participants explained their contributions to the Web as determined by their command of a domain of information:

- ". . . something I knew / know a lot about . . ." (d-wb);
- "[s]ubjects which I felt I had information to offer . . ." (w-a).

"What you see on my homepage is a manifestation of what skills and general knowledge I have," wrote participant i-li. Participant g-jgd explained his choice of content by recalling "[a]n old writer's adage: write what you know." One graduate student's matter-of-fact explanation perhaps accounts for a feature that appears on some student sites—essays and other course work—work that is perhaps seen to be validated by the institutional sanction that a college or university offers to work that is "academic": "I was a student, so I had material at hand. I presented my project" (g-jg).

Participants' explanations also suggest the inhibitions they felt on what they had to contribute. Participant a-aa reports that he "hate[s] seeing resumes and 'these are pictures of my friends' on people's sites. [A]ll I had to offer was my writing and my general wackiness so that's what I gave." Participant g-ncg writes of a gradual acquisition of what he considers to be Web material that is valid:

> "The only thing I had to offer was my advice on what Web pages were cool / useful, so I decided to make a page with a list of those links. Later, as I found new things that I

> could offer that might help others, I created the page (e.g. [USA] constitution text, shareware recomendations [sic], movie reviews)."

These participants indicate a sensitivity to how their own contributions to the Web enter into a marketplace that places values on its products and, indirectly, on its producers. In these accounts of their own decision-making processes, participants' contributions to the Web are circumscribed by what they "have." Not "having" what is recognized as information implies that one has less of a claim to a voice within the medium.

Outline

In the four chapters that follow, I discuss four general strategies by which individuals claim their speaking spaces on the Web. With each of these sets of strategies, individuals "define the situation" of their homepages in different ways, using the knowledge and semiotic resources available to individuals in a medium dominated by institutions. These strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, for the separate pages of Web sites are often far more eclectic and heterogeneous when brought together than are the separate pages of a journal, or the separate chapters of a book. Moreover, Web sites are widely understood to be works in progress, constantly changing in response both to the developing medium and to the changes in the lives of their owners. The range of strategies may more fruitfully be thought of by the primary kinds of discursive resources that individuals draw on and the consequent stances they take in the construction of their personal homepages.

With the first set of strategies, discussed in chapter 6, individuals make little or no overt pretense of competing with the institutional sites that dominate the Web. This is not to suggest that individuals are not influenced by the valuations of the marketplace that are discussed above. Rather, it is precisely because of such valuations that individuals may restrict the scope of their contributions to the proximal, the products of their own body. They claim their place on the Web with transcriptions of their speech voice and with topics rooted in their body, and thus define the situations of their sites as informal, reifying their presence through conversational interactions with their visitors.

With the second set of strategies, discussed in chapter 7, individuals find a place for themselves amidst but not in competition with institutional sites. They make their contributions to the Web by defining an information niche that they can reasonably occupy, a niche that is not likely to be filled by the interests that motivate institutional sites. With the resource of information, they can take up the stance of an expert on their niche topic, or teacher of their Web audience.

With the third set of strategies, discussed in chapter 8, individuals respond to institutional precedence in the mass media by drawing on the discourses and practices of institutions themselves. Thus, individuals represent the contents of their sites, signal relations with their readers, and take up positions for themselves, that are all modelled on the corresponding contents, relations, and positions of institutional presences in the mass media, thereby defining the situations of their sites accordingly.

The final set of strategies, one that incorporates elements of the above three and especially of the preceding chapter, confronts the contradictions occasioned by the Web's blending of personal access with an international publishing network. Individuals recognize the gap between, on the one hand, the institutional practices that have defined almost all the precedents of mass media communications and, on the other hand, their own statuses as private citizens. Rather than capitulating to such a challenging situation with their silence, they use this gap as a resource. They draw on the discourses of institutions, but they do so ironically, constructing mock institutional contents, relations, and positions. In a sense, their meta-text reflects on the irony of their position as interlopers in an international media network and responds to this position that has been, by default, cast for them.

With each of these sets of strategies, individuals are working through a means not merely to compose their contributions, but to legitimate their own positions as publishers within the environment of international communications.

The Body in Cyberspace

In the previous chapter, I raised the question of what people could feasibly publish on the Web. Though access to the technology and acquisition of the basic computer skills required for Web publishing is becoming increasingly widespread, the status of Web contributions by unsanctioned individuals is not as clear. We saw how some participants did not necessarily take to Web publishing "naturally," with their own familiar resources and experiences, but instead sought to acquire something to contribute that would be recognized as valuable, to construct respectable public images and to fashion their contributions so as to warrant a claim to some of the Web's multi-media sophistication. In practice, people's contributions are, in part, forced.

As individuals enter such a new production situation, their position is less secure than that of traditional mass media producers, institutions, which only have to adapt their established public positions and relations to a new format. As I discussed in the previous chapter, a Web site for these organizations is primarily just one more communications tool, to be added to their TV ads, radio jingles, glossy brochures, direct mail packages, and other forms that sustain their visibility and relations with the public. The revolution is far more palpable for individuals, representing themselves not as spokespersons or employees of organizations, not in the guise of corporate voices, but as independent persons in their own right. Successfully occupying the new medium is not just a matter of picking up new technical knowledge but of learning a new position. People must acclimatize themselves as authors of a continuously "broadcasted" public presence, with an international audience largely of strangers, separated from them by indeterminate distances.

Most people cannot bring to this new situation of their Web authorship much experience in such a media position, so unprecedented is it in their repertoire. What experience they have as communicators is based, rather, largely on one-to-one or small-group interactions, primarily oral, in local situations offering meaningful positions for individual contributors and

immediate feedback on the effectiveness of their contributions. Such communication is conspicuously limited in its reach to those within earshot; even in communications mediated by telephone, the audience is limited largely to those who are or have been contiguous in space-time at one point or another: family members, friends, co-workers, and so forth. It is this experience that would constitute the primary communications "literacy" of most people, the skills that they could bring to a new communication situation. They have developed their know-how, their practice with discourse, in concrete environments localized by the features of space and time.

In chapter 2, we saw how people proceed in a communication situation not just with their knowledge of language in the abstract but with a know-how, with their skills for getting things done by using language in such a situation. Bourdieu, for instance, emphasizes the social and temporal composition of subjects' symbolic behaviour with his concept of the habitus, the repertoire of dispositions inculcated through a lifetime of social experience. One's know-how, a constituent of one's habitus, is applied based on one's "linguistic 'sense of place'," one's "practical mastery of situations" (Bourdieu, 1991, p.82). Bakhtin distinguishes between a dictionary knowledge of words and a facility with the genres associated with different situations, the latter of which provides subjects with the strategies for proceeding in those situations. Drawing on Bakhtin, Berkenkotter and Huckin characterise such practical know-how of genres as "situated cognition," knowledge rooted in the environments in which genres are practiced and hence learned (1993, p.485). Uniting these perspectives is the understanding that communicators' adeptness in a situation draws on their practice in, their repertoire from, their tacit knowledge of, analogous situations.[22]

Hence, when people take up the role of producer for a mass medium, a position which for most has no direct precedent, their inclination in this new situation would likely include drawing on their communication repertoire from situations further afield, as analogous experiences are unavailable. Electronic publication on the Web is, of course, partly analogous to people's previous writing experience, and so Web authors would likely draw on the kinds of skills and techniques they have acquired in writing letters, academic essays, and so forth.

However, as we have seen in the chapter 4 discussion of participants' motives for publishing on the Web, it is social exchange and social acknowledgement that many people seek with their production efforts. What many want is a permanent role in an ongoing "conversation." For instance, the high frequency of Web counters (appearing on 64 sites, well over half of the sample) suggests that tangible evidence of contact with others, and hence the vicarious experience of acknowledgement, provides an important response for homepage producers. Occupying a piece of the Web is their means to express themselves, to maintain a presence with friends and family, to contact potential pen-pals, to construct a self-image of altruism by helping others, and to secure their membership in what appears to be a fast-growing social phenomenon.

Such engagement with others can perhaps, in the minds of many, only modestly be proffered by print. People without extensive writing experience may find an unusual bedfellow in Plato, who decried the seemingly anemic medium for its unresponsiveness to its changing contexts. What Plato extols of dialectic, and what many would extol of conversation, is the salience of context, discourse's engagement, in particular, with other minds and, in general, with its local and immediate situation. This distinction between speech and writing is further elaborated by Walter Ong:

> The word in its natural, oral habitat is a part of a real, existential present. Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another real, living person or real, living persons, at a specific time in a real setting which includes always much more than mere words. Spoken words are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words. Yet words are alone in a [written] text. Moreover, in composing a text, in "writing" something, the one producing the written utterance is also alone. Writing is a solipsistic operation. (1982, p.101)

It is this vicarious engagement of the "oral habitat" that seems to motivate many homepage producers. To the extent that they perceive their situation to be a social one of self-presentation and of contact with individual surfers, homepage producers would also draw on their communicative repertoire for managing social experiences. Such a repertoire, for most,

would be inculcated through oral communication exchanges, grounded in situations of co-presence. One's spoken voice would be the resource with which one is most fluent and most secure and confident, as one's speech "voice" is more frequently beyond the logonomic systems of institutional discourse than is, for instance, one's written productions. Written communication is, from the perspective of many people, regulated by teachers and editors to a far greater degree than is oral communication, and is often practiced only in situations, such as in school and at the office, in which one's work is scrutinized and evaluated. Speech, by contrast, enables, for most, a greater spectrum of expressive possibilities, a deeper, more motivating personal style, and the resourcefulness for producing socially-effective meanings and actions.

In this chapter, we explore the place of subjects' linguistic habitus, primarily a speech habitus, in what for most is the otherwise unfamiliar situation of mass media production. First, we consider how participants conceive of their experience of the Web, a relatively intangible network constituted counter-intuitively of electromagnetism, as grounded, localized in space just as their other communication experiences are. We then explore how participants draw on a repertoire of conversational skills for proceeding in such a localized social space. This conception first of the Web environment and then of individuals' communications strategies for such an environment is radically divergent from the institutionally-dominated production regimes of most other mass media communications; the sources and implications of this incongruity are discussed in the final section of this chapter and are further explored in subsequent chapters.

Context: the chronotope of the Web

As discussed above, the new medium presents a challenge to aspiring Web communicators, whose range of producing experiences and skills would likely not include the new context that so problematizes the place of the individual producer. The Web, of course, does not exist in any specific location or occupy any physical space apart from its dispersion of client and server computers, regional networks, electronic transmission backbones, and so forth. Technically, the Web may be defined as a set of protocols for transmitting and manipulating strong and weak pulses of electricity from one computer to another. Because its composition is electronic, the medium measures time in fractions of a second. Space is illusory. A Web page is not physical in the way that a paper is, for its constituents are, literally, electrical pulses and miniature magnetic fields, both inaccessible to our unaided sensory perception (L. Polic, e-mail to author, July 13,1998). Its sensory reconstruction will manifest itself differently with different browsers with different preference settings on different operating systems on different computer screens, able to be changed continuously with the advent of animated graphics, push technology, and sound and video applications.

Though the World Wide Web is intangible, computer users and surfers do not conceive of it as such. In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson illustrate how our conceptions of our world are shaped by the metaphors embedded in discourse. For instance, in a contemporary application of Lakoff and Johnson's perspective, John Lawler (1996) illustrates how we conceive of a computer as, variously, a servant, a race, a tool, a machine, a workplace, a filing cabinet, and a toy. Brenda Laurel, in a work revealingly entitled *Computers as Theatre* (1993), argues that computer applications may be better conceived not through the prevailing static metaphors of objects but as dramatic activities in which the user is an actor. Howard Rheingold (1993), who has written about Internet-based communities and fellowship, explores how the spatial image of a "cluster" of "places" seems to be a conceptually comfortable and appropriate model for the Internet. Kevin Hunt, in distinguishing the actual Web from its original conceptions as something of an information

database, characterises the medium as "a tangle of rhetorically constructed virtual spaces" (1996, p.387). He observes how the intangibility of computer networks is rendered more palpable with spatial metaphors:

> [I]ncreasingly, users are beginning to conceptualize computers and computer networks as comprising spaces through which they can "navigate," . . . using language that maps physical attributes to the virtual locations that the networks comprise. (p.377)

Such spatial metaphors seem to dominate the discourse of the World Wide Web and related networks and applications: cyber*space*, *Web*, Inter*net*, Information Super*highway*, *Netscape*, *Explorer*, *Mosaic*, *search* engines, *sites*, *home*pages, *surfing*, and hyper*links* are some of the more familiar Internet terms that are derived from spatial metaphors. One experienced user of the Web, Tim Bray, Senior Vice President of Technology at the search engine developers Open Text Corporation, describes the otherwise intangible experience of surfing as evoking spatial sensations: "The Web, when you're in it, feels like a place. It manifests, however, as a sequence of panels marching across your screen" (1996). This inclination to spatialize the new medium is especially ironic, though perhaps expected, as the medium's success is based in part on having collapsed the barriers of time and space: one can navigate from Toronto to Tokyo to Toulouse in seconds. Spatial metaphors can compensate for the loss graphic scale of these voyages.

The spatiality of media has been discussed by communications prophet Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan, conceiving media as extensions of the body, and of the electronic media as the extension of the central nervous system, argues that "electronic technology [has] abolish[ed] both space and time" (1964/1994, p.3). Communications, in effect, has transcended the constraints that space and time have traditionally placed on the body. The result is a continuous, ubiquitous presence, human communications of a scope that McLuhan envisions in his metaphor of the "global village." In a world of the global village, everyone is co-present to and hence involved with everyone else. Notwithstanding McLuhan's paean to this ubiquitous co-presence and total involvement through electronic media, it would seem that accompanying Web development has been the construction of metaphorical spaces to stand in place of the absent setting for cyberspace. McLuhan's own global village metaphor suggests

as much, as it does not so much eliminate spatiality as reconceive it on the scale of local, individual experience (p.255).

The contending representations of spaces also implicate the kinds of worlds that might feasibly be represented in such spaces. This role of space (and time) in literary representations of the world has been explored by Bakhtin (1981b). Bakhtin introduces the term *chronotope* to refer to the construction of, literally, "time space" within a text. In his survey of the diverse forms of narrative in the historical development of European literature, Bakhtin's analyses illustrate how chronotopes enable the representation of certain kinds of action and characterization. Bakhtin speaks of the chronotope as "provid[ing] the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events" (p.250).

Though Bakhtin focuses on literature, he allows that the chronotope is also a valid concept outside of literature (1981b, p.84; Morson and Emerson, 1990, p.368). Indeed, we may extend the concept to apply to much of representation, the semiotic stand-in for an object in its four dimensions of space and time; a representation may inherently invoke that space and time as part of its signifying process. Bakhtin suggests as much when he writes that language itself, "as a treasure-house of images, is fundamentally chronotopic" (1981b, p.251). As well, not only does the chronotope engender representation both within and beyond literature, but its dimensions of space and time are implicated with the value-laden spaces and times of culture and society. Although Bakhtin does not explicitly develop the social implications of the chronotope outside of literature, Morson and Emerson make clear that the chronotope has a socially active role in "real" space and time:

> In literature and culture generally, time is always in one way or another *historical* and *biographical*, and space is always *social*; thus, the chronotope in culture could be defined as a "field of historical, biographical, and social relations." Because our lives unfold in a variety of such fields, an understanding of their characteristics is important to our lives as individuals and social beings. (1990, p.371)

The chronotope becomes especially pertinent with the development of a medium that has so

stunningly overcome the past constraints of space and time. If we can navigate from Toledo (Ohio) to Toledo (Spain) in seconds, how do we represent to ourselves what we have done? And how do we, as authors or as surfers, represent and value an individual Web *site* in Toledo or elsewhere when it manifests itself as no more than a sequence of panels displayed on our computer screen? The ethereal domain of the Web offers an especially fertile ground for the construction of chronotopes, as a dominant representation of space-time has yet to consolidate itself among the diverse experiments and developments occurring in the new medium. Because the resources and interests that individuals bring to the Web are different from those of institutional producers, different kinds of references to space or time might feasibly arise to accommodate and validate their different social interests. For the first generation of Web users, who have acquired their language habitus in more concrete, local settings with specific, known audiences, the novelty of a spatial vacuum presents a particular challenge and perhaps also particular opportunities. How, then, do Web authors represent what they are doing with their electronic postings? What kinds of chronotopes engender representability and legitimate activity on personal homepages?

Evidence from the sample of homepages suggests that, like computer users in general, participants filled the spatial vacuum of the Web with spatial references. For instance, participant b-sb features, beneath the title of her main site page, the line "*Where* I spend every moment of my life!!!" (emphasis mine). Participant g-jgd has posted a two-part site: one file on Grateful Dead tapes, and a well-developed set of files on pastoral counselling. The index page that leads to each offers no title or identifying information, only a perfunctory notice, beginning as follows:

> Not much to see *here*. Sorry.
>
> Want to go *where* I spend my time? (emphasis mine)

There follows links to each of the two parts of his site. As these brief excerpts illustrate, both of these participants refer to their sites as a place, a location for their activity. It would not have been their only option. They might have referred to the activity itself (e.g., *How* I spend my time), or to the consequence of their activity (e.g., *What* I have composed), but presumably the spatial metaphor offered a conceptually "natural" setting for human activity.

Of course, spatial references such as these are certainly not unique to Web pages. It is standard practice of formal writing, for instance, to refer to what is presented "above" and "below" even though a typical reader likely reads such material "previously" and "later." However, compared to print, the Web has less of a claim to spatial dimensions. True, a Web file has to be stored on a server computer somewhere, and most Web composers would have to use a process like File Transfer Protocol to transfer a file from their own screen and hard drive to the server computer. However, a book, at any moment, is on some book shelf or someone's lap. The physical extension of the book naturalizes a greater degree of spatial reference than would the electromagnetic constitution of a Web file. The linear sequence of a book's writing provides a more secure orientation than does hypertext. Yet the book's partial spatiality and linearity has proved to be only a modest source of metaphors invoked to comprehend the Web: hom*epages* and *index* pages are among the very few bookish metaphors. The abstract logos of the book offers a less accessible model for Web authors and surfers than does the physical extension of social space. As Bakhtin points out, the chronotope enables such representations by making the abstract appear concrete (1981b, p.250).

Non-print sources of spatial metaphors are much more numerous and more suggestive of the functions of communication in the medium. The familiar *under construction* notices and icons and the even more common *welcome* greetings that open most personal Web sites (at least 68 sites in the sample use the word *welcome* to introduce the whole of a part of a site) both draw on language practices that are traditionally associated with specific spatial environments. Buildings and large-scale architectural projects are "constructed"; print text, by contrast, is "composed" or "revised" or "edited." People are "welcomed" to events and to social, commercial, and geopolitical spaces. Traditional print practices such as books, essays, and newspapers do not extend overt "welcomes" so much as display the more conceptually abstract "prefaces," "forwards," and "introductions."

The above two homepage usages suggest how the space of a homepage is not conceptually similarly to the space of print. Other spatial references reinforce this point. In naming or

entitling the whole or part of their sites, some participants draw not on the print practice of entitling by theme or topic but on the social and cultural practices of possessing and naming locations: "Killoranspace" (g-jg), "Killoran's CyberPlace" (c-amc), "Hilly's place" (d-h) are three samples that draw on a territorial metaphor for their titles (my surname is substituted for participants' surnames in the first two examples).

Other participants conceive of their compositions with metaphors from what would be the primary territorial domain of individuals and nuclear families in capitalist societies: the home.

- participant m-s welcomes surfers to her "Home";
- v-s entitles her site "Sabine's Home";
- g-jg calls his "John Killoran's cyber residence" (my name is substituted for the participant's);
- m-bm offers surfers a choice between her "Frames House" and her "Non Frames House";
- g-kgo, whose site evinces a love of language, entitles her site "spaß haus" [German for "fun house"] and uses a graphic of a house floor plan to illustrate spatially, and provide navigation to, the various "rooms" of her site;

Some participants use the familiarity and intimacy of the home to create metaphors of greater privacy: both g-kgi and g-kgo refer to the "rooms" of their sites; v-mk, d-h, and y-gy identify parts of their sites as "Corners"; and k-mr entitles the site she helped create for eight student roommates the "Kitchen Suite."

While these usages, and other usages of the common *home*page designation of personal Web sites, invoke familiar personal spaces, other usages create metaphors of commercial or public spaces. The sample includes a "Tea House" (v-j); a "Bistro and coffee bar" (k-sk); a "Bar & Grill" franchise with four "Locations" in four different cities, which are really four separate URLs (g-kgi); a "Whisky-Bar" (s-js); an "Arena" and a "Kiosk" (g-kgo); at least three "Galleries" of photographs and graphics (o-so, s-gs, v-mk); what might be a restaurant (g-kgl's "Chéz Kyall"); a "Den of Delights" (a-ka); a "castle" (i-li); and, for the more civic-minded, a "Meeting Place" (d-dnp) and a "village hall" (g-jg).

Finally, and in contrast with the modesty of the "corners" and "rooms" mentioned above, some participants adopt large-scale geopolitical metaphors to encompass the scope of their sites or parts of their sites. The sample includes:

- a "Newfoundland Outport" (b-kcb) by expatriate Newfoundlanders who open their homepage with the welcoming "Hope you enjoyed your *trip*" (emphasis mine);
- "Lilsland" (i-li), "SanrioLand" (m-s), "The Land of the Freak" (a-ma), and "Joanna Land" (b-jb), the latter of which refers to repeat visitors to her site as "citizens of Joanna Land" and whose site counter announces the latest "population" of Joanna Land;
- "The Margaret Zone" (a-ma);
- a "Realm" (i-li) and a "territory" (k-ck).

As well, there are at least six sites referred to as "world" (d-ad, d-dd, d-nd, k-tk, w-jw, w-tw), one of which (w-tw) features its "world" title above a graphic of planet Earth. Two other site titles also suggest other-worldly aspirations: "Jennifer's Home Planet" (s-jsb) and "Planet Stacey" (o-so).

The salience of these spatial metaphors, the majority of which constitute homepage titles or section titles, suggests that they play more than a perfunctory role on personal homepages. A title plays a foundational role of creating an orientation to a document. The spatial metaphors of these titles suggest that spatiality is at the forefront of their site authors' conceptions of their work and of surfers' first impressions of these sites. Their appearance on the non-spatial Web is, of course, ironic, and raises an obvious question: In an otherwise spatially ambiguous medium, why bother with spatial constructions at all? Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope points us to one answer: the representability engendered by a salient sense of space. Yet based on the chapter 4 discussion of the motives of homepage authors, it cannot be assumed that typical homepage authors would invest much thought to bolster the representability of actions. Nor could we easily assume that such a tendency is part of the habitus. Other conditions may also be contributing to the prominence of these spatial references. Thus, before we consider the representability that a chronotope can engender within a Web site, we will first briefly explore the "external" conditions of Web site production—the composing process and then the

social environment—that could account for some of the emergence of such salient spatial references.

First, a setting can motivate invention by the writer. For instance, the Web site of participant s-s includes a section entitled "Space is the Place," featuring photos, text, and links relating to space exploration. In his survey responses, s-s describes how the inspiration for the idea derived from the spatial metaphor embedded in the title of his site: "When I started the page I typed in 'Steve's Space' . . . . The next day I saw that and it just hit me." Another participant, g-kgi, maintains a large, hard-worked site entitled "Kevin's Bar & Grill." In his survey responses, g-kgi describes how his initial conception of a specific social space provided him with a familiar precedent for an otherwise unfamiliar project: "I started with the basic concept of a corner pub, and then extrapolated what areas people would want to hang out in." Among the site's features are "The Bar Rag," a page of hyperlinks to sites featuring news, weather, sports, and other information one would glean from a newspaper; "Kevin's Bar and Grill: The Official History," which describes the motivation and genesis of his chain of on-line "bars"; "Bar News: Kevin's Weekly Reports," which is more a journal of interesting events and observations that would make for conversation fodder in a typical bar; "Kevin's Bar & Grill Joke Book"; hyperlinks to the Web sites of some of his "patrons"; a "wall" (page) of the comments e-mailed to him by "customers" (surfers to the site); various pages indexed under the self-effacing "Wisdom (sic) from the bartender" (*sic* is in the original); links to information resources and sites offering trivia that one might find in a real bar; and a "comment card" and a "post card" by which he solicits e-mail from visitors.

The chronotope of participant g-kgi's site illustrates how place functions in our world not merely inertly as a backdrop but as a cue for the kinds of activities compatible with a place. The public space of the pub, and the cultural activities of that space, serve as the cue for invention in a medium without a setting. Burke would view this as, in part, a completion of the dramatistic dimensions of a situation: "both act and agent require scenes that 'contain' them" (1945/1969, p.15). This orientation to securing a scene serves as a kind of topoi or what Bakhtin refers to as an "organizing center" for the work, a generative source (1981b,

p.250). In the confrontation between writers and the blank screen that precedes their compositions, the creative need may be not merely for fresh speech acts and representations but for dramatistic integrity. With a scene, Web writers can compensate for the contextual vacuum of their efforts. Given the insubstantial, ethereal quality of the medium, these metaphors furnish needed settings for homepage narrators, their monologues, and their actions. It is precisely the ephemerality of the Web that creates the conditions in which physical or spatial analogies allow authors to think through the Web's void.

Sociologist Sherry Turkle (1995) describes a similar inventive and lubricative function for what she characterises as "objects-to-think-with." She introduces the concept to explain how people approach the unfamiliar and make it accessible and malleable through objects that are already familiar parts of their lives. As an example, she describes how the seemingly esoteric ideas of Freud achieved their fame because of the "objects," such as dreams and slips of the tongue, that allowed people unconnected with psychoanalysis to participate in grasping and remaking the ideas for themselves (p.48).

For people unaccustomed to the seemingly decontextualized communications of the Web, the "objects" of a familiar setting can offer an orientation to their work in this new environment. As discussed above, subjects' habitus has developed from their daily experience as producers and receivers of grounded communication, especially spoken communication, the most frequently practiced means of communication. When producing speech, the features of the environment are salient, rooted in such "objects" as the scene, the situation, one's own body, one's conversational partner, the tone and pitch and speed of the voices, and so forth. These "objects-to-think-with" develop a prominent role in one's speech disposition by their presence to the senses during speech practice. Subjects' habitus develops in conjunction with the use of and response to such objects. In the same way that talking aloud to oneself is perceived by some as empty and disconcerting—because having something to say is not a suitable prerequisite in the absence of the palpable objects and ceremony of speech—communicating in the non-space of the Web is disorienting, because no environment is available to cue subjects' habitus. The Web challenges potential communicators in part because its chronotope

is underdetermined.

In acquiring speech genres, subjects would develop a know-how not only for what to say and how it would be received, but also, according to Morson and Emerson, "expectations for the kind of time and space on which the exchange will rely" (1990, p.427). Subjects develop a know-how for speaking in the home, speaking on the street corner, speaking in church, speaking in the classroom, and speaking in a bar; their speech genres are grounded in the environment. On the Web, that environment can be provided in part by spatial references.

A space facilitates the work the author must do not only to produce his or her electronic document, but also to legitimate an otherwise suspiciously vain, egocentric exercise. Unlike literature, which is validated by well-established fields of literary scholars and publishers before it ever reaches the public, and can therefore assume the indulgence of its public, a personal homepage—a new type of publication by upstart "publishers"—must first work to validate itself before its public. This struggle is, in part, defensive, a response to the stigma against displays by unsanctioned individuals centered upon themselves. Spatial metaphors can deflect some of the stigma.

Burke's dramatistic framework offers an insightful perspective on the orientational function of such spatial metaphors, in particular those that appear in titles and hence serve to define a site. Foundational to Burke's rhetoric is the function of language in "attributing . . . motives" (1945/1969, p.xv). The five archetypal motives that Burke derives from a dramatistic framework—act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose—can also be found to underlie the pairs of elements that are brought together in accounts of causality and "determination" (p.15) and "selectivity" (p.18) (e.g., the pair A and B brought together when we assert that A "causes" or "determines" B, or that if A then "select" B). For instance, an act may be represented as being "caused" by the agent or by the scene of the act; Burke uses the term *ratio* to refer to these pairings, in this case, agent-act ratio and scene-act ratio, respectively. Ratios provide an especially insightful framework for exploring potentially contentious or unstable attributions of motives.

As we have seen in chapter 4, homepages authors are sometimes faced with the stigma of composing to satisfy a less-than-altruistic need, such as a putative emotional incontinence satisfied by displaying oneself to anyone who will listen of read. The thematic unity of the often-eclectic parts of a personal homepage may rest solely on its common authorship, not the most credible grounding for an unknown author and hence an unwarranted authorship, and moreover a grounding on an identity which some claim is multiple, dispersed in the non-linear medium of the Internet (e.g., Turkle, 1995, p.49, 185, 259). A Web site, then, may be perceived as a dispersed collection of loosely related or even unrelated files, hyperlinked to each other primarily because of the mysterious motivations of the writer, an "I" in lieu of the thematic unity of most print texts. This imputation may be interpreted as the attribution of an agent-act ratio of motives: this act of personal homepage publishing is understood primarily as a manifestation of its author.

Given the thematic diversity of some personal homepages, a spatial dimension can thus serve as an alternative unifying function, encompassing the dispersion by invoking a common ground. Such a scene can reconcile the diverse elements of a site: the dispersion of activities can be encompassed by a setting that conventionally encompasses such diversity, such as a "land" or a "home" or a place of drink and entertainment. As discussed in chapter 4, giving such dispersion a name effects a kind of "reduction," rendering the dispersion as a single entity (Burke, 1945/1969, p.96). The spatial dimension, in this limited application, functions in a manner reverse to that which Bakhtin found in literature. Rather than creating environments within which characters may be made manifest in a work usually assumed to be unified, the spatial dimension of a Web site, in part, creates unity in a series of texts that are often otherwise assumed only to be unified by virtue of the character of their author. By naming a unifying element other than just himself or herself, a Web author can invoke and legitimate a site identity, "packaging" of contents of that space. The spatial title provides the scene that dilutes the salience of the author, thus shifting the agent-act ratio to a scene-act ratio of motives: these topics belong not just because they relate to the author, but because they fit this space.

More assertively, a text's positing of a "space" may be the social act of legitimating its author's presence on the Web in the first place. In her work on genres, Anne Freadman points out that a text performs its function in part by establishing a place to speak:

> '[P]lace' is no mere metaphor. Where a text occurs is germane to its generic function, because who it is addressed to is governed by material factors such as this. A society is, in this sense, a system of quite literal places, and the setting of a text may be read as a symbolic representation of the work the text does to find a place to speak. . . . (1987, p.110)

Homepages, of course, have no intrinsic place and have little social precedent with which to be validated. As interlopers in the mass media long monopolized by institutional voices, homepage authors may be responding to this institutional precedence by proactively staking their claim, marking their place to speak in the mass media as a prelude to further contributions. A metaphorical territoriality offers them some of the franchise that has always been adjoined to property. Defining the Web in this way, individuals have at least a nominally equal right to contribute to the Web as institutions do. Defined otherwise—as, say, the "Information Superhighway"—the Web would offer fewer rights of franchise to information-poor citizens.

In sum, we have seen how, in a medium bereft of the normal grounding for subjects' discursive production, a sense of setting establishes the conditions by which Web writers can rely on their dispositions with language in environment and on the social legitimacy of being propertied speakers. A space, even if not developed thematically beyond its naming in a title, makes sense, for an aspiring communicator, of what he or she is doing. We have also seen how the salient spatiality of a personal homepage can not only lubricate the construction process but also legitimate the constructed product. Spatiality functions rhetorically to validate an otherwise disenfranchised speaker with the grounds from which to speak. This rhetoric is instrumental in bringing forth such a novelty as personal homepages.

Aside from securing the "external" conditions of a personal homepage—its composition and publishing—spatiality can support its "internal" operations, what authors can be and do and

what surfers are emplotted to see and do within a Web site. Bakhtin discusses how familiar social locations such as the road, the castle, the parlour and salon, and the town make possible certain kinds of narrative transactions (1981b, pp.243-47). Likewise, the social space evoked in a Web site can index certain kinds of positions and transactions. In a medium of "world-wide" communications, it is revealing that almost all of the spaces evoked by participants provide human-scale settings: homes and social venues. In contrast with the national and multinational status of much of the Web's sites, the local scale of participants' spaces are proportional to the social activities of human agents. Indeed, it may be precisely *because* of the horizonless scale of the *World Wide* Web that participants responded with redefined spaces. These spaces are recognizable and comfortable settings for human social action and interaction.

These chronotopes redefine Web sites from their defaults as information repositories —perhaps the most fitting description of many institutional sites—to social venues. Many of these metaphorical spaces, such as homes, bars, cafes, restaurants, and galleries, function as familiar locales that occasion socializing among strangers. They can bring the author of a site into the scene as a protagonist. Constructing such establishments also vicariously constructs that author-protagonist within the positions of owner, proprietor, entrepreneur, and so forth. These are appealing vantages for participants, many of whom are young and marginalized from the socio-economic resources and statuses that would permit a satisfying sense of control in their non-Web lives.

The homes and bars of personal Web sites also stage more inviting visiting experiences than would the information archives of institutional sites. Whereas information repositories may emplot only readers, the chronotopes of such social venues can emplot guests, customers, conversants. Moreover, human-scale chronotopes evince the kinds of transactions that can take place among social equals. An institutional site potentially frames a surfer as a small figure searching for information from a large information provider. One party owns the information, the other party needs it. A home or bar, by contrast, frames a citizen-to-citizen exchange. It is not about information narrowly conceived, but about socializing. The space

furnishes a representational ground for touring the home, sharing hypertext visits to favorite destinations, filling out a guestbook entry, "conversing" with the site author by e-mail, and so forth. The subject positions and relations with others, enabled in part by these chronotopes, are among the most important creations of personal homepages. This issue of subject positions and social relations is explored further in chapters 8 and 9.

Evidence of the favouring of person-to-person socialization on personal homepages would be available not only through the direct references to human-scale spatial imagery, as discussed above, but also in the manner by which hosts actually "behave" on their sites. Tellingly, most of the settings evoked on personal homepages are of a scale such that their entire space is within earshot. In contrast with the much larger scale of publishing, the small enclosed spaces of homes and bars help naturalize the use not of the written language but of the speaking voice. If participants' discursive behaviour is indeed similar to that of people in conversational settings, we could thereby infer a latent presence of a local, social chronotope. In such a chronotope, legitimate symbolic activity can be performed by drawing on one's speech habitus. Participants would be communicating as they would in concrete social settings. We explore such grounded behaviour in the next section.

The speech habitus in Web production

Above, we discussed how Web authors fill the vacuum of the Web with spatial references that create a familiar conceptual terrain for their communications. The ubiquitous *home*pages and personal *sites*, as well as the more inventive social and commercial spaces, usually evoke a sense of local space on a human scale, equivalent to the real spaces that individuals inhabit and lay claim to: their home, their local café, and so forth. This is, perhaps, as would be expected, since it is on the scale of such locally conceived spaces that individuals have developed their habitus, their dispositions as language producers. Most will have never had occasion for producing, say, for an international audience, and so international conceptual spaces, though intriguing, would be less familiar.

If the Web does indeed feel more comfortable when conceived as a network of interconnected local spaces, we would then be led to inquire about what kinds of discursive practices function within such a chronotope. Is the discursive behaviour of individuals on the Web indeed analogous to their behaviour in the local spaces of their daily lives? What contribution does their speech habitus, developed largely in strongly contextualized situations and spaces, make to their productions in their imaginary locale on the Web?

Below, we explore these issues by considering two features of interpersonal, face-to-face communication that have manifested themselves on the Web:

- Web authors' means of identifying themselves,
- Web authors' discourse of casual speech.

Identifying the speaker

It might be expected that homepage authors, in claiming their space in the mass media, would first consummate their authorship by placing their name on their work. Such a practice would conform with our expectations for media and written communications and indeed most of the communication we produce, which is accompanied by an identification of the producer, the name of the author, the holder of the copyright. Given our social practice of signing our written letters and memos and of including our names on the title pages of academic writing, and given the simple effort of including one's name in an accessible spot on a Web site, one can imagine little motivation for departing from such obvious practices. However, as we have seen above in chapter 4, in only just over half of the sites (59) of the sample is a full name made readily accessible in whole or through its parts (e.g., a family name in the site title and the first name on the index page).

Moreover, despite the potential duplication of names, obvious when one is flipping through a phone book and perhaps especially problematic in a world wide network bringing together thousands of *John Smiths*, there was, among the sites in this project, no explicit attempt to circumscribe the reference of a name. For instance, of the 48 site titles that feature part or all of their author's name, none was accompanied by a modifier such as (using my own name) "John Killoran of Waterloo" or "John Killoran, Writing Instructor" or "John Killoran, son of Bernard and Lucille." A slight majority of site titles (58) include no part of their author's name and so provide even fewer clues about authorship. As well, though several sites feature brief biographies and photos, these are frequently relegated to subpages, leaving ambiguity unresolved on the main index page. Moreover, of the 48 titles that include some part of their author's name, almost twice as many, 23, feature a first name only (such as, using my name again, "John's Homepage") as feature a last name only (12; e.g., "The Killoran Site"). The Web population, still modest in number relative to the population as a whole, has apparently yet to fully recognize in practice the scope of its reach and respond to the looming problem of mass duplication of names. In the Yahoo! listings of personal homepages, in which sites are presented by the alphabetical order of, usually, their authors' surnames, a handful of duplicate

names are distinguished by identifications such as their authors' Internet service provider!

Finally, of the sites that do not feature a full name on the index page or in other readily accessible locations on a site (such as on a personal biography page), 28 feature either a first name exclusively, or a first name that receives far more prominence than a surname (such as a first name in large font in the title, and a full name in small font buried somewhere in the site). Clearly, in these cases in which adding a surname to the already existing first name would take only a moment's effort, the far more salient display of a first name alone would suggest a function for names other than the simply identificatory.

In chapter 4, I discussed one possible reason for the relative anonymity of many personal homepages: a need to protect one's privacy. However, the anomaly of a first name appearing alone or with greater prominence than a surname may also be explained by pointing to the different functions of surnames and first names in social discourse. The surname, though nominally a marker of one's family heritage, in fact usually appears in the discourse of the other. Except in formal situations, individuals do not introduce themselves or refer to their conversational partners by their surnames. In most contexts in which one's surname is spoken, it is uttered in the voice of a superior: calling the class attendance, performing military role call, summoning the employee, and so forth. It is within these occasions that Althusser's (1971) explanation of the emergence of subjecthood as an interpellation of the individual occurs in the most literal sense. "That's me," we respond, recognizing ourselves in the command and the gaze of officialdom: "That's who I am: a student, a soldier, an employee—referent to that signifier."

In its written form, the surname is the sign used by institutions to keep track of individuals. Institutional practices, whose personnel resources include large masses of relatively anonymous people, require full names for the purposes of managing their activities and communications. It is on the basis of surnames, for instance, that individuals are catalogued in alphabetical order. Most appearances of a surname occur in official documentation: on the cover page of an essay so that an instructor can assign a grade; in little squares, letter by letter,

on tax forms, credit applications, driver's licences; and so forth. These are documents that are produced largely by institutions for institutions. Of the dozens, perhaps hundreds and thousands of documents on which individuals print, type, or sign their names, few remain within their possession. A surname, in practice, thus functions primarily to facilitate the interactions between individuals and institutions.

By contrast, a first name bereft of its surname would appear almost exclusively outside of official contexts. A first name alone is a feature primarily of oral discourse in situations of co-presence. It belongs to scenes of intimate and familiar space among social equals. We greet acquaintances by their first names; though a surname may be added with ironic or humourous intent, its sincere use would suggest social distance, a violation of an unstated pact of friendship. Since the main contexts of a first name's use are social encounters within intimate distances, its referential function of identifying someone is frequently less important than its interpersonal function of managing social relations. The skillful use of one's own and other's first name becomes part of the repertoire of speakers who, regardless of their lack of official power, can still function successfully among their peers.

The Web, by its scope, would seem to share the conditions of mass media and institutional communications, and hence invite the formality of a full name with an emphasis on the surname. Of what use is it to us to know that a Web site is, say, "John's homepage" when there are a myriad of Johns in the world. However, the Web's participants are outside of the logonomic systems that would sanction and regulate official texts. Informal speech is the discourse of the powerless, of those who cannot credibly or legitimately occupy the subject positions sanctioned by institutions. Revealingly, there was only one site that featured a surname in the absence of a first name, in contrast with the 28 sites in which the surname was either absent or appeared only relatively discretely in comparison to the far greater prominence of the first name.

Thus, in announcing their presence to the world, some participants would seem to be drawing on a familiar discourse tactic for announcing their presence to acquaintances, a tactic with

which they establish recognition and relations of conviviality among their peers. Such a tactic would accord with the conceptual space of the Web, wherein many communicators draw on a habitus for grounded, local communications. A personal Web site, as conceived in its production, would thus not necessarily be crowded with the other *John Smiths* of an expansive, impersonal global environment, but rather would be oriented to the local, intimate social spaces populated by manageably small groups. In using first names, Web writers are representing the scene of their Web space as one warranting a spoken exchange, an exchange in which they can legitimately participate not just as recipients but as experienced producers of discourse.

With such an approach, they also construct the ideal recipient of their discourse: a peer, a social equal on a "first-name basis." Such practices implicitly redefine the network from a medium of a multinational scale with its hierarchies of "blue chips" and "penny stock" producers to a socially undifferentiated network, a set of private spaces to be occupied by people, engaged in one-on-one exchanges.

Speaking casually

We saw above how several participants, in their use of their first name, may be drawing on a habitus for spoken language as developed in local settings, as distinct from the practices of the relatively non-localized, abstract mode of writing. The homepages studied in this project feature several other usages that are more typical of speech than of writing:

- colloquial and non-standard diction,
- spellings that diverge from standard form to mimic their spoken pronunciation,
- interjections,
- frequent and multiple exclamation points,
- frequent use of ellipses in lieu of commas and periods,
- high variability of typeface, such as upper and lower case, bold, italics, underlining, and font size,

- and phrases, utterances, and passages suggestive of discourse in oral contexts.

We explore some of these features below.

Consider, for instance, the use of words that fall outside of the prevailing standard usage of the written language. Appendix D lists over 200 such usages: colloquialisms, interjections, profanity, neologisms, and so on. These appear on 47 different sites, almost half of the entire study sample. These usages are recognizable typically of contexts of spoken English:

- interjections (e.g., at least 15 participants use *Hey* on their sites).
- variant pronunciations of written forms (e.g., *yeah*, *ya*, *yep*);
- stressed or exaggerated pronunciations of standard English words (e.g., *Sooo...*, *pleeease*, *Of cooouuurrse*, *nicccccce*);
- dropped phonemes from standard pronunciations of words or word pairs (e.g., *wanna* and *wanta*, *'cause* and *cuz*);
- onomatopoeic representations of facial noises (e.g., *Slurp!*, *Sniff*, *uuhhh*);
- sounds of unrestrained human emotion such as laughter (e.g., *Ha-hah-ahhah-hhhaah!*, *Haha*, *HA!*), realization or surprise (e.g., *Oh*, *ohhh*, *Ah!*, *wow*), anger (e.g., *damn*, *d*mn*, *FUCKIN'*), joy (e.g., *AWESOME!*, *whee!*, *Yay!*).

Most of these usages, though quite recognizable, are not found in the mainstream dictionaries that describe the language, nor in the educational institutions that teach the language. What these and other usages share in common is their usual appearance not in the corpus of the written language but in the mouths of ordinary English speakers in comfortable, informal settings.

Another feature of spoken usage transcribed in the sample of homepages is the high occurrence of punctuation marks that, ordinarily, do not receive heavy use in written documents, but that appear on personal Web sites both frequently and in non-standard (incorrect or stylistically unusual) ways. Ellipses, for instance, are regularly used on sites in the sample to recreate in writing the pause in a speaking voice, with the casual assortment of dots (anywhere from two to dozens) seemingly marking out the length of a pause. Parentheses regularly make multiple appearances throughout Web pages to signal asides, changes in tone

that might appear as uneven digressions in print but that are a regular feature of the more dynamic medium of speech.

Exclamation points, the most handy print representation of strong emotional expression and energy, not only appear on a majority of sites, but also regularly appear in pairs, in multiples, and in successive phrases. Such unusually salient usages—counted as "unusually salient" either where multiple exclamation points are used together (e.g., *!!!*), or where several (three or more) exclamation points are used in a passage in which more than 50% of the end punctuation is exclamation points (e.g., three exclamation points used in four successive phrases)—appear on 52 of the sites in the study, almost half the entire sample. Of these 52, 43 include exclamation points used in multiples from two to 20 at a time, a usage which, of course, transgresses the prescriptive standards of the written language, standards which ration exclamation points to one per sentence, and even then in moderation. As well, it is not unusual to find, for example, lists of hyperlinks in which the majority of the listed items are followed by exclamation points (e.g., on the sites of a-aa, g-kgl, l-wl, r-ir, s-gs, w-pw, and several others), a usage which, though not technically an error, is considered to be stylistically clumsy. Speech, however, is valued precisely for its strength of expression; animated and dynamic speakers win an audience's interest. From the perspective of many Web authors, the expressive intensity signified by exclamation points perhaps compensates for print's restraint, its "boring" monotone.

That Internet communication would come to model itself in part on the vitality of concrete sounds and expressions of the face rather than on the more abstract constructions of paragraphs is perhaps best revealed in the development and widespread use of emoticons: simple typographic representations of the expressive responses of human faces, constructed with the characters and punctuation marks available on a keyboard. Emoticons developed first on those Internet applications in which one-to-one or small group communication occurs relatively quickly and usually casually, in e-mail, newsgroups, and IRC chat groups. With the relatively high commitment of time and labour required of keyboard communication, typographic abbreviations developed to compensate for the body language lost in Internet

communications: physical manifestations of emotional stances and attitudes. A similar Internet invention is the naming of facial expressions and physical actions such as **smile**, **grinning**, and **dramatic bow** (from the sites of participants d-h, p-kp, and v-mk, respectively), usually placed between asterisks or other typographic elements to distinguish the named expression or physical action from the surrounding message. Though a Web page is relatively more enduring than the messages in these other Internet channels, and despite the Web kinship not with private chatting but with public publishing and broadcasting, these semiotic resources have nevertheless migrated onto personal homepages. Seventeen Web sites in the sample use emoticons to convey the body language that would be readily apparent in face-to-face communications but which is lost on the Web; similarly, named physical responses such as **smile** appear on 9 sites.

Other discursive features in the sample draw from a similar origin in social presence. For instance, the word *well* appears as an interjection in at least 27 of the sites. Both *Websters* and the *OED* define such a usage by its meta-discursive function of either introducing or resuming a discourse. While the *OED* refers to the producer as either "the speaker or writer," the usage examples are dominated by excerpts of dramatic dialogues, reported speech, and expressive writing (1989, Vol.XX, p.118). The word, in this function, seems more familiar to the contemporary ear and mouth than to the contemporary eye. One would not expect, in a print text such as a book preface, a newspaper editorial, or a memo, the opening "well"; yet of the 27 sites that include *well* as an interjection, 8 begin a page with it. It would seem to be one among a number of comfortable ways of initiating discourse in the absence of clear contextual audience prompts. Other interjections in the sample that perform a similar introductory function include *anyway*, *now*, *okay* and *OK*, *so*, and *you know*. More common still are the spoken greetings derived from face-to-face encounters, such as *Hi*, *Hello*, and, in one case (participant s-e), *G'day!!*

In spoken discourse, such usages perform a pivotal role in signalling the move from silence to conversation, or from one conversational topic to another. These actions are, for Bakhtin, part of our repertoire of speech genres (1986, p.80). Print regularly has the sanction of title pages,

specially designated sections labelled *abstract* or *summary* or *subject* or *preface*, and special formatting features such as headings or headlines, indented first lines, and drop caps. These features, plus the legitimacy of having been vetted by the interests that operate the publishing industry and that screen potential print voices, provide a print author with the validating ceremony in which to proceed. Yet Web authors, the first generation of individual interlopers into a mass media monopolized by institutions, find themselves in the position in which their contributions are foremost a presumption to speak, to break the silence.

To navigate such an intrusion effectively, subjects may rely in part on their repertoire of speech genres, a repertoire that, for Bourdieu, is instilled in our language habitus. As we have seen above, in the language habitus of many Web authors, the Web page would most comfortably be like a spoken monologue, though bereft of its ceremonies of introductions and mutual greetings and many other features of the mode of speech. It is this habitus that several participants bring to the new discursive practice of Web authorship. As speakers of the language, they conceive of the Web not just as a channel of writing but also as a channel of social exchange, and in occupying this new medium with their voices, they draw on strategies that have provided them with the know-how to get things done through speech. The opening of an exchange or the changing of the conditions or topic of an exchange are recognized as speech acts that intrude awkwardly upon the freedom of the hearer. An opening like *well*, analogous to the timid clearing of the throat, announces the intrusion into the silence. It moderates the potential aggressiveness of an uninvited or unannounced voice by soliciting the imaginary listener's attention and foreshadowing the utterance that will follow, signalling a degree of modesty.

The unexpected appearance of these many speech usages incongruously transcribed onto the Web points to the social conditions underlying individuals' Web production:

- individuals' lack of status with which to secure an audience;
- individuals' long-standing alienation from the production regimes of the media.

In these social conditions, individuals may be using their transcribed speech usages strategically to redress the imposed humility of their public positions. I explore the

implications of each of these two social conditions in turn.

First, the heightened animation typical of many of these speech expressions is indicative of the discourse of those whose position compels them to work so as to maintain an audience. In his seminal work on self-presentation, sociologist Irving Goffman, developing his dramaturgical perspective, notes that performers "must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions" (1959, p.66), a means of securing an audience. Psychologist Barry Schlenker reports that subjects have been found to recognize different situations as cueing different scripts and manifestations of identity (1986, p.35); the public exposure of a Web site, for instance, might feasibly cue discursive behaviour consistent with that of performers offering entertainment to a fickle audience.

As we saw in chapter 2, Bourdieu introduces a distinction between the capacity to produce language and the competence to produce language that has an effect. Web authors no doubt have an untapped capacity to produce written prose where their situations warranted it. However, their Web productions are the function not of their hypothetical language potential but of their practical competence, their inculcated ability to use language and other semiotic resources to produce actions and effects on other people:

> [C]ompetence is . . . the capacity to command a listener. Language is not only an instrument of communications or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. . . . Competence implies the power to impose reception. (1977, p.648)

As otherwise undignified, unsanctioned producers, individuals on the Web lack the symbolic capital with which to secure effortlessly the attentions of surfers. Bourdieu's perspective reveals how their discursive actions in such a vulnerable position may be better understood by virtue of the competence with which they marshall their discursive resources to secure attention. Hence, the many expletives and facial noises, the superfluousness of exclamation points, the typographic intensity, and the other features evoking animated oral discourse can be seen as manifestations of participants' speech strategies for creating excitement and interest. Participants draw on their primary semiotic competence, a competence for using

speech dynamically and engagingly, in an attempt to motivate an audience and win its loyalty.

Second, the anomaly of discourse recognizable from one mode (speech) appearing transcribed in another (writing) calls attention to the social harmony between producers and the media for which they are producing. This transgression of one mode into a domain of the other exhibits what Hodge and Kress would recognize as the creation of difference (1988, p.82, 90). Difference and similarity allow for a formation of group identities based on semiotic resources that come to be identified as "ours" and "theirs." Hodge and Kress introduce, as an example, Halliday's work on "antilanguages," languages formed by marginalized subjects to consolidate their group status in the face of a more dominant system and its language (p.68). They also describe Labov's work on the endurance of low-status discourse, discourse which could readily be replaced by easily adopted, higher-status equivalents but which perseveres among some speakers because it reinforces solidarity and challenges power (p.86).

These cases exhibit similarities with the case of Web authors transcribing their informal speech usage into a mass media dominated by professionally produced writing and multimedia. The relatively high occurrence of what, by conventional writing standards, would appear to be the excesses typical of novice writers points to the exclusivity of institutionally sponsored communications. For instance, published texts in the print medium are produced largely by acknowledged writers, journalists, and editors who have had the upbringing, education, and writing experience to have developed the language skills that accord with the prevailing standards of the printed language and that is flexible enough to support a repertoire of expressive tools. English print practices are different from its speech practices, and hence require different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1991, p.57). Such a difference helps maintain the exclusivity of groups whose background has provided a sustained initiation into the practices of the written language.

Web authors no doubt know how to spell correctly simple words like *yes*, and would have recognized that exclamation points tend to be used one at a time. However, as novice producers in the mass media from which they were hitherto excluded, and as producers with

few recognizable resources, Web authors would not necessarily have a strong incentive to reproduce what are at best modest renditions of standard, professional usage. Such usage belongs to the voices of institutional producers. Indeed, "ordinary" individuals' casual usage may more successfully establish consubstantiality with the audience they might imagine receiving their contributions, an audience with a similar marginalized status as their own.[23]

Moreover, not only does transcribed speech reveal a linguistic and hence social difference from the standard practices of professional writing, it is also conspicuously lower down on the social hierarchy of language usage. As discussed in chapter 2, Burke underscores the importance of hierarchy by including it as a characteristic in his definition of the human subject, who is "*goaded by the sense of hierarchy*" (1966, p.16; italics in original). Hierarchies are one of the fundamental products of human subjects and society; the orientation of semiosis is not just to this or that, but to better or worse. Burke illustrates this point with an example that draws on language distinctions quite similar to those observed between the oral and the written on personal homepages:

> Either elegant or filthy language can represent the hierarchic principle, just as both "up" or "down" represent the "principle of height." (1950/1969, p.258)

Transcription of spoken usage thus index not just conversation per se, but the hierarchic scale between casual speech and its absent, higher-status paradigmatic partner, formal writing.

Pierre Bourdieu, whose socio-economic approach to language and culture reads semiotic hierarchies as manifestations of class hierarchies, makes a similar observation about the relative valuations of one language type with respect to the other:

> In the uses of language as in life-styles, all definition is relational. Language that is "recherché", "well chosen", "elevated", "lofty", "dignified" or "distinguished" contains a negative reference (the very words used to name it show this) to "common", "everyday", "ordinary", "spoken", "colloquial", "familiar" language and, beyond this, to "popular", "crude", "coarse", "vulgar", "sloppy", "loose", "trivial", "uncouth" language (not to mention the unspeakable, "gibberish", "pidgin" or "slang".) The oppositions from which this series is generated, and which, being derived from the

> legitimate language, is organized from the standpoint of the dominant users, can be reduced to two: the opposition between "distinguished" and "vulgar" (or "rare" and "common") and the opposition between "tense" (or "sustained") and "relaxed" (or "loose"), which no doubt represents the specifically linguistic version of the first, very general, opposition. It is as if the principle behind the ranking of class languages were nothing other than the degree of *control* they manifested and the intensity of the *correctness* they presupposed. (1991, p.60)

Thus, like Burke and Hodge and Kress, Bourdieu reads language usage relationally, as indexing a system of linguistic valuations and, behind that, a system of social relations. Casual usages, such as those appearing on personal homepages, do not just exist in a vacuum but rather announce their status in the hierarchy of usage, in opposition to the dominant standard usages and hence to dominant media production regimes at the other pole of the hierarchy.

Similar observations could be made not just about language per se, but also about features of document design. Hodge and Kress offer a hierarchical interpretation of typographic style that is relevant to the kinds of typographic diversity observed on many personal homepages. They equate large typefaces with shouting (1988, p.95), which suggests an emotional incontinence, a lack of restraint that, in contrast with the measured elegance of higher-status discourse, is associated with lower-status usage. In general, the expressive range evoked by typographic diversity, like the "relaxation" and looseness that Bourdieu observes in speech (1977, p.654), illustrates the emotional leakage frequently associated with less refined speech and contrasted with the control exhibited by written exposition.

In spite of the clear difference in valuations between oral and written modes of language, many participants obviously opted for the former in an apparently willful flaunting of the hierarchy of established media discourse. Their choice reveals not only their lack of solidarity with prevailing production standards, but also perhaps a contestation of the very logomonic systems that have hitherto excluded them. Participants may be expressing themselves in the media with the fullest range of their linguistic and typographic resources because, for once,

they can. Bourdieu equates the coarseness of "domesticated language" with a "rejection of the censorship which propriety imposes . . ." (1991, pp.87-88). The conventional restrictions against informal, casual usage in individuals' workplace writing, in their academic writing, and in their visible, public comportment cannot be enforced on the Web. By flaunting their casual usage in the context of prevailing formal practices in professional communications, participants are playfully contesting the hierarchy that has reduced their familiar discourse, and their own position, to a subordinate status. They thereby define their own Web space, and try to define the international space of the full Web, as an uncensored, emotionally unrestrained space.

The fertility of this kind of juxtaposition has been explored by Bakhtin in his work on the Medieval use of carnivalesque discourse and imagery in the face of official practices. Unofficial usage in its own right may not merit much attention, but such usage embedded in ceremonies, performances, genres, and discourses modelled on those of official practice creates a mockery of those practices, and was sometimes oppressed by those in power (e.g., 1984, p.189). In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin summarizes and interprets this history of unofficial usages:

> Heteroglossia, as organized in these low genres, was not merely heteroglossia vis-à-vis the accepted literary language (in all its various generic expressions), that is, vis-à-vis the linguistic center of the verbal ideological life of the nation and the epoch, but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. (1981a, p.273)

The salting of a mass medium like the Web with the unprofessional voices of ordinary individuals might thus be seen as a parody of the pretensions that a mass media presence attempts to sustain. This capacity for parody created by an infiltration of the low end of the hierarchy into the high is explored in detail in chapter 9.

The body of the author

What is shared by all the usages discussed above is their source in the habitus of the communicating subject. Standard written English is just one component of an individual's communication resources, a component limited largely to academic and employment experiences. The language habitus of those who have not had access to writing-intensive educations, apprenticeships, and careers, who have been receivers but not producers of communication in the mass media, is instead a habitus rooted in the body. The body is the most democratic of communication resources, the one communication resource that everyone has and has practiced with. In his seminal essay "Techniques of the Body," Marcel Mauss identifies the body as a subject's "first and most natural instrument" (1973, p.75). Bourdieu writes of the bodily "hexis," which Thompson glosses as the "durable organization of one's body and of its deployment in the world" (1991, p.13). Bourdieu classes language as just a subset of this bodily repertoire with which subjects engage their environment:

> [L]inguistic capital is an embodied capital and . . . language learning is one dimension of the learning of a total body schema which is itself adjusted to a system of objective chances of acceptability. Language is a body technique and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of the body *hexis* in which one's whole relation to the social world is expressed. (1977, p.660; italics in original)

What individuals occupy their homepages with are transcriptions of their bodily hexis. The pace, tone, and volume of a voice, together with the accompanying facial expressions and full body comportment, are expressed through exclamation points and ellipses, upper-case letters, variable font formats and sizes, spellings modified to fit the voice, and other textual features. Revealingly, almost all emoticons, rather than being arbitrary typographic symbols like their alphanumeric kin, are stylized representations of human faces. These typographic stylizations, in processes not unlike those of synesthesia and concrete poetry, evoke the kinetic elements of the communicating body. Unlike institutional productions, the personal Web page is rich in such transcriptions of the bodily hexis.

Above, in chapter 4, we saw how a primary motivation of Web producers is to express themselves, to be heard. In the language habitus of many, the way to be heard, to maintain an audience, to be seen as interesting and enjoyable to be with, to be popular, is to create dynamic bodily events. Subjects learn through experience how the effects of their communication, their command of listeners, their way of getting acknowledged and attended to, develops not merely from the semantics of their words but also from their bodily carriage, their tone of voice, their exhibition of passion. What makes their embodied communication unique is its representation of being right here, right now, with me. The niche they create on the Web is a space within speaking distance, one in which their tone of voice is heard, their facial expressions are seen. With words are produced meanings, but with the body are produced effects, the presence and continuous now that compels a hearing.

Above, we have seen just some examples of how subjects fill the vacuum of the Web with their bodily hexis and with chronotopes that create a setting for such embodiment. The sample of participants' Web sites reveals much other evidence of communication rooted in the body.

In a medium that is celebrated for its reduction of the space-time scope of the world to the scale of a "global village," in which individuals continents apart converse almost instantaneously, and in which mutability now has the currency that, centuries ago, constancy had, one of the most readily warranted topics is one's geographical location. Sixty-one of the Web writers in the sample reveal their geographical locale on their sites, most often by a direct statement (e.g., "I live in Waterloo, Ontario") and, less frequently, only by implication (e.g., "I am a student at the University of Waterloo").

Almost always, the geographical domain named is the most meaningful local unit: a town; in only a few instances is a larger geopolitical unit such as a state (of the US) or a country (non-US) the only identified location. It is thus out of the geography of their daily activities—the trip to the grocery store, the gas station, the school, the mall—that subjects ground their communication, speaking from their familiar terrain, their physical extension in a local setting,

their home town.

Certainly, the novelty of the medium's world-wide scope does make geography an issue on the Web. The novelty of the medium, however, cannot fully account for the frequent identification of one's town, as opposed to (more meaningfully to an international audience) just one's state or (more precisely but less relevantly) one's street address. For instance, 14 of the homepages in the sample identify not only their author's current home town but also their author's place of birth.[24] Such information might at first seem irrelevant in a medium that prizes currency; yet birth information, for the individual author, maps out the spatial extensions of the body, its claim to the spaces it has occupied.

As well, in revealing their date of birth or current age, as is done on 27 sites, participants orient their communication to their body's duration, their extension in time. In displaying a personal photo, as is done in 58 of the sites, participants orient their communication to their body's physical existence and appearance. In presenting their nuclear family and their genealogical tree, participants orient their contributions to their body's biological ties; in presenting their travels and travel photos, participants orient their contributions to the terrains their body has occupied.

With such topics prominent among the contributions of many Web authors, the non-space of cyberspace becomes invested with the evidence of the corporeal, the one resource with which each subject can claim to offer something unique. As Bourdieu maintains, the bodily hexis expresses "one's whole relation to the social world" (1991, p.86; 1977, p.660). Bakhtin argues, in his work on Rabelais (1984), that the manifestations of the body, though undignified, nevertheless create a fertility and an enlivening generative capacity. Morson and Emerson summarize Bakhtin's interpretation of the body's function in a way that is especially relevant to the context of the Web:

> A grotesque-word matrix drags the messy body into territory previously occupied by disembodied, hierarchical word systems. It spreads obscenities throughout learned talk, and degrades language in order to transform abstract thought into something more

> material, concrete, and widely shareable. (1990, p.438)

In the context of the Web and of mass communications, in which knowledge is produced and copyrighted by institutions, the messy body creates a niche that ostentatiously occupies the same neighbourhood as institutional productions. It promotes not information but a reified voice, speaking from *here*. Its vicarious presence grounds the abstract pixels of the Web in the real social world of power and hierarchy, of social and organic change. It responds to the privilege and exclusivity of established media production with a more accessible and diffuse, less programmatic, communications dispensation, foreseen by Walter Ong in his conjecture of a "secondary orality" to follow from the age of print:

> This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment. . . . (1982, p.136)

Though the Internet has been publicly celebrated as an information resource, as the Information Superhighway, the body redefines the situation as not so much epistemological as ontological. The knowledge resources with which to make relevant contributions are more convincingly claimed by institutional voices. By contrast, individuals' meaningful participation in the new medium is consummated by occupying the ephemeral Web with their body: its extension in space, its duration in time, its geographical location past and present, the places it has been to, the sounds it makes with its face, its biological affiliations, and so forth. It is with the body, its witness to the local and unique, that many Web communicators attempt to validate their role in a medium that otherwise transmits the universal: organizations whose scope and agenda traverses frontiers; companies that advertise and sell internationally; research and scholarship that inherently claims to be truth and, hence, to be beyond the vagaries of space and time. By contrast, a primary orientation of the homepage author, the meta-text underlying his or her contribution, is the assertion "I am."

* * * * *

Though the body provides aspiring Web authors a fertile source both for topics and discourse with which to make their contributions, it does not necessarily offer these contributors to the mass media what institutional contributors have long monopolized: legitimacy. By the prevailing standards of the mass media, the fruit of the body—as is the case with the labour of the body of the proletariat in Marx's interpretation of capitalism—provides little value with which to purchase the symbolic capital of recognition, credibility, status, legitimacy. In the next two chapters, we explore how individuals, in order to acquire the symbolic means for legitimacy, must abandon the body.

Dispensing Information

Above, I have discussed how the World Wide Web's decentered social and technological structure has created the opening for active participation by "ordinary" people. This technologically-induced opportunity, as we have seen, raises a set of non-technological doubts about the value of their contributions and hence the value of such contributers:

- What place do ordinary people have in a mass medium?
- What resources and strategies could they draw on to make useful contributions to a world-wide forum?
- How can they legitimate their contributions to such a forum?
- What implications, in turn, do their contributions carry for the collective enterprise of the Web?

We have seen in the previous chapter how some people, in occupying the Web, draw directly from what for most would be their primary language habitus, speech, and on their embodied skills for managing interpersonal encounters with others. Their strategies derive in part from their speech practices and bodily hexis, their corporeal means of using language in such ways as to produce animation, excitement, humour, giddiness, and other emotional tones, and thereby secure the attention and interest of listeners. The chronotope of their sites could be characterised as spatially local and temporally spontaneous, hosting seemingly unrepeatable events that, but for their transcription into the electronic record, seemed to be unfolding here and now. Such practices implicitly define the situation of Web communications as interpersonal, social, and local. In such a representation of the Web marketplace, what would constitute valued contributions are precisely those offerings that are considered valued in face-to-face encounters in interpersonal social contexts. It would be on such a basis that people might make some sense of what they are doing and how they are going about doing it as they proceed with their contribution to the newfangled world-wide forum.

Despite individuals' low standing, even invisibility, in most public forums, private discursive

practices are not their only available option. The qualities of what constitutes a credible contribution is always open to a degree of implicit negotiation among the communicating participants, especially in such a novel, unregimented forum as the Web. Through in "real life," individuals, as communication producers, may find their public contributions restricted by socially- and institutionally-grounded production regimes, individuals may find on the Web the opening to become plausible mass media producers, a position from which they are largely excluded in real-life. For individuals with the right resources, the Web can become the medium through which they can expand the environment of their discourse production beyond the local and the social. One such resource that is available to some individuals is information. Marshall McLuhan, in one of his many ambitious and pithy declarations, reconceives the hunter-gatherer of the prehistoric age as now, in the information age, the "information-gatherer" (1964/1994, p.283). Joseph Walther, writing on computer-mediated communication, observes that in cyberspace, one's "social currency" derives from the information one has (1996, p.20). On the Web, a medium sometimes referred to as the *Information Superhighway*, information can be conceived of as, using Bourdieu's terminology, the symbolic capital with which an individual can become a legitimate communication producer. Such a producer need no longer frame his or her contribution as local, social, and ephemeral. Information is potentially timeless and boundless, and hence the context of its offering can be equally grand in scale.

In this chapter, we explore the means by which individuals having what could be socially recognized as valid "information" come to occupy the Web. First, we sketch the means by which aspiring Web authors typically might come to recognize how the Web validates certain kinds of information offers. Then, we explore the resourcefulness with which individuals respond within such a context: first, by considering how some participants have made their sites centres of specialized information for a world-wide audience; then, by considering the strategies of those whose information may not be exclusive enough to warrant the implied claim of making a contribution to the world-wide project; and finally, by considering how the "look" of information plays a role in determining what appears on personal Web sites.

Recognizing the Web as information marketplace

To develop an understanding of how Web authors might frame their contributions to the Web, let's first sketch the means by which prospective Web authors might come to be influenced by existing contributions to the Web. We saw in chapter 4 that the majority of participants had experiences as visitors to scores if not hundreds of Web sites before beginning to compose their own. Moreover, a substantial majority, 95 of 110 participants, acknowledged that their exposure to other sites had a role in their compositing of their own sites. Many participants reported that, through their surfing activities, they became acclimatized to the medium, acquiring a general understanding of what the medium was capable of:

- [W]ell, seeing other people's web pages shows you what new things you can do. (d-cad)
- They provided me with the concepts of what was possible. (t-jst)
- Well, they were the only reference I had to start from. . . . (s-s)
- [I looked at other sites to] try and see what the web was about. . . . (j-rj)
- [I] looked at those sites to see what the convention is. (h-eh)
- I never thought about having a homepage until I saw other's [sic] that had them. I had only seen news and info pages before that time. (h-s)
- Just like the best writers learn style and such from reading, web designers must look at what has been done in order to learn style (the good and the *bad*) and just get a feel for the [I]nternet and its culture in general. (i-li)
- See[ing] other sites gave me an idea of what I wanted my website to look like. . . . I used other web pages to see what I could do with my own. (w-jw)
- It gave me ideas as to what I like and what things were aesthetically pleasing. (d-dd)

These responses reinforce an assumption underlying many of the theoretical perspectives discussed above in chapter 2: communication is not just "natural," but rather develops normative practices, socially constructed ways of doing things. Regardless of whether these norms are explained by logonomic rules or by genres or by markets, they are cued to their environment. A new environment, such as the Web, creates the "exigence" for its own set of

practices, a hierarchy of what "good" or "bad" might look like in the new environment.[25]

As might be expected, participants reported developing a recognition of how different contributions might be valued in the new "market" of the Web, and thus how they themselves might go about making "profitable" contributions:

- It made us aware of the things we didn't want our site to be - sort of a 'learn by negative example'. (b-kcb)
- Mostly, I could see what worked and what didn't work, and I could use ideas and styles that I liked in other sites. (d-wb)
- [I] learned what to do and what not to do. (a-aa)
- I learned what to do and what not to do. I saw what got peoples [sic] attention, and what didn't. (p-dp)
- I found things that I liked and things I wanted to avoid in my own page. I looked for things that caught my attention and things that annoyed me. (t-jj)
- I learned specific example [sic] of things I did *not* want to put on my page. I also learned techniques others used which I wanted to incorporate into my page. (w-a)
- I often got ideas for what I would have done the same, what I liked and disliked. . . . I found that individuals [sic] home pages were very diverse, ranging from the 'this is me' type of page which was largely autobiographical to a special purpose pages [sic]. (m-lm)
- I saw which ones looked cool, and were easy to navigate and they helped me see how i could go about making mine cool. .[sic] I also leanred [sic] from the bad sites i saw on what NOT to do. (s-es)

In these accounts of participants' learning experiences, we can see repeated references to some form of polarity: a good versus bad, a positive versus negative. These participants seem to have come to the Web with the assumption that it would have a hierarchy of contributions, and they report developing a growing valuation savvy for that hierarchy.

As we saw in chapter 5, among the criteria some participants came to recognize was an imperative to deliver solid content, to make an informative contribution:

- I don't like sites that have nothing to say. It takes more than HTML knowledge to be a webmaster. (g-kgi)
- I recognized that many homepages are not information oriented and/or [are] poorly designed and wanted to avoid those pitfalls in designing mine. (b-jb)
- People seemed to be going out of their way to make their page LOOK good. . . . I hoped my web page would be useful and informative. . . . (h-dgr)
- Also, I found sites more useful when they didn't just have a favorite links area but also had some useful reference and information links. (e-ke)
- I was impressed with their content. I didn't want a page full of links, I wanted to make my page stand out with completely original content. (v-s)

Perhaps reinforcing this emphasis on content is the very surfing and navigating experience itself. When surfing from site to site, Web users navigate with hyperlinks that, in their composition and their context, ideally would name or describe or illustrate the topic of the destination site or file. Unlike the transactions in our daily conversations, these electronic transactions are generally concisely identified, usually with nouns or noun phrases, and lead us to communications that usually have informative, content-oriented titles. Also instilling certain attitudes about the best capacity of the Web would be the searching experience. Web directories such as Yahoo! catalogue sites on the basis of their information, their topics. When using search engines to attempt to find the kind of information they seek, novice surfers would also learn how context in the relatively a-contextual Web can be artificially created by the accident of overlapping key words. Because of the ranking formulae of these engines, the search results will in general give priority to sites that use a key word more frequently or more prominently. These are the sites that surfers are most likely to see. Surfers will also experience the frustration of visiting high-ranked sites that have little to offer on their search topic. Thus, when surfers conceptualize their favourite sites, it is reasonable to assume that they may be thinking in terms of content. A 1998 survey of Web users' purposes for using the Web lends support to this view. The top two Web activities surfers report pursuing are research and education, both of which are content-focused (CyberAtlas, 1998).

These activities of surfing and searching in the new medium would not only instill navigating familiarity and efficiency, but also gradually inculcate the criteria for establishing a valued presence in this medium. In particular, the surfing and searching practice would tend to inculcate the sense that one measure of value of a Web site is its homogeneity, the degree to which it successfully occupies its niche. In a medium in which any given topic may be addressed by hundreds or thousands of sites, the heterogeneous message is drowned out, unrecognized, unheard. On the Web, one is found, one is heard, and one achieves recognition and legitimacy by establishing and occupying a niche. In this dimensionless medium, a successful site is one that creates the illusion of filling and controlling a conceptual territory.

Positioning an information expert

In a discursive market that values specialized products, aspiring members of that market may seek to join not with any haphazard offering but by discovering or constructing a niche in which their contribution is recognized. Among the participants surveyed for this study, some represented their contributions as a consequence of their search for a speaking space, an opening that they could occupy:

- . . . I wanted some of it to be stuff that I hadn't previously seen on the Web. (g-kgo)
- [I] [w]anted to do something completely different. (y-gy)
- . . . I wanted to make my page stand out with completely original content. (v-s)
- [The Web] (at that time) didn't have any similar pages [to mine] (I thought it would be redundant to write a page with information that was *already* readily accessible on the Web. I still think that). (r-ir)

Similarly, other participants positioned their contributions as a response to a niche that they found unoccupied:

- "Some [parts of my site] fill existing needs that I saw . . ." (c-amc).
- "[My site content is about] what I saw as lacking on the Web" (k-sk).
- "I turned to the Web to gather information on throwing a cocktail party but came up short. After having figured out how to throw one I put the information on the Web so like-minded people would have a page on which to find the necessary information" (b-jb).
- "I am a scuba diver and they're [sic] where [sic] no pages around that covered the topic in this area. So I took it upon myself to do something about it" (h-rh).
- "There wasn't much info about adopting from Vietnam (where Sahara [their daughter] is from) and I wanted to change that" (b-tb).

These accounts represent the environment of the Web itself as creating some of the exigence that responsible individuals can meaningfully respond to. Instead of explaining their site content in terms of their knowledge or experience or more personal desires to express

themselves, these participants explain their site content in terms of the environment in which a representation of their knowledge or experience would have validity. They recognize an ongoing world-wide "conversation" and respond to it by seeking openings where they can jump in.

Among the niches developed in the sample of Web sites are a site devoted to actor and film producer Kenneth Branagh (k-sk), a site devoted to pastoral counselling (g-jg), to raja yoga (m-jm), to distilleries and the brewing of whisky (s-js), to the Internet and computer community in the Philippines (c-amc), to certain music groups of the 1970 disco era and to the various races in the 1960s Star Trek series (i-ai), and others. Each of the above comprise several HTML files and in some cases over 100 image files. Also, these sites are devoted completely or almost completely to their niche, with little or no personal information about their authors

In a developing market in which a typical contribution is a brief bio of oneself and one's family, a few pages about one's interests, and a page of links, the labour invested in developing a unique niche on the Web is far in excess of what would be necessary just to occupy the medium. The Web offers few penalties for illegitimacy or invalidity. In a medium in which there are few explicit restrictions on what can be said, how can we account for the effort some participants make to occupy a niche, to say something new, to seek that legitimacy?

One valuable by-product of specialized niche pages is the image of rationality and responsibility that might accrue to their authors. The above accounts of participants validating their contributions by pointing to an unoccupied, unserved niche market suggests some of the same criteria developed within H.P. Grice's (1975) framework for co-operative, rational behaviour. Grice's work on implicature is best known with conversational exchanges. However, Grice represents conversation as "a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behaviour" and discusses other kinds of interpersonal behaviour "transactions" in which similar "principles" would apply (p.47). Moreover, as we saw in chapter 6, many

participants frame their contributions in a manner resembling oral discourse, suggesting that others too may have been composing their pages by drawing, at least in part, on their habitus as effective conversationalists, not as writers. In sum, Grice's work on rational behaviour in interpersonal contexts can potentially illuminate communications behaviour in the context of the Web.

With his framework for co-operative, rational behaviour, Grice's aim is not to assert that people do reliably behave rationally and co-operatively with each other, but rather to map the logical "principles" by which we can sustain an assumption of competence and rationality in others and ourselves on the basis of our sometimes perplexing communicative transactions. His Cooperative Principle provides a concise statement of how the general injunction to behave rationally might be manifest in the dispositions that individuals develop through years of socialization and communication:

> "Make your . . . contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the . . . exchange in which you are engaged" (p.45).

Stated as it is in the form of an imperative, the Cooperative Principle may be conceived, in the terminology of Hodge and Kress, as an articulation of one element of the frequently tacit production regimes, the rules that prescribe who may produce semiotic meaning in what contexts and in what manner. The Cooperative Principle offers a concise guide of how to produce valid and accepted contributions that maintain solidarity with one's correspondents and construct an image of competence and rationality for oneself.

In the context of the Web, the Cooperative Principle can be conceived as one dimension of making not only a meaningful Web site but also a credible Webmaster and legitmate social subject. As is suggested in the chapter 2 discussion of the theoretical perspectives on discourse and its context, one of the consequences of discourse is subjecthood. Such perspectives aim to unsettle the common assumption that subjecthood is innate, a given, outside of and pre-existing discourse, and instead construct accounts of how subjecthood is a work, a by-product of discourse. We may conceive of these perspectives, collectively, as an articulation, in Kenneth Burke's terminology, of an act-agent ratio of motives: a given

communication act enables a corresponding kind of subjecthood to emerge from its agent. In chapter 4, we have seen how social-psychological accounts of such act-agent transactions can account for the investments participants make in constructing a site on the Web, investments that pay off by reifying the selfhood of the individual. One's self identity is solidified through the validation generated by the real or imagined acknowledgement of others for one's aptitudes and acts. By publishing a specialized work, one becomes an author, one reifies one's authority on a topic by manifesting that knowledge; publicly, one becomes someone through the recognition accorded by one's peers. A similar ratio is evident in Goffman's account of self-representation, in which selves may be seen to be effects, not causes, of their performances (1959, p.252) .

Social psychologist Rom Harré and his colleagues also account for subjecthood in terms of the "constitutive force" made available by discourse for the construction of personhood (Davies and Harré, 1990, p.46; Carbaugh, 1994, p.164). Harré and colleagues introduce the term "subject position" (Davies and Harré, 1990), deriving the concept "position" from marketing (Harré and van Langenhove, 1991, p.395), to account for the "discursive construction" of

> "a person's 'moral' and personal attributes. . . . One can position oneself or be positioned as e.g., powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definitive or tentative and so on." (Harré and van Langenhove, 1991, p.395).

While their work focuses explicitly on conversational positioning, there are suggestions that the concept of subject position would be equally applicable in contexts of written communication (e.g., Harré and van Langenhove, 1991, pp.402-03, 405, 406).

The concept is also used by Norman Fairclough for discourse types and situations in general, not specific to any one medium.[26] For Fairclough, "there is a sense in which we can say that [social agents] *are what they do*" (1989, p.38; italics in original). One becomes a social agent by occupying a communication role available in the discourses of a particular situation. Fairclough is careful to extend the prerogative of agents beyond that of simply enacting, by rote, the discourse types readily available to them in such a given situation. Underlining the

creative capacity of agents, Fairclough, like Harré, introduces the concept of subject positions as an alternate to fixed social roles. Subject positions (in discourse) are taken on as a consequence both of the constraints imposed by the communication situation and of the creative capacity of agents to choose and adapt various discourse types in response to the specific conditions of the situation (p.39). Hence, we may conceive of discourse types as resources with which to construct subject positions (p.39), and we may conceive of situations as opportunities to occupy those subject positions and, by extension, to construct subjecthood. Thus, for instance, in light of the Cooperative Principle discussed above, acts that are recognized as relevant to their context may reflect positively on their agents. It is on joining the conversation with a contribution that is informative, true, relevant, and perspicuous that one can fulfill an expectation of reasonableness.[27] One might thereby construct a self-image of rationality and credibility by constructing a Web site that makes a well-focused, non-redundant, informative contribution to the community.

The Web thus presents individuals an unprecedented opportunity to take on at least some of the trappings of subject positions hitherto reserved for institutions or for those sanctioned by institutions, such as professors, publishers, priests, and politicians. On the Web, an individual can in principle take up a wide range of subject matters and draw on the discourses commonly associated with situations that address these subject matters, all to publish and thereby to occupy for himself or herself the elusive subject positions otherwise frequently reserved for more established classes. Because the medium is so new, and because of its carnivalesque mixing of established genres and contexts, it has yet to develop the relative stability of subject positions in such environments as the classroom, the job interview, and so forth. In principle, individuals have a number of options, and participants in this study certainly adopted different types of subject positions on their personal homepages.

For instance, in the previous chapter, we saw how some participants defined the situation of their sites as that of a local, casual conversational exchange. The subject position constructed of such discourse is that of the friendly, gregarious conversationalist, not too far removed from the default position precast for most citizens. To opt out of this default position, subjects must

take up new discourses so as to construct the concomitant new positions. One option, made relevant by the dominance of institutions in the mass media, would be to take up the discourse types commonly used by institutions for the construction of their media presences. Adapting such discourse types, individuals construct subject positions that are modelled on institutional presences. We explore this possibility in the next chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how individuals can "profit" from the time and labour invested in researching and presenting homepage topics by constructing the subject positions of serious, informed producers, of specialists or teachers on niche topics that, with aptitude, experience, or hard work, they can credibly occupy.

Consider, first, the experience of one participant, b-jb, and her site about hosting cocktail parties. In describing in her survey response the impact other sites had on her thinking about her own prospective site, b-jb establishes the grounds for what she feels is a relevant contribution to the Web: "I . . . recognizaed [sic] that the web was being innundated [sic] with commercial sites that, in my opinion, detract from the spirit of the web. My site aimed to counter that in some small way." Above, we saw how she, like some other participants, found her niche after searching for her topic on the Web and finding little existing coverage. After researching the topic (presumably through other media), participant b-jb constructed her site so that, as she writes in her survey response, "like-minded people would have a page on which to find the necessary information."

Participant b-jb's site offers "a step by step guide" to hosting a cocktail party. Her topics cover the scheduling of tasks leading up to the party, a sample invitation, snack and drink recipes, advice on being a socially interesting person, hangover remedies, and links to other relevant sites. Unlike most sites authored by a single person, she refers to herself not with just the first person pronouns but as "Miss Joanna," a fitting pseudonym for a purveyor of social manners. An animated graphic at the top of the home page shows a portrait of an elegantly styled woman who winks at the visitor and blows a kiss. Though with some seemingly deliberate lapses, b-jb otherwise maintains a polite stance throughout most of her advice pages, referring to visitors as "ladies and gentlemen," "citizens of Joanna Land," "my dear

friends," and "darling."

Her site, though ostensibly about throwing a cocktail party, is also the manifestation and occupancy of a subject position. We receive only a small and eclectic selection of information about participant b-jb in her real-life identity: she lives in New York city, likes TV and writing, has been to university; there is no photo, however, and no clear sense of her age or occupation. The site is not directly about the existing real-life individual. What the site does develop is an identity of sophistication, elegance, taste, and popularity. Participant b-jb seems to know her topic well and hence her writing and publishing of it is the embodiment of a position of authority, warranting respect for its author. Her highly mannered "Miss Joanna" and her occasional references to "philistines" construct a social identity of class, exclusivity, and distinction. Her role as advice-giver presupposes and constructs a textual audience of advice-receivers, novice or aspiring cocktail-party hosts, whose position reflects admiration and validation back on Miss Joanna.

Her Miss Joanna identity is not without slips, but these appears deliberate. On the one hand, her flexible use of language, alternating usages redolent of a higher-class social demographic such as "panache," "declassé," "and "canapes" with expressions of a more common social usage such as "booze," "stuff," "a hell of a lot," and "a hot one," does disrupt the integrity of her Web identity; yet on the other hand, it proactively resists the implication that she's putting on airs. Highlighting the elegant voice by contrasting it with an earthier voice acknowledges metatextually the partially fictional status of her identity, allowing her to try on the ostentatious airs of her subject position without offending a readership of egalitarian, technologically adept netizens that would otherwise find themselves positioned in a lower status. She maintains consubstantiality with the majority of her audience with her flexible language usage, even while exercising the identity of an elegant society hostess, "Miss Joanna."

Participant b-jb's successful occupancy of a niche allows her to construct such a vivid "Miss Joanna" that her real-life identity may pale in comparison. As mentioned above, very little of

her real-life identity is explicitly presented on her site, perhaps a wise composing decision, as it could potentially conflict with the subject position of knowledgable social hostess that she has established as a result of her knowledge resources.

Such a potential conflict is perceived by another participant, a-kal, a librarian whose site includes both personal pages about her home, dog, and garden and a carefully researched series of pages about tsubas (the hand guards on Japanese swords). Participant a-kal writes in her survey of how she perceives an incongruity between these two parts of her site:

> It was just to be a general [who-am-I] page. I keep contemplating taking the whole page down and simply putting up separate tsuba and armor pages, but I've received a lot of response from people who just pulled me up through the tv or gardening sections. . . . They hadn't expected to find that sort of thing & they found it amusing. So I've decided to let the mishmash stand.

Her subject position as dog-owner, wife, and gardener undermines, she feels, the ethos of her position as authority on her hobby of several years. Visitors find the incongruity "amusing," and she herself feels that speaking both as a wife and dog-owner on the one hand and as authority on tsubas on the other hand is somehow invalid. The two different discourse types apparently cannot be contained within a single subject position. In speaking about the future development of her site, her concern is not with its content per se but with how legitimacy may be constructed for its author:

> I think I want to eventually go to a more professional page on the armor and tsubas & I think that my personal page may make people view my work on those subjects as less professional.

Of the two options, she feels that occupancy of her niche topic is more important than a more direct representation of her home and self, so much so that she contemplates erasing herself from the Web.

In these two accounts of "selflessness" on the Web, homepage topics composed in response to available niches on the Web involve more than an environment that provides measures of legitimacy and topics that can achieve validity by their niche specialization. They also,

inherently, construct the subject position of specialists, experts. As we saw in chapter 4, some of the motivations individuals have for joining the Web include the articulation and expression, indeed the reification, of their being. More than a medium of communication of pre-existing identities, the Web is the agency by which subjecthood may be manifest. One's niche knowledge becomes a symbolic capital that one can transfer into certain characteristics of subjecthood. Diluting such subjecthood derived from public positions of experts with positions of private real-life identities weakens its currency.

Presupposing socially-valued positions

Above, we have seen how some individuals, by having what is recognized as information (as distinct from persona trivia), are able to construct not only potentially useful communication but also in so doing the position of a rational communicator. Within the environment of the Web, having information that has not yet been published allows potential Web producers to conceive of the scope of their project as encompassing the Web as a whole: contributing meaningfully to the "Information Superhighway" by taking responsibility for one of its niches. One can become, in a scene of such scope, a communicator recognized as distinctive, valuable, helpful, hard-working, rational, thoughtful, authorative—an expert.

For those who do not have such information, the resources for producing valuable communication and, hence, the subject position of a valued communicator are fewer. But they are by no means non-existent. The Web is a communication environment in which, for individuals, the power to produce is relatively high but the influence of a contribution is relatively low. Nevertheless, with power one can shape not only one's contribution but also the choice of context within which one's contribution is meaningful. Fairclough describes this as a process in which a producer can index a selected context by assumptions built into the text. He refers to these assumptions about the context as "presuppositions," and emphasizes their social significance: "Presuppositions are not properties of texts, they are an aspect of text producers' interpretations of intertextual context" (1989, p.152). To the extent that text producers have power in a situation, they also have the prerogative to compose a text that manifests their own interpretations of what its context is. Most of Fairclough's examples draw from situations in which the distribution of power is rather unambiguous. Indeed, in most established media, the powerless have little or no access at all, so the simple capacity to produce and disseminate a message is adequate demonstration that a text producer has at least a degree of power. While presupposition is evidently useful in communication situations in which producers have such unchallenged power, the concept loses some of its relevance in situations in which the producer cannot enjoin the intended recipients to indeed read or listen,

to become an audience. The Web is one such context, a medium in which readers have quick access to millions of texts and no social or economic or political price to pay for emigrating from one to another.

This quality of communications in the medium is shared with the conditions of communication in some other media, in which the theoretical power of the producer to produce whatever he or she wishes is tempered by the power of the recipient not to attend to such production. Some casual face-to-face conversations, for example, have this quality. Irving Goffman's (1959) work theorizing the medium of face-to-face communications offers a fruitful explanation of how the power of the producer can be reconciled with the power of the recipient. Though focusing on face-to-face interactions, Goffman's account is similar enough to Fairclough's that the differences can be potentially illuminating. Goffman's explanation of the self-presenter defining the situation of the presentation is akin to Fairclough's account of the producer of text determining the presuppositions that characterise the text's context. However, in Goffman's account, a greater role is granted to the consent of the audience with the definition of the situation:

> [This definition of the situation] involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored. (pp.9-10)

This agreement, Goffman suggests, is frequently contingent upon whatever definition of the situation is made by the party who takes the initiative to make the first moves (p.10).

In written text, the first moves, indeed all moves, are usually made by the writer, who emplots a consenting role for the reader. However, the habitus individuals acquire as communicators includes strategies for winning and maintaining the interest of listeners. Except in situations of unambiguous power, most communicating individuals, to some extent, draw on those strategies that, they think, will best ensure they are heard or read. In chapter 6, we saw one manifestation of such strategies, the use of exclamation to create a mood of excitement and animation. Such a strategy is quite plausibly part of individuals' speech habitus, developed through face-to-face encounters and transcribed into the written medium of the Web.

In the case of Web sites, though producers in principle have the prerogative to compose what they wish, producers can better win the consent of their audience by determining contextual presuppositions that represent their producer-viewer relationships as credibly beneficial to the audience. It is with their capacity for defining the situation, or determining the presuppositions of their communication, that individuals who cannot occupy an unfilled information niche can nevertheless create a meaningful subject position for themselves. Individuals who cannot credibly define their situation as one of adding unique value to the Web as a world-wide collective project can opt to reduce the scope of their context. They can be useful not to the Web but to a subset of Web users, such as novice Web surfers. The presupposition of their texts, in such a strategy, would construct precisely the audience that has, at the opening of the transactions, less information than they do.

This conception of Web sites in terms not primarily of topic but of audience is revealed in some survey responses. Some participants accounted for the choice of context for their sites by referring directly or indirectly to their imagined audiences. They represented the situations of their messages to the world as really being messages to some people. A few referred to their audiences quite specifically:

- "[I] decided to cater to [. . .] people who want to program, make Web pages, etc." (p-map)
- "[I wrote] for people who were newbies to the Web so they could learn how to search and find info!" (s-e)

These two participants' presuppositions project the characteristics of that segment of the audience for whom their own information offering would be beneficial. It is on this understanding of their situation—having relatively unexclusive information but imagining a suitably consenting audience—that they make sense of their composing what might otherwise be a redundant message for the Web. When asked directly about their intended audiences, some survey respondents identified a subset of Web users, such as their family and friends, or those interested in their particular niche topic. Though technically accessible by all Web users, their sites were conceived of much more exclusively.

In discussing their choice of content for their sites, some respondents indicated a more general sensitivity to or concern with what their audience might find "useful" (m-cm and d-nd) or entertaining:

- "I started with the basic concept of a corner pub, and then extrapolated what areas people would want to hang out in." (g-kgi)
- ". . . I tried to make the page as interesting to others as possible to generate more visitors." (b-to)
- "[My site is] mostly on what I felt the readers would appriciate [sic]." (t-tg)

In general, these latter responses frame the situations of their sites as commencing once a surfer has already arrived at their site. Unlike those participants who have exclusive information that could open a new niche topic, and hence who could conceive of collaborating in the public enterprise of building the "Information Superhighway," these participants conceive of a more private endeavour of servicing those who have arrived for the duration of their stay, and perhaps for future visits. This conception of legitimacy implied by such a private situation is somewhat narrower than the one discussed above—of producing difference, of occupying a niche in a public sphere—but with such a presupposition, individuals can nevertheless make sense, both to themselves and to their potential audience, of what might otherwise be perceived cynically as an irrational business of adding a few more files to the millions already on the Web.

The accounts of all these participants highlight not the Web page information per se but the activity of constructing meaningful subject positions which, in turn, enable the composition of those packages of information that do end up being produced for the Web. By representing their audiences as being helped, entertained, enlightened, well served, these situations also emplot their Web authors as helpers, hosts, teachers, guides.

Such constructions of subject positions are especially salient on the Web sites themselves. Some features of Web sites may best be illuminated not just by their topics but also by their staged social interaction, with the site authors positioned as congenial, generous hosts. For instance, participants' sites commonly open with greetings; at least 68 sites in the sample

include the word *welcome*, almost always near the top of the main page. As well, participants' sites demonstrated considerable solicitude toward their guests, with at least 85 sites using the word "you" in a non-generic sense, foregrounding the audience's role in the interaction, and at least some awareness of an attendant audience during the composing process. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, participants strove to represent themselves as animated and entertaining hosts through such usages as frequent exclamation points. Other print-based media, such as books and magazine articles, do not include such salient social interactions with their readers and hence such vividly constructed subject positions as hosts.

But it is through the dissemination of information that Web authors construct the more sustained and elaborate subject positions of helpers and teachers. This emphasis on information often ends up manifesting itself in the use of the immediate context as a source of homepage material. Along with personal information, perhaps the most typical content of personal homepages in the sample draws from the medium itself: navigability within a site, links to other sites, annotated hyperlinked lists of those sites, information about Internet networks such as newsgroups and chat groups, information about and recommendations for hardware and software, "how-to" tutorials, multi-media demonstrations, and so forth. Much of this preoccupation is due, of course, to discourse's responsiveness to its environment and the tendency of that environment to elicit discourse about itself. Some, however, may be due to the knowledge of such discourse's producers. As experienced Internet users, one of the things they know best is, well, the Internet. Despite the likelihood that their audience will also know the same information, Web authors may feel, nevertheless, that their information about the Internet is their most specialized resource with which to construct credible subject positions, especially with the right presuppositions.

For instance, two subsites devoted to the Web and software applications illustrate how, despite having little to offer that is new, the construction of the right audience can in turn construct a subject position of authority for the writers. One subsite is by participant i-li, a young woman between the ages of 15 and 19, whose site includes two six-part primers on Web site construction, one on HTML ("HTML Basics") and the other on graphics and other homepage

applications ("A Virtual Toolbox"). Introducing her first primer, i-li writes, tongue in cheek,

> First, I just gave out some Web page tips. Then I moved on to providing tools for Webmasters-to-be. Then, I said 'LET THERE BE HTML BASICS! And there was. . .
>
> .

Having established her own activities, she then constructs the audience for her most recent venture:

> This isn't going to teach you HTML to last you for the rest of your life. It will just provide the basics most pages use, taught with lots of examples to make sure you really understand. If you decide you're ready for bigger, better things after this, use one of the links I have provided to HTML tutorials [. . . .]

The "you" in this passage is depicted as a Web-composing novice. This person may have difficulty picking up new practices and may not appreciate their true depth of application and so is provided with many examples "to make sure you really understand." The lessons are "taught" and so presumably the author is the teacher and the reader is the student. Moreover, the reader is advised that she may decide, once taught at this site, that she has the aptitude and skills to be "ready" for advanced HTML practice.

Throughout both primers, participant i-li periodically invokes her audience in ways that suggest the audience needs patience and reassurance:

- "See? I told you so"
- "Don't worry."
- "Makes things easier, doesn't it?"
- ". . . but you don't want that, do you?"
- "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times!"
- "Maybe you're smarter than you look."
- "You want to [. . .], don't you?"

Though her pose is clearly exaggerated and playful in some of these utterances, the pleasure in the writing is that of a writer, a teenager who is apparently a student, trying on the voice of a teacher, a primary authority figure in her life. The immediacy and intimacy of these utterances makes vivid her vicarious engagement with her attentive pupil. She appears at ease

in her role of anticipating and responding to the imaginary needs and feelings of her student. Her HTML and Web knowledge offers her an imaginary field in which knowledge can be exchanged for the symbolic power of teachers and authorities. Her trade in such knowledge allows her the purchase of a subject position of respect, expertise, authority, which is as much the subject of the site as HTML is.

A similar stance can be observed on the site of participant v-hvz, a Dutch student relatively fluent in English, whose site is devoted largely to Internet tools and applications: search engines, anti-virus software, compression software, UNIX commands, and so on. His pages offer easy access by hyperlinks to the search engines and ready access, by downloading, to the software applications he discusses. This mini-library could be potentially useful to a significant proportion of Web surfers.

His implied audience, however, is not this large cross-section of the World Wide Web demographic. Consider, for example, how he introduces his UNIX page and its first subsection:

> UNIX is the most-used operating system on the Internet. Therefore it might come in handy to know something about this system. If you already know the UNIX-basics, this is not the page for you. If you are new to this system however, you might be interested. I will show you how to browse through your directory contents, how to copy, move and rename files and last but certainly not least, how to change modes.
>
> **Directory contents**
>
> If you know how to use DOS, you will certainly have tried **dir** to see what files you have in your current directory. If you have, you also have noticed that this doesn't work in UNIX. In UNIX you can use several commands.
>
> (v-hvz; underlining=hyperlinks)

The audience he has posited is one whose knowledge of UNIX is minimal, but who are at least familiar enough with DOS that *DOS* itself requires no explanation. His other pages reveal similar precision in defining his target audience. His "Compression-Software" page, which

offers four shareware downloads, includes the following explanation in its introduction:

> Compression software is used to make files smaller and to put a number of files in just one file. The use of this is obvious: exchanging software becomes a lot easier. But... you don't only need compression software to compress, you also need it to decompress it.

The implied audience of this page would not have known how the name "compression" relates to files, and so is offered an explanation in simpler terms: "to make files smaller. . . ." Knowing this, the audience has the aptitude to infer the "obvious" application, easing the transmission of files, but apparently not the possibly counter-intuitive application, presented as the surprise ending of this passage, of decompressing files as well.

Participant v-hvz's search engine page projects a less plausible audience. Introducing links to eight search engines, v-hvz explains that search engines

> are very useful when you are searching for a subject on the Internet about which you want to know more. Simply enter the text for which you want to search and after a while the engine presents a page with sites where the text was found.

This passage, however, belies the most plausible audience that would be reading it in this environment—on the Web. Any reader who would have found his or her way to this page might only have done so with the use of a search engine. In his survey responses, participant v-hvz identifies his main reason for putting up and maintaining a Web site as "fun."

Participant v-hvz's pages construct implied audiences who do not yet have the level of Internet know-how that their author has. Rather than addressing an audience of his peers, at the more advanced level of computer experience that he evidently has, v-hvz constructs user-friendly, nicely packaged introductions for novices in the areas of his expertise. The implied audience of novices contrast with his own advanced position and suggests some of the satisfaction that derives from the "fun": the construction of a subject position, a position of authority, a role as teacher, helper, guide. By presuming to speak to novices as opposed to peers or superiors, v-hvz is able to manifest a generous, gregarious, and perhaps paternal stance to his world. In the context he constructs for his site, the Internet and software

information can serve as the means by which his knowledge is translated into symbolic power, a capacity to define a positive subjecthood through text.

Both participants i-li and v-hvz can be said to use their information as a prerequisite to legitimate their entry into the Web. Their information might be conceived not so much as an end but as a means, a resource by which the composition of their Web sites can be made meaningful acts. With such a resource, their otherwise redundant messages become the staging of tutorials generously offered to Web novitiates by knowledgable mentors, and thereby the construction of certain kinds of subjecthood.

The simulacra of knowledge

One manifestation of the prestige of information on the "Information Superhighway" is the frequent appearance of formats most amenable to delivering information: lists and tables. Indeed, for those well accustomed to print media, one of the most striking features of Web communication is the relative scarcity of paragraphs. The Web is rich in signifiers selected for their surface appeal—graphics, colour, sound, animation, columns, lists, tables, and so forth—but not for their potential depth. There is, for instance, little development, narrative, sustained argumentation. Rather, a topic usually conceived of by its breadth or depth would, on the Web, be rendered into discrete modular units. Typically, each Web page on a site is brief but self-contained. Its architecture is salient, visible in the lists and tables and links that put the pieces into relation with one another. The continuity of organic wholeness, of a beginning, middle, and end, is a function of print or speech. On the Web, such cohesion becomes dispersion.

Compared to print, the computer screen seems especially well suited to such discursive formats. According to William Horton, a specialist in technical communication, the two media invite different textual strategies, so much so that he characterises as a myth the expectation that on-line documentation will come to eliminate the need for print documentation (1994, p.15). The screen is better suited to discrete screen-sized textuality than to longer narratives or unstructured representations. Among the contextual features that lend themselves to different textual strategies are the screen's relatively poor resolution (p.225) and the screen's vertical shallowness (as opposed to the vertical depth of most print documentation) (p.223). Horton cites studies that have found that in comparison with reading from paper, reading from the screen is slower, less accurate, and more tiring (p.246). He concludes that some forms of textuality are better suited to the screen than others. In the table reproduced in part below, Horton contrasts the kinds of textuality suitable to conversion from paper to screen with those that are not suitable (1994, p.46):

Poorer candidates for conversion	Better candidates for conversion
General information	Specific information
Philosophy	Concrete facts
Theory	Operating instructions
Long reading passages required	Passages are skimmed or searched
Long flowing passages	Short chunks
Unstructured material	Regularly structured material
Sequential structure	Hierarchical, tabular, or web structure
Free-form layout and format	Consistent format
Text mostly in paragraphs	Text mostly in lists, tables

Prominent among the candidates for conversion to the computer screen are textual forms that support data and the ordered relationships among data. Studies of readability by John Morkes and Jacob Nielsen (1997) have found, similarly, that Web-based texts should be "scannable," containing formatting features, such as bulleted lists, that convey textual information to the scanning, not reading, eye.

The developers of Web standards seem to have well recognized the need for the convenient formatting of data. Among the easiest-to-learn HTML tags are those that format structures that are well suited to representations of discrete data: lines, numbered or bulleted lists, and tables. Motivated by the novelty of the medium, many aspiring web authors may respond to the HTML formatting language as an invitation to try out a list, to attempt a table. For instance, we saw in chapter 4 that some Web authors construct Web sites as a means to learn and practice HTML. Though deterministic accounts of the role of a medium have not found enduring support among communications scholars (e.g., Holmes, 1995, p.460; Spears and Lea, 1994, p.453), at least among novitiates the most visible manifestations of a communications channel are often those features that mark the channel as unique. These technical features become the capital of the Web, thereby conveying a silent imperative: if the medium proffers forth such structuring tools, then these tools are not only meant to be used, but their use

accrues symbolic value. It thus presumably behooves one who is joining the medium to adopt its symbolic practices, to acquire the content to fill out these forms.

Such a leading role for form has been proposed by Richard Coe (1987). He characterises form as heuristic, as "a motive for generating information": "Faced with the emptiness of a form, a *human* being seeks matter to fill it" (p.18; italics in original). Rather than mutually supporting each other, form on the computer screen may thus precede content, and perhaps thereby shape or even determine Web content. This shaping or determining influence could be mediated through what Coe describes as "a tacit process of 'indwelling'" (p.19), a means of acquiring some of the ways of functioning discursively in an environment. As discussed in the opening sections of this chapter, potential Web authors acclimatize themselves to the Web through their surfing activities. As surfers and readers, they cannot but be influenced to some degree by the Web's propensity for certain forms of display. For instance, in describing what they had drawn from other sites in their thinking about the construction of their own site, many participants wrote about what for most would be the most novel textual feature of Web semiotics, the visual manifestation of a site: its style, design, layout, and "look." One participant, for example, expressed the relative valuing of content and form by downplaying the former in favour of the latter: "I wasn't so much looking at contents as at formatting / organization (tables, graphics, etc.)" (a-kal). The Web thus does not just transmit information but also promotes certain conceptions of how information is recognized as such.

The influence of different modes of communication on the conceptual range of that communication has been explored by Walter Ong (1982). Ong observes a successive change of discursive practices and their accompanying conceptualizations of the world from the oral mode to writing to print and finally to the computer screen. The move from oral to written communication entailed "a shift from sound to visual space," from the ear to the eye (p.117). This visual space not only makes possible the visual formats of lists and tables and charts, but, suggests Ong, was invented so as to satisfy the need for the ordered, structured information of such lists and tables and charts (pp.98-99). Then, with Gutenberg's invention, the spatial placement of the word became even more measured and precise (p.121). Moreover, not just

the assortment of print but also the blank space that helps structure a page became an active ingredient of meaning (p.123). With the advent of computers, Ong sees a "further intensifi[cation]" of the "spatialization of the word" on the screen (p.136), typified by the frequent use of lists and charts in contemporary communications (p.101).

Though Ong does not explicitly explore the social ramifications of such developments, we might infer some implications of increasing spatialization with the social perspectives on discourse introduced above. We have seen (in chapter 6) how Bourdieu, for instance, equates a restraint and precision of expression with high status, whereas more relaxed and imprecise expressions are of lower status. If the structuring of lists and tables are conceived of as a manifestation of the restraint and precision of expression, of control over one's material, of a "refusal to surrender to nature" (1984, p.40), then such semiotic formats could be equated with social dominance. In the same light, to the degree that textual structure represents a certain selective contortion of one's world, then the grasp of that world evinced by a salient structure in what Hodge and Kress describe as the mimetic plane of meaning could, in the semiosic plane of meaning, be an assertion of power and control over that material and hence one's world.

There is general evidence of these patterns of dominance and power in the collection and deployment of data and information in society. Generally, the ownership of data, and hence the users of these formats of data, has been the purview of institutions: educational, commercial, governmental. Their prerogative engenders a power-knowledge, a knowledge derived from the applications of power.[28] They have the power and the resources required to define, measure, collect, and arrange from the raw material of the world bits of datum into "conceptual classifications."[29] Individuals no doubt have much experience supplying personal data to institutions, data such as the various measures of age, education, income, and so forth, but the only data they would in turn have access to may be their own. Their prerogative with conceptual classifications of pools of data is limited largely to domestic objects and activities: shopping lists, arrangements of books or CDs on selves, arrangements of clothing in dressers and closets, of guest lists at receptions and parties, and so forth. There is thus a prestige to be

gained in the command of elusive but valuable material which can be represented as "information."

Among the sites in this study, there are several cases in which the representation of material appears to be motivated in part by the prestige of order and control that institutional discourses embody, or by the technical capacity of the Web as the medium for what resembles information. For example, g-kgo has a page that serves essentially to say hello to 13 friends, whose first names are listed down the centre of the page in alphabetical order. Participant c-jc displays a table, several screens deep, that lists 31 acquaintances along with their e-mail addresses and a brief description of each, all organized alphabetically by name. Participant m-cm posts 24 inspirational mottos on a page entitled "Mission Statement--A Guidebook to be Used Throughout Everyday Life." The 24 mottos are listed not by theme but in alphabetical order according to the opening letters of each sentence. In their lives outside the web, most people would tend not to experience their friends or their inspirations in alphabetical order, but rather as part of a narrative of experiences and impressions. Yet unlike, say, oral conversation, the computer screen does not invite such unstructured personal representations. On the web, producers, in essence, structure their world into lists and tables, in separate files grouped in separate directories, all indexed from a central index file.

The most common type of list, featured on the majority of the sites in the sample, is the list of hyperlinks to favourite sites, a list which is frequently structured with various categories and subheadings. Non-Internet information is also featured in many lists. For instance, participant s-js's site features an extensive list of Scottish distilleries organized in alphabetical order by location; b-kcb lists, by geographical locale, the addresses of Canadian and worldwide stores, restaurants, and pubs that have some connection with Newfoundland; p-map has pages of jokes organized by joke categories, as well as a table illustrating his weekly course schedule and a list of all previous university courses (course numbers, not titles) organized sequentially by term; w-kw, a self-proclaimed poet, represents the identities, interests, and motivations of a group of poet colleagues using neither prose nor verse but rather three bulleted lists; g-jg has a

table showing the Grateful Dead bootleg tapes he owns, including the taping dates, concert locations, tape durations, and other features; a-aag has a six-column table of his bootleg tapes of the music group Rush, the columns of which include the recording date, city, the tape recorder location, and a rating on a scale from one to five; i-li features a "royal bitch session" in the format of a three-column table in which the first column features "Nice Thoughts" displayed as hyperlinks and graphics; the second column "Not Nice Thoughts" about the same topic; and the third, short paragraphs of corresponding "Remarks." Both g-ncg and r-ir feature several movie reviews presented in alphabetical order, each using consistent five-part formats to structure the presentation of film specifications and their own commentary.

On the Web, to have an arrangement of data is to have something seemingly legitimate to say. To display material in list structure or in tabular structure is to manifest order, control, hierarchy. These structures are the alchemy by which trivia is transformed into information.[30] The epistemological mode of the Web is guided by the Cartesian horizontals and verticals of the computer interface; by the one- and two-dimensional relationships of ordered or bulleted lists; and conceptually by the hierarchical organization of main pages and subpages, main headings and subheadings.

Postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard has written about the progressive dissolution of a sign's relationship to reality, a process which culminates in a "simulacrum," a sign that has abandoned its reference to a sustaining reality (1983, p.11). The plethora of horizontals and verticals and grids that some Web sites display evinces some of this quality of simulacra, serving not so much to add insight into "reality" but to validate their own textuality as significant signs. In the medium of the "Information Superhighway," contributions must be seen to bear the appearance of "information," displaying in linear, angular layouts a geometry. The demand to validate contributions to the medium has artificially inflated the supply of such signs, diluting their utilitarian function in support of referentiality. As discussed above, they promote form over content, signifier over signified.

* * * * *

In the previous chapter, I encapsulated a set of strategies participants adopted to construct their homes on the Web by pointing to the communicating body as the source of these strategies. The resources for these strategies include personal photos, family connections, settings of enclosed personal spaces, evocations of body language and tone of voice, and language uses familiar from face-to-face interactions. As we saw, many Web authors carve out their niche on the Web by symbolically occupying the ethereal medium with these resources of their bodies.

In this chapter, we have seen how individuals with what would be recognized as "information" have used that information to claim a niche, a presentation space. With the authority invested in information holders, they have been able to take on subject positions of experts, tutors, and mentors. We might characterise such actions by pointing to their resource of the "mind," not the biological or humanistic mind but the social mind, the capacity of individuals who, by virtue of access to education, employment, technology, and leisure, have obtained a nugget of marketable information with which they can warrant their claim to a communication channel that extends well beyond the limits of the "body." They have symbolically occupied the information-obsessed medium of the Web by staging a display of the products of their socially-networked minds.

These strategies of the "body" and the "mind" are not mutually exclusive ; many personal Web sites encompass both. As we saw above, for instance, participant i-li constructs her subject position of teacher or guide in part by drawing on utterances that are recognized as encouraging and playful when "spoken" in the right tone of voice. Her resources are thus both informational and interpersonal. Rather, this conceptually handy distinction of body and mind is social: the former drawing on resources that all individuals have and can use; the latter drawing on the same universality but also on the more restricted resources of education, employment, technology, discourse, and the leisure to invest the required time, labour, and

intellectual capital. In the crude but familiar distinction, the former makes of the Web a blue-collar occupation, the latter a white-collar investment. The former transcribes onto the electronic screen the mode of speech; the latter, the mode of print. The former is rooted in a local and immediate chronotope; the latter, with the ostensible timelessness of truth, strives to transcend any limits of time and space. The former defines a Web presence as an ontological issue, the latter as an epistemological issue.

As the logonomic systems change with the occasion of a new technology, the change is not limited to the "what" of the communication but also encompasses the "who" of communication, the positions one can take on, the means by which identities are available to be fashioned. The subjecthood that can feasibly be constructed in a society is a function of the discursive positions that can feasibly be occupied by individuals of that society. Given that homepage authors commit their time and labour to compose and update their sites with little expectation of material recompense, we can infer that the symbolic capital accrued through the effort may be reimbursed instead in the form of subjecthood. The subject positions that one can feasibly construct in one medium of communication may indeed sufficiently reward the authors as to redefine for themselves their regular "real-world" assemblage of subject positions. What the Web would occasion then are new means for relatively powerless individuals in society's communications infrastructure to remake themselves, vicariously, in subject positions of relative authority.

One need not be directly constructing a self per se, however, and certainly not a well-rounded self. To the extent that the Web may validate specialty sites over generalized expressions of personhood, it may become a technology that not only communicates niche interests but also encourages subjects to conceive and develop themselves as information specialists. Much as "well-roundedness" is a celebrated personal quality in face-to-face interactions, a specialization may similarly become the social currency of computer-mediated communications. Much as individuals in capitalist societies are now known for their occupations, individuals in the near future may come to be known for the niche that their

personal home pages occupy.

We have seen in this chapter how presentation spaces can coalesce around possessions of information, a resource of "mind." We saw in chapter 6 how speaking spaces could be occupied by the resources of the "body." Thus far in this exploration, these resources we have explored come from within the domains to which individuals could most feasibly lay some claim. Though the control of these resources is unevenly distributed throughout contemporary societies—the practices of bodies and minds are regulated by such social and institutional operations as education, politics, and economics, and by such social constructions as gender and race—they have nevertheless been somewhat accessible to whatever range of power that "ordinary" citizens in industrial societies could feasibly exercise.

Exercising power as an individual producer of international media communications, however, has hitherto been beyond all but the most privileged of individuals. Such power is almost always rooted in organizational entities, not individual bodies and minds. With the accessibility to such a position now thrown open to anyone with a computer account, the model offered by organizational entities is now no longer so distant or strange. In the next chapter, we consider how individuals are drawing not just on the resources of body and mind but on the resources that have been modelled to them by the dominant producers of mass media communications: organizational identities and discourses.

Synthetic Institutionalization

In the previous two chapters, we've considered two kinds of strategic approaches individuals take to occupying a space on the Web. To simplify, I have referred to these as the "body" and "mind" approaches: the former drawing on the resources that all individuals have as localized, biological, subjects; the latter drawing on the resources that some individuals may have as a result of access to education and technology.

In a medium dominated by popular institutional sites, both of these approaches draw on what individuals in contemporary developed societies can feasibly contribute in their status as individuals. Both enable individuals to occupy spaces as individuals in their own right on the World Wide Web, perhaps in subject positions that are different than those they occupy in much of their real-life communications, but nevertheless in subject positions that are available to some individuals: hosts, guides, teachers, experts, authorities. But both of these approaches draw primarily on communication types that are available to individuals in one-to-one or private communication contexts.

The Web, however, enables individuals to participate in a mass medium in a way that few individuals have ever been allowed to in the isolated popular participation roles of the established mass media. On the Web, individuals are producers of mass media products. Even the relatively few individuals who have been involved in such productions in other media have fulfilled their responsibilities only as employees, working at the behest of newspaper, radio, TV, film, and recording industries to produce a corporate product. Few individuals have ever represented themselves or their interests to anonymous distant audiences and fewer still have done so through the mass media in a sustained manner. There is no precedent from which to make adept individual contributions.

Moreover, there is as yet little tradition of credibility for individuals' mass media

contributions. In the hierarchy in which specialized knowledge, financial investment, innovative technology, and sheer labour power are required in order to achieve acknowledgement and recognition, individuals, who have little access to these resources, are already preassigned to marginal roles. Ostensibly, their personal pages circulate amidst the same unzoned global village that institutional sites do; in reality, personal Web pages are at the periphery of the Web's main cyber-thoroughfares. Personal sites are hyperlinked to other personal sites and to institutional sites; institutional sites do not link back.

In the absence of legitimacy, of personal experience, and of viable precedents from one's peers, and in a social context in which much of the discourse that is seen, heard, and read is disseminated through the mass media, one finds one's source of communications literacy not with other individuals but with organizations. It is corporate bodies that address the public through the traditional media and, indeed, through the most popular sites on the Web. These communicating entities form the most salient and the most credible communication role models.

In this chapter, we consider how individuals adapt their communication strategies from these corporate role models as a means to produce for the Web. I begin this exploration by sketching a theoretical framework to account for the anomalous hybrid of individual and institutional voices. Then, in three successive sections, I draw on the sample of homepages to analyse how authors adopt institutional discourses to represent the content of their sites, their relations with the public, and their own subject positions as Web proprietors. This exploration continues in chapter 9, where we consider how the contradictions inherent to such individual-institutional hybrids express themselves.

Discursive colonization

In chapter 2, we reviewed how subjects develop their discursive know-how from amongst the voices of their social environment. For Bakhtin, subjects' discourse is constituted not so much of a series of words, selected one by one from a dictionary, but of utterances, selected from other voices for the whole meaning they represent and the action they accomplish. Utterances, for Bakhtin, are demographically situated in social space, belonging to certain groups, certain situations, certain functions, and are recognized for such demographic signatures. For Bourdieu, subjects' discourse derives from their linguistic habitus, their dispositions with language. These dispositions develop through a subject's experience in time, and as such are best oriented for those new situations that are most akin to the past experiences that first inculcated their dispositions.

Typically, in a given communication situation, subjects respond with their habitus for such a situation, or, in Bakhtin's framework, with the generic voices associated with that kind of situation. Situations change, however, a consequence of changes in the social and cultural order, in the social power and positions of individuals, and in communications technologies. Such changes introduce problems with the use of the familiar, available communication strategies. It is as a response to such problems that Fairclough characterizes the motivation of creativity.

Though focusing primarily on the determining capacity of power and hegemony, Fairclough balances such stasis with "interdiscursivity": an "endless combination and recombination of genres and discourses" that accompanies historical change (1993, p.137). An inventive capacity emerges in situations in which the conventions maintained by power become "destabilized" or "destructured" (1989, p.171). Such destructuring introduces problems in the hitherto unproblematic constraints imposed on the contents of communications, on the social relations potential communicators can establish, and on the subject positions individuals can occupy (1989, p.46, 170). It is within such a discursive fabric that Fairclough locates some of

the human capacity for creativity, in a process he characterises as "restructuring": "put[ting] together familiar discourse types in novel combinations as a means of finding new ways of doing things to replace the now-problematic old ones" (1989, p.171).

In the environment of the Web, we have seen in chapters 6 and 7 how adopting individuals' voices familiar from other environments contributed to redefining novel Web situations as relatively familiar interpersonal ones. The resources for interdiscursivity, however, are greater in scope than has been illustrated in these two chapters. With the hegemony of institutional practices in contemporary society, the discursive resources available for individuals are certainly not limited just to those produced from the subject positions of individuals. On the Web, a mass medium dominated by institutional voices, there is evidence that individuals are drawing their discursive resources from these institutional voices of the mass media. Below, I analyse some such practices exhibited in the Web pages sampled in this study, practices that develop from such "cross-species" discursive migrations.

First, to better articulate the conditions by which discursive resources can migrate from one domain to another, we will need two more concepts from the work of Fairclough. Fairclough writes of how discourse from one segment of the social structure can "colonize" other parts (1989, pp.197-98). He singles out the discourses of consumerism and bureaucracy as particularly pervasive (p.198). For instance, one familiar site of such influence is with the discourses of higher education, in which, in one case, "deliverables" are now being offered in lieu of "education," "consumers" are now being served in lieu of "students," all of this being done by "suppliers" (Emberley, 1996). In this case, the discourse of one area of socio-economic activity, together with its concomitant interpretations of the world, has colonized institutional practices of another area, with the effect of advancing the ideology implicit in its discourse.

Discursive migrations can also occur over domains that are vastly different in scale, such as between institutions and individuals. This is the focus of a second concept of Fairclough's:

"synthetic personalization" (1989, p.62). To illustrate this concept, Fairclough discusses a tactic of advertising and bureaucratic discourses, which, he observes, often represent institution-to-person relations in the guise of person-to-person relationships. Such relationships are thus represented as egalitarian and mutually motivated. We may conceive of "synthetic personalization" as somewhat akin to the literary trope of personification, but with different objectives. With synthetic personalization, the institution manipulates the representation of institution-citizen relationships and subject positions so as to resolve problems (p.217) and, more insidiously, to retain and build power (p.222).

The appearance of such practices on the Web has been noted by Joseph B. Walther, who, in his 1996 article on computer-mediated communication, observes of some corporate Web sites:

> The use of technicians' personal names and pictures as access points, rather than using vague department- or role-related addresses, is hypothesized to begin the personalization of professional and corporate-consumer relationships. (1996, p.31)

Similarly, Kevin Hunt describes cases of commercial Web sites that feature pages about individuals, such as their employees. He characterizes this practice as illustrative of what he calls "communal ethos," an ethos built of the connections among information and people that a Web site can offer its audience (1996, pp.380-86). Such synthetic personalization can provide the resources with which to construct ethos and consubstantiality—the shared "substance" which aligns our identifications with some groups and not others.[31] By representing itself in a form that is easily recognized as having attributes in common with people and as having character—that is, as a person—and hence of making an ethical appeal through a shared "substance," an institution can better establish and reinforce a loyal following among its audience of persons. With their regimes of institutional discourse producers and often isolated individual receivers, the mass media provide especially fertile channels for such discursive practices.

On Web sites published by individuals, however, I am observing a reciprocal practice developing, similar but in the opposite direction. Individuals' discourses are being colonized

by the discourses of institutions. Institutional discourses have a long pedigree developed in contexts of public communications and, in that tradition, have developed the means to accomplish effectively their communicative objectives with the broad public. Individuals, whose dealings with the public are almost exclusively in one-to-one or small group interactions, have few such resources in their communicative habitus and hence are susceptible to the handy and prestigious models of institutional discourses.

I will adapt Fairclough's usage of "synthetic personalization" and refer to the colonization of individuals' texts by institutional discourses as a process of "synthetic institutionalization": the individual represented as the institution. This colonization is "synthetic" because it represents individuals' own subject positions and their relations between themselves and their audiences in a manner that is hitherto not customary among private citizens. People and society are, of course, endlessly flexible. Our prevailing understanding of personal discourses is itself a production, as is the Western conception of the unified self (e.g., Fairclough, 1989, p.104). "Synthetic" does not in this case imply its opposite: "authentic," an ostensibly true representation of the self in a "natural" discourse.

Rather, synthetic institutionalization is highly contextualized: the adoption by individuals, in their Web discourse, of practices that, early in this computer era, are widely recognized as institutional practices. Synthetic institutionalization, I would contend, arises from and is contingent upon the specific conditions of the communications environment that are sketched above. To summarize:

1. A new medium of mass communications is established;
2. It is the first medium of mass communications that enables the active participation of the public as themselves "publishers" or "broadcasters";
3. Because it is the first, there is no established literacy, no established habitus, no established genres, by which to get on with such communication;
4. Hence, in such conditions, the powerful, well-established, widely-known discourses of mass-media communications, discourses popularized through institutional advertising

and broadcasting, colonize the speaking spaces of individuals.

As with synthetic personalization, however, synthetic institutionalization is also implicated in the construction and maintenance of ideologies and in the distribution and application of power. As we saw in chapter 2, according to Fairclough, powerful producers of discourse impose constraints on the scope and function of the communications of less powerful producers and receivers of discourse. Drawing on Habermas (Fairclough1989, p.75), Fairclough categorizes these constraints as constraints on the contents, on the social relations, and on the subject positions of the less powerful communicants (p.46, 74). The imposition of such constraints is not limited just to overt short-term exercises of power, influences which obviously would not apply to the seemingly free-for-all that is the Web.

The perspectives developed by Hodge and Kress and by Bourdieu suggest some of the more elaborate means by which constraints are applied and their prescriptions obeyed. As we have seen in chapter 2, for Hodge and Kress constraints are not just piecemeal impositions by powerful agents, but rather are systematic. They introduce the concept of logonomic systems to refer to the mechanisms, specifically the "set[s] of messages" prescribing the parameters for legitimately producing and receiving semiotic resources, by which ideologies are sustained (1988, p.4). Though the rules prescribed by these messages must be, at some level, perceived by society's members, they need not be explicitly formulated in so many words. Hodge and Kress identify conceptual systems of classification (p.267) and ideological representations of one's identity and social position (p.40) as among the mechanisms by which the logonomic rules are produced and applied. To illustrate, they point to the operations of "politeness conventions, etiquette, [and] industrial relations" (p.4). Social mechanisms such as these are relevant here because within the environment of the Web, there are no explicitly enforced "rules" aside from the technological constraints or limitations of coding formats and software applications.

Where Fairclough and Hodge and Kress draw on political and administrative metaphors of

"constraints" and "rules," Bourdieu draws instead on an economic model to account for the regularities observable in discourse. As we have seen in chapter 2, a subject's discursive intervention in a situation is a function both of the subject's habitus and of the subject's anticipated profit potential with the intervention. The habitus is conditioned by past successes or failures, successes or failures often conveyed subconsciously through the accommodating or uncooperative behaviour of others (1991, p.51). The role of anticipation of profit is so strong that it can influence not only a subject's intervention in any one situation but also what we recognize as his or her personality (e.g., p.82). The social economy also produces valuations that, while in principle applying no coercive force, in practice compel a subject's compliance. Thus, the kind of censorship that Bourdieu explores is not the exercise of bureaucratic apparatuses but rather self-imposed, applied by one's own "concessions" to be "acceptable" (1991, p.77; 1977, p.655).[32]

Fairclough, in illustrating the "constraints" he discusses with an example, likewise extends the agency of constraint beyond that of formally-constituted apparatuses to include "the constraints derive from the conventions of the discourse type which is being drawn upon" (1989, p.47). This kind of constraint would also be partly self-imposed (pp.46-47), and hence a function of a pervasive rather than just an explicit power. Moreover, not only the source but also the scope of constraints extends beyond the immediate situation to include the longer-term restrictions transmitted through "the conventions of discourse types" (p.74) with which subjects construct and negotiate their worlds. Fairclough calls these longer-term products of power "structural effects," effects which, in tandem with the three above-mentioned constraints, are exercised in three dimensions of society: knowledge and beliefs, social relations, and social identities, respectively (p.74). The relationship between the (short-term) constraints and (long-term) structural effects may best be thought of as a continuum, the former structuring, and in turn being structured by, the latter.

It is this pervasive continuum of constraints and structural effects that could account for what I am calling synthetic institutionalization: the discursive behaviour of individuals that is

modeled on institutions. Institutional discursive practices are normally implemented in environments in which institutions exercise their power to broadcast certain messages, to compel the listening and reading behaviour of recipients, and to direct the actions of those recipients. An individual would be exposed to such practices by their prominence and demonstrated efficacy and would adopt them in his or her public communications on the Web. Such synthetic institutionalization need neither be imposed nor consciously selected. Drawing on Habermas, Fairclough describes the primary process by which the ideology sustaining long-term structural effects is consolidated as the "mechanism" of "inculcation" (1989, p.75), in which discourses of power appear naturalized. Similarly, Bourdieu describes the process by which legitimate, and hence profitable, discourses are absorbed as one in which "dispositions . . . are impalpably inculcated. . . ." (1991, p.51). Hence, this colonization of individuals' discourse by institutional discourse may derive from a gradual acquisition of institutional voices which have so successfully dominated the discursive environment. Synthetic institutionalization could thus manifest itself to individuals composing for the Web simply as a smart, winning discursive strategy, as, unreflectively, the most "natural" strategy by which to proceed when dealing with the public through the electronic media.

In this chapter, I explore synthetic institutionalization in the sample of participants' Web sites by following Fairclough's categorization of three types of constraints and structural effects:

- contents—knowledge and beliefs,
- relationships—social relations,
- subject positions—social identities.

None of Fairclough's three constraints and structural effects are mutually exclusive; for instance, a text that manifests a certain kind of social relationship may also correspondingly manifest a certain kind of social identity. However, they do offer a conceptually handy way to approach the fecund effects of synthetic institutionalization, and so each set of constraints and corresponding structural effects will be discussed in turn.

Contents—knowledge and beliefs

In characterising the kinds of constraints imposed on relatively powerless producers, Fairclough defines the *content* of a participant's contribution as, straightforwardly, "what is said or done" (1989, p.46). Together with the long-term structural effect on *knowledge and beliefs*, this dimension of constraint is similar to the "regimes of knowledge" that, according to Hodge and Kress, are prescribed by logonomic systems, regimes that circumscribe the "referents . . . or categorizations of possible topics of semiosis in terms of specific versions of reality . . ." (1988, pp.266-67). As is suggested above, the "constraints" on contents or topics should not be limited to those explicitly formulated or directly imposed, but may also emerge from the environment of communications. The environment of Web communications is, of course, one in which institutional producers dominate. As has been discussed above, they have a long-established presence dominating almost all other media; they have what are widely perceived as legitimate commercial, educational, or political objectives in maintaining a Web presence; they have the specialized information, products, or services to attract surfers to their niche offerings; and they have the capital, material, labour, and knowledge resources to construct and develop elaborate Web sites. Not surprisingly, among the most frequently visited sites are those maintained by institutions whose information services are especially relevant for the medium itself (Bray, 1996). Individuals' contributions, by contrast, are a relative novelty. The Web is the first medium in which the public can participate as discourse producers, not just recipients. There is as yet, however, no acknowledged "rhetoric" legitimating what individuals might contribute to the mass media.

In a new communications environment that in principle is open to all but that in practice has as its most frequently traveled nodes, as its most profitable discursive products, the elaborate multimedia-rich, information-rich, authorative sites of institutions, it is the topics, practices, and discourse of institutions that become normative, the standard against which contributions are measured. In such an environment, the "constraints" on the content or topics of individuals' contributions are embodied among the established, visible, visited institutional

contributions. A perception of what constitutes normative Web contributions may be induced through the surfing experience of individuals, an experience which, as we have seen in chapter 4, takes many individuals to hundreds of sites prior to their first attempts at producing their own. Among the hundreds that they visit, institutional sites are likely the most numerous and the most prominent; and yet in taking on their new positions as producers, they are by default handicapped in their potential to offer the same caliber of content or even to recognize the validity of what content they have to offer. These institutional sites serve as primary but ill-suited role models.

In the absence of both personal producing experience and a legitimate precedent, individuals can always frame their contributions in a recognizable way by adopting the discourse by which institutions name their topics and practices and publications, a move that can contribute to how the content of their contributions builds a narrative of legitimate activity. The utility of such a move can be better understood with Kenneth Burke's concept of terministic screens. For Burke, all language usage embodies a perspective in which some dimensions of a situation are brought into relief while others are elided. He articulates the logic supporting such a language-induced perspective, or lack of perspective, in a concise and well-known passage:

> Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality. (1966, p.45)

Because the conventionally understood referential function of language is also an obscuring or determining function, Burke uses "terministic screen" to refer to the effect words have in implicating certain perceptions and thoughts and not others. A terministic screen "directs the attention to one field rather than another" (p.50).

Using the concept of terministic screens, we can clarify the distinction between *having* valid content to contribute and *representing* whatever content one's message has with the terministic resources that help frame it as a valid activity. A terministic screen and not just content per se guides our interpretation of the type of situation we see "reflected." In

particular, the terminology that institutions use to name their products, services, and activities can, where adopted by individuals, represent individuals' contributions as of *that* type, of institutional prerogative.

Such a discursive practice is evident in several of the homepages examined in this study. For example,

- photo albums become photo "galleries" on some sites (o-so, s-gs);
- a non-artist's drawings are displayed in an "Art Gallery" (v-j);
- a small music collection of sound files becomes a "music station" (g-kgl);
- an accumulation of haiku written over the previous months is accessible in an "archive" (a-aa);
- a list of 24 personal inspirational mottos is entitled a "Mission Statement" (m-cm);
- a set of pages with fiction, graphics, sound clips, information, and links all about Star Wars is a "multimedia kiosk" (g-kgo);
- a page of links about Macintosh computers becomes the "Macintosh Division" (g-kgi);
- a collection of files, a bulletin board, and videoclips about political protests in Serbia form a "Information and Communication Resource Centre" (g-jg);
- and a Chicago weather forecast graphic linked from another site becomes a "service" from the "people" at a site authored by participant a-aa alone.

As well, participant k-mk hosts an "Institute"; participant g-kgi offers an "Official History" to his site; participant k-ck has a self-described "pseudo-official" page; a-ka has three self-titled "official" pages; c-jc, on the main page of his site devoted to beer, has a graphic resembling a government stamp of approval which reads, "Canadian Internet Licensing Board"; he has also branded his site with a logo that, alluding to beer, reads "Genuine Joel."

In each of these examples, a hitherto unrecognized discursive practice is glossed with the terministic screen of established institutional practice. There is no formal apparatus imposing such usages on individuals. However, absent of such discursive colonizations, individuals'

pursuits are largely *terra incognita*, there being little specialized discourse in the fields of publishing or service activities meaningfully recognizing their contributions; *their* usages, such as "photo albums," belong to other environments, private, not public. Synthetic institutionalization thus offers an interpretation of validated public enterprise for what may otherwise be perceived as irrelevant activity.

Apart from glossing participants' work with well-recognized meaningful pursuits, some of the usages in these examples can develop prestige for the participants who can convincingly use them. The "economy" of such usage can be further elucidated with Bourdieu's economic account of symbolic capital accrued in the transactions of discourse. As we saw in chapter 2, Bourdieu approaches linguistic usage not through any properties inherent to the language or aptitudes inherent to a speaker or language producer, but through an environment which can be understood as a market. The market "endow[s] linguistic products with a certain 'value'" (Thompson, 1991, p.18), a value which may be correlated with the power of those who normally dominate the market. Legitimacy accrues to those who offer in the market a product of high value. Indeed, offerings are understood in Bourdieu's framework not just as references to meanings but as "signs of wealth . . . to be appreciated. . ." (1991, p.66). For Bourdieu, individuals become responsive to the conditions of a market neither through coercion nor through deliberate choice but through a gradual process of "inculcation" (p.51). The market provides feedback about the efficacy of a linguistic offering through the degree of symbolic profit that the offering can accrue. Individuals come to know their own place in the market and the potential value of their offerings through their exposure to its legitimate discourses and producers. As language users, they may attempt to adopt discourses of higher value as a means of increasing their own status.

In a mass medium such as the Web, individuals would have been inculcated with a sense of the hierarchy for valued offerings, through their exposure not only to other Web sites but also to markets that appear analogous: publishing, broadcasting, advertising. The high-profile practices that dominate the high traffic locations on main street, the advertising on TV, the

most visible communications channels in contemporary society, would endow the corresponding linguistic products with a correspondingly high valuation. Synthetic institutionalization of the content of individuals' contributions would derive in part from the high valuations that institutional discourse has accrued through such public exposure. Individuals' messages may hence be shaped so as to accommodate these prestigious symbolic practices.

To illustrate, we will consider for the remainder of this section several kinds of institutional practices that appear on the sites of participants in this study. Consider first the function of naming a topic, an activity, a page, a section, or an entire site. A site title, for instance (in lieu of using just one's name), can help validate a Web site. Titles are not part of informal social exchanges: individuals do not formally entitle their conversations. Indeed, proper nouns in general are not the prerogative of individuals, as the uniqueness implied by such linguistic resources usually require the sanction of institutions, in the form of trademark registration, the wherewithal to mount a legal defence, and so forth. However, on the Web, personal homepages circulate amongst institutional sites, sites which often have legally-registered names, trademarks, copyrights, and product lines. Such propertied linguistic signs are highly visible but, to the ordinary consumer, elusive.

In confronting the exigence to create titles for what might be just a self-display—precisely the type of content that has not otherwise merited the legitimacy of titles—Web writers sometimes draw on the discursive practices of institutions. Some participants append their one proper noun, their personal name, to a more commercially viable name to produce an institutional-sounding site title: "Billie's Bistro" (k-sk), "Kevin's Bar & Grill" (g-kgi), "Hannes's Internet Whisky-Bar" (s-js), "Chèz Kyall" (g-kgl), and "Daphne's Den of Delights!" (a-ka). None of these sites, of course, are literally the public food, drink, and entertainment establishments implied by their terministic screen. Rather, the discursive practice by which institutions warrant proper nouns is adopted to create an identity and legitimacy that the common-noun discourses of anonymous individuals could not.

Where participants actually do have services or resources to offer to others, these must be validated with the proper nouns of service organizations. For instance, participant v-s's site has become a popular Web node for wannabe vampires. In separate files, it features three listings: e-mail links to aspiring vampires, homepages of and about vampires, and sites of thematic or commercial interest to the vampire community. Though these might have been labelled with some of the very words used above to describe them, their author instead adapted the terminological practices of institutions to entitle these sections, respectively, "Vampyre Connection," "Vampyre Homes," and "Vampyre Yellow Pages." Throughout the site, *vampyre* is usually misspelled with a *y*, a tactic which is a common feature of business trademarks (Nilsen, 1994/1997). The collection as a whole is titled "Vampyre White Pages," evoking the linguistic jewels of "Ma Bell."

In another case, participant g-jg, a European-based writer whose Web-based employment entitles him to extra server megabytes, offers individuals free space on his server. His offer, taken up tentatively by about a dozen Web users, is an individual's act directed to an international audience, a communications situation for which few legitimate models of private discourse exist. With such a vacuum of discursive models (and with his own uneasy command of English as a second language), he instead frames his offer through the terministic screen of familiar English advertising discourse:

> "Killoranspace* is yet another Killoran* Initiative! [underlined words are hyperlinked] This one can become a very interesting experiment, if **you** become an active, participative citizen here ...
>
> Now, right now [hyperlinked] **you** can become a Citizen in Killoranspace! Just click on join [a link below in his page] and get your (free, of course) 'home' (yes, your very own homepage, with its very own URL and all)!!!
>
> No programming skills needed! [...]" (g-jg)
>
> * [My surname is substituted for the participant's surname.]

Participant g-jg's invention of the proper noun "Killoranspace" (my pseudonym) for his service offers the language yet another "trademark," shifting attention from what otherwise

appears as the ephemeral and suspiciously generous act of an unknown and suspiciously generous agent by establishing and giving prominence to a scene, the Killoran*space* which encompasses this offer. Likewise, the capitalization of "Killoran Initiative" and "Citizen in Killoranspace" (again, pseudomyns) sanction this unusual offer from a stranger to other strangers by adopting proper nouns where individuals ordinarily make do with common nouns: individuals may have initiative, but only institutions have "*I*nitiatives"; individuals have extra space on their server allocations, but only governments have a "(Killoran)space" that could offer "Citizenship." For both participants v-s and g-jg, proper nouns consolidate their many diverse activities into seemingly official enterprises, and in turn these enterprises warrant a display of prized linguistic resources.

Another highly visible, prestigious, but exclusive semiotic resource is the copyright symbol. Legally, copyright is automatically granted to any published work, including electronic text, though this may not be widely known (Templeton, 1997). However, the legal utility of the copyright symbol on a personal homepage may be less important than its display. Most individuals will never have legitimate access to production regimes to publish a text that warrants appending the copyright symbol. It is part of the discourse of publishers, lawyers, institutions and people of influence and power. Yet at least 27 sites in the sample have one or more pages formally copyrighted with © or the word *copyright*. While some of the sites contain work that, one could claim, would merit the protection of copyright, such as stories, poems, and specialized information presentations, others are not developed to a degree that would likely warrant concern about possible violations of intellectual property rights. Adopting the signifier to one's own site, however, represents one's work with the prestige of professional publishing, and accrues symbolic capital for the author.

The most pervasive semiotic resource that individuals on the Web adopt from institutional discourse is graphics. Because of the technology, training, and capital required to produce publishable graphics, graphic production has hitherto been limited largely to specialized media organizations and producers: advertisers, magazine publishers, TV and film producers, and so

forth. In *Reading Images*, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen observe an increasing "institutional (and technological) control" of graphics production by "the global cultural/technological empires of the mass media" (1996, p.4, 26). With their broad market reach and sophisticated technological resources, these media empires define the contemporary fashion in graphic design. By contrast, whereas most individuals in the more technologically advanced countries will have had plenty of educational experience producing essays and other written forms, this education and their experience with semiotic resources is limited largely to these black-ink-on-white-paper productions. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that "[i]n terms of this new visual literacy, education produces illiterates" (p.15). Aside from dabblings with pencil sketches and water-colour paintings and the point-and-snap souvenirs of those with cameras, the technological, training, and capital requirements for graphic production have, in effect, imposed a de facto limit on the production regimes for such semiotic resources. For instance, Kress and van Leeuwen characterise the field of visual design as "still the province of specialists who generally see little need for methodical and analytically explicit approaches" (p.12), and hence who, inadvertently or otherwise, restrict professional graphics production to the initiated. Ordinary individuals are instead positioned as receivers of graphics semiosis, on the various plastic cards they carry in their wallets and purses; on the boxes and bags that contain their consumer purchases; in magazines, brochures and their other reading material; and on their television, film, and other viewing material.

That most individuals are absent from the production regimes of much graphic communication raises possible consequences for the role of such semiotic resources in society. Hodge and Kress, for instance, drawing on Peirce's three-part classification framework for signs, point to the greater persuasive potential that iconic signs (such as graphics) have over other semiotic resources: "Icons . . . have the modality of direct perception, and hence are the most persuasive of signs (as modern advertisers and news editors are aware)" (1988, pp.26-27). Fairclough observes that in contemporary communications, visual resources have increasingly been replacing verbal linguistic resources (1989, p.3; 1993, pp.141-42). Ben and Marthalee Barton, in a bibliographic essay synthesizing research in visual representation, similarly

identify an increasing trend toward visual semiosis at the expense of verbal semiosis (1989, p.104). Fairclough views this trend as a manifestation of an increasingly "'promotional' or 'consumer' culture" in which the genres of marketing discourse colonize other genres (1993, p.141) and hence shift their discursive purposes and effects. Kress and van Leeuwen predict that "visual literacy" will increasingly become "a matter of survival" for those in, or hoping to gain entry to, the workforce (1996, p.3). To the degree that individuals have little productive potential with the semiotic resource that is the most persuasive and increasingly the most salient and dominant resource in contemporary communications, public discourse will increasingly be dominated by the agendas of institutions which do command the productive capacity of this resource.

Use of the resource has increasingly become a prerequisite for credible participation on the Web. Much of the phenomenal growth of the Web over other Internet networks such as the older gopher network is due to the Web's capacity to support graphics and other media. In a 1995 study using the Open Text inventory of 1.5 million Web pages, over 50% of Web pages were found to include at least one image (Bray, 1996). Developments since then, such as the increased accessibility to graphics software, the more recent generations of multi-media-capable browsers, and the fast-rising expectations for Web design, have made graphics more of a necessity than a luxury. As we have seen in chapter 4, in their surfing activities prior to the composition of their own sites, homepage creators will have been exposed to this environment. As of 1997, when this study took place, the label "cool site" had seemingly entered everyone's lexicon; many companies, educational institutions, and other organizations had marshalled their substantial resources to establish a Web presence; and well-established ranking services provided greater visibility for the "coolest" of sites. According to Jack Kapica, the *Globe and Mail*'s Internet reporter, among their criteria used by enterprises that evaluate and award "cool" sites are that sites appear "beautiful" and "colourful" (1995). Some scholars have criticized such popular arbiters of Web quality for their vaguely defined criteria which emphasize innovative or fashionable uses of the medium at the expense of content (e.g., Rettig, 1997; Oliver *et al.*, 1997). Kapica observes, however, that the primary imperative

recognized by professional Web composers is to capture a favourable first impression from impatient surfers: "Web pages need to catch the attention of jaded visitors as they leap frantically from one hypertext link to another with a speed unmatched even by bored TV channel hoppers" (1995). Symbolic usage, as Bourdieu would recognize, is about winning the consent of surfers to be an audience in the first place.

Participants as well seemed to recognize this imperative of adopting a visually rich discourse for their Web communications. When discussing what influence other Web sites had on the construction of their own site, more than a third of survey respondents wrote about design issues, such as graphics specifically or, more generally, the layout of a page, its style and aesthetics. When asked specifically about how they decided on the use of graphics for their homepages, several wrote of the action their selected graphics would take in attracting an audience. Graphics were selected to "attract the visitors" (w-tw) and to "get people's attention" (p-dp). They stimulate perhaps not so much the mind as the eye, and are hence selected because they are "eye pleasing" (p-sp), "eye catchers" (s-s), and for their "eye catchiness" (e-ke). These responses suggest an awareness of the pragmatic value of this semiotic resource. Others likewise recognized graphics almost as a semiotic currency—as, in Bourdieu's characterization, "signs of wealth"—referring to the semiotic resource as, for example, "cool" (a-mar, d-wb, m-s, s-e), as providing "a little razzle dazzle" (d-bdd), "a contemporary look" (i-li). Participant n-tn, for instance, wrote that he "decided to compete with my co-worker to see who could put more features on their page first." In an explanation that echoes Fairclough's observation of the visual's dominance over the verbal, participant o-so described how in planning her homepage, she gave precedence to its visual semiosis:

> I thought about a visual, not a textual theme. The Web is, I think, a highly visual medium. So my first goal was to produce a very creative and attractive page. The text came afterwards.

Participating in the Web means, for these participants, adjoining to their primary literacy the esoteric semiotic resource that originated with mass media producers, both for its utility in capturing viewing bodies and for its market value as a display of production wealth. Having

and displaying the prized semiotic resource is a signal of contemporaneity, a symbolic capital with which to purchase credibility in the Web's circuit.[33] For personal homepages circulating within this communication environment, graphics would be conspicuous by their absence. Of the 106 Web sites examined in this study, all included graphics.

A few survey respondents, such as participant p-jp—whose site, despite his denial, does include graphics—spoke out against the use of this semiotic resource:

> I intentinally [sic] do NOT have any graphics on my page. . . . I didn't want a bandwidth-hogging page that takes forever to come up. Most of these people who write themselves a Web page want it to come up with frames, cool pictures, cool images, and I really don't see the point. Mine is simple, and doesn't hog up bandwidth like the rest of these idiots who think it's really chic of them to call the Internet the World Wide Web, or the Information Superhighway.

In his abjuration of graphics, participant p-jp nevertheless recognizes the semiotic resource and related resources (such as frames) and usages (such as "Information Superhighway") as forms of symbolic capital with which to obtain "chic-ness."

As discussed above, the technological, training, and capital requirements for graphics production largely restrict individuals from comfortably commanding the semiotic resource. These barriers would be especially salient for graphics production, as the technology and computer applications are relatively new and expensive, and as the ephemeral medium of pixels is not as intuitively accessible or manipulable as the pencil and paint media with which most individuals will have had at least passing experience. Nevertheless, homepage production is itself subject to de facto restrictions arising from the requirements of technology, training, and capital, restrictions which have likely contributed to the pronounced demographic imbalances discussed in chapters 3 and 4. It would thus not be surprising that the still relatively small proportion of the population that has posted their own Web sites would overlap with the relatively small proportion that has the access and the know-how to produce their own computer graphics.

The survey offered suggestive findings in this direction. Though respondents were not asked specifically about the sources of the graphics on their homepages, 16 did volunteer, in their response to Question 9 about how they decided on the graphics they included on their homepages, that they themselves had created some of these graphics. In their explanations of such work, some of these respondents suggested that it was precisely the exclusivity and novelty of having the know-how (and the access to graphics software) that lead them to create and post their own graphics. Participants b-cb and d-nd explained that their purposes were, respectively, "to give my site an original look" and "to be unique." Participant j-aj likewise suggested a hierarchy that valued personal graphics production over a more dependent use of the semiotic products produced by others: "I wanted graphics to be about me and my interests, not canned images." These canned images, as well as whatever images would not contribute to an "original" or "unique" look, would most likely be the products of commercially produced sites or icon "archives," collections produced by Internet service providers and other commercial organizations for the benefit of their clients and the Web community. It is such producers who are recognized as dominating the semiotic resource. Indeed, some of the appeal of displaying one's own graphic productions would be due not so much to the semiotic products per se but rather to the subject position of being a creator of such prized institutional resources. Both participants w-jw and s-es referred to their own roles when explaining how they decided on the graphics displayed on their sites:

- "I was proud of my graphic creation and I just had to put it on my page" (w-jw).
- "I'm an artist (or at least and [sic] artist wannabe) [so] I created all of them myself . . ." (s-es).

Other respondents, most of whom apparently did not produce their own graphics, lamented the lack of resources, such as time and know-how, that would enable them to make a stronger claim on this form of symbolic capital:

- "I wish I were more adept at computer artwork" (w-kwi).
- "I am in the process of figuring out a program to build my own graphics. [I] haven't had a lot of time as of yet to do much with it" (h-s).

- "I used / created / incorporated graphics [w]ith dificulty [sic] considering my limited drawing ability" (b-jbo).
- "I tried to be as creative as I could using the software I have and the time I had for it" (k-tk).

The issue for these individuals is one of gaining control of a semiotic resource that has been tantalizingly prominent in the discourse they are exposed to, both on the Web and in other media, but that has remained elusive to their ready appropriation.

Such is the imperative to acquire the resource that at least 24 respondents suggested in their survey responses that they had taken some of their graphics from other Web sites. While a couple of these respondents (c-amc, r-ir) spoke of their procedure for obtaining permission for such use, several others displayed what Jack Kapica refers to as "Hackers' Morality," "[the] notion, popular among some young Internet users, . . . that if you can get your hands on anything with your computer, that you have a right to keep it" (1997). Kapica limits the scope of this new (im-)morality to the new medium, and develops his point with several cases in which individuals access or download institutionally copyrighted applications or texts. Buten (1996) provides further evidence of such (im-)morality with his finding that between 28% and 40% of the homepage authors he surveyed reported copying graphics "as they see fit." A further 52% reported copying graphics under various conditions (e.g., site logos to illustrate links to those sites). Only 9% reported using only their own original graphic productions.

In the survey responses I collected, some participants wrote unabashedly of a similar acquisitiveness in obtaining graphics:

- "[We] [u]sed whatever we liked on the Web" (y-gy).
- "[I] 'borrowed' about 60 percent [of the graphics on my site]" (g-kgo).
- "I am always searching and stealing graphics off the Web!" (k-lk, whose site identifies her as a teacher).
- "[D]on't think about the word copyright" (a-kal, whose Web site identifies her as a US

government librarian and a former university librarian).

While tallying the frequency of such "pilferings" in the sample homepages is effectively impossible, the frequency with which recognizable proprietary images are displayed on the sample of homepages—images from such cultural products as Star Trek, the Simpsons, movies, cartoons, rock musicians, and so forth—suggests that "hackers' morality" is fairly widespread, open, and casual.

In an environment in which the most valued but increasingly necessary semiotic resources are produced by institutions, individuals "steal" these semiotic resources so that their contributions may have a chance for visibility and acknowledgement. Their own habitus as speaking and writing citizens does not usually include a visual repertoire or other validated discursive practices such as those discussed earlier in this section, and hence leaves them socially disenfranchised. In this environment of institutional supremacy, synthetic institutionalization acquires for individuals the semiotic content increasingly required for credible, late-twentieth century communications.

Relationships—social relations

The second effect of power that Fairclough identifies is constraints on the type of relationships that can be formed from a given communication context and, more generally, the type of social relations available to individuals. Relations, even if only rudimentary relations of speaker-listener or writer-reader, are emplotted in any kind of text, including of course the samples of discursive practices explored in other sections of this chapter.

In the previous section, for example, we see evidence that the relations emplotted in some homepages resemble the relations between advertiser and consumer. The advertiser attempts to represent a product or service as credible through the use of technologically sophisticated graphics and multimedia, proper nouns, and other institutional prerogatives. The consumer is cast as fickle, someone who may be attracted by, for instance, visual displays or other multimedia elements. Despite the fact that the producers and receivers would not be recognized as "true" advertisers and consumers, this advertiser-consumer relation is conditioned in part by the nature of the Web as a mass media network; it is one of the few credible mass media relationships available as a model for Web novitiates.

As well, included in the last section of this chapter is a case of how the relations between producers and receivers are constructed as relatively contractual. One expression of this contractual nature of the relationship is the regularizing of Web site updates, in which the updates serve to emplot the surfer as a recipient of a weekly entertainment service, and correspondingly serve to emplot the Web writers as organized, long-term service providers. Again, despite the fact that the producers and receivers may not be recognized as "real" service providers and recipients, the context of the medium gives precedent to such relations.

Both of these discursive practices illustrate how social relations modelled on institution-public relations are both cued by the context of communication and emplotted in the discourse of the text producers. However, there are some discursive practices that allow for a more explicit

enactment of relations between producers and receivers of text. Such is the case where producers seem to address directly their audiences, and where, in many cases, their audiences can respond. It is these that I focus on in this section, first by exploring some of the ways the transaction between Web author and surfer is opened, and second by exploring how the surfer is encouraged to respond to the Web author and hence continue the relationship.

One of the most ubiquitous terms in the sample of homepages is the word *welcome*, appearing usually at or near the top of the primary index page. At least 68 sites in the sample feature a *welcome*, far outnumbering the sites that feature a more colloquial form of social opening, such as "Hello" (i-li; j-wt); various forms of *thank you's for visiting* (e.g., l-jl; w-a); the diffident "Um . . ." (y-gy), "Well . . ." (h-ah), and "Okay . . ." (d-cad); and the party openers "LUCKY YOU!!" (p-kp) and "Feel like Beer?" (c-jc). Though widely recognized, "welcome" is not commonly spoken by individuals as a greeting. We may have welcome mats, or "Welcome to our Home" plaques near our front doors, but these are usually commercially produced products. Except in the most formal circumstances, we rarely speak the greeting "welcome" to visitors to our homes, using instead the more intimate "Hi, please come in," "Hello, glad you could make it," and so on. Moreover, we don't normally issue explicit "welcomes" to readers of text-based documents like letters, memos, e-mail messages, essays, pamphlets, reports, and so on. Instead, with this usage, Web writers seem to conceive and represent their homepages not as documents but as social spaces.

Welcome is perhaps adopted from real-life situations in which individuals have experienced institutional discourse: road signs on the outskirts of towns and at the frontiers of states, signs on the doors of commercial establishments, announcements to shoppers, introductions to public meetings and courses, and so forth. In each of these cases, the transaction with the public is sanctioned by institutional protocol. The higher prestige value of a *welcome* enables homepage writers to participate vicariously as hosts of such legitimized socio-economic activities. Web writers construct the relationship not of one private individual greeting another private individual but of synthetic institution hosting the public.

Such usage underscores the problematic status of the personal on the Web, of the stance that would engage surfers with an informal "Hi" or "Hello." The implied relationship available in Web space is more like that between proprietor and client. Such is the imperative of managing relations with the public that most sites feature both the *welcome* salutation and an e-mail link closing, a channel for continuing the relationship. These features perform the interpersonal function of managing the boundaries of what are conceived of as public visits to proprietary spaces.

Aside from e-mail links, two Web applications enable surfers, the recipients of Web communications, to register their presence to site producers: guestbooks and response forms. With guestbooks and response forms, surfers can record their participation explicitly, and hence develop at least a modest voice in negotiating their social relations with site producers. However, these social relations are already constructed in part on the model of institutional relations with the public.

A guestbook uses CGI script to enable visitors to record a message that is displayed along with the messages of other visitors. Twenty nine sites in the sample featured guestbooks, most using applications that are offered by their Internet service providers. Guestbooks overlap to some extent with the communicative potential offered by e-mail, in that both mediate the homepage viewer with the homepage author. However, guestbooks are treated much more anonymously. An e-mail message sent between two strangers bespeaks a greater deliberateness and intimacy than a comment left in a guestbook, which presumes no special exigence and invites no response. Rather, as with print guestbooks, the audience of the comment is as much other site visitors as it is the site host. Tellingly, the typical comment made in a guestbook is a perfunctory review, such as "Great Homepage!" and does not attempt to engage the site author with possible changes to the status quo, with a possible dialogue of equals.

As with much computer terminology, *guestbook* is a borrowing from already-established

language usage, in this case a usage for a communication practice common at art exhibits, smaller museums, and other public displays. Though guestbooks for visits to private homes would be quite possible, and though many homeowners invest much of their labour, capital, and talent in the upkeep and renovation of their homes, such a communication tradition has never developed. A homepage, however, as is discussed below in the "Social Positions" section of this chapter, is analogous not so much to a private home as to a public display, a construction that shares the same aspiration as such practices as architecture and landscaping. Guestbooks are used in publically recognized, specialized spaces. By adopting *guestbooks*, homepages take on a discursive practice hitherto recognized and largely limited to publicly sanctioned displays in publicly accessible buildings or landscapes usually sponsored by public institutions. But with such a discursive practice, homepage writers also frame their engagement with their audience with the prestigious though unequal social relationship implicit to guestbooks: one party is a proprietor, the constructor of spaces and director of their display; the other party is the "guest," with a transient status, having little stake in the display but for the time that he or she chooses to devote to it.

The other application potentially allowing for viewers' explicit engagement in relations with the homepage writer is the response form. With some knowledge of HTML tags and a CGI script, homepage writers can easily create and post interactive response forms. Such forms can include a number of formatting features, such as pull-down menus and radio buttons for pre-selected response options and response windows for longer, typed responses. These interactive forms are the electronic equivalent of the print fill-in forms commonly used by institutions to take mail orders of merchandise from clients, to process applications for educational, social, or health services, to screen applicants for loans, credit cards, memberships, and so forth. Indeed, the HTML response form and its CGI capabilities were likely inspired by an anticipated need for Web equivalents analogous to print-based institutional practices.

At least 11 sites in the sample feature such forms. The majority are fairly short solicitations

for comments and feedback, with the forms perhaps ostensibly serving to publicize the solicitation visually or to induce a greater response rate. Such utility should not obscure the value of forms as objects of wealth, however, serving as much in their display as in their utility. In Bourdieu's economic framework, response forms, on the market of the Web, are the prestige usages of an upper class—a class that would include the elaborate institutional sites that can claim "authentic," purposefully uses of response forms—that one can adopt so as to feign a higher standing.

Some usages, however, reveal more specific objectives. Participant c-jc displays a response form by which the public can "vote" for their favourite beers, wines, and spirits. Much of his site is a celebration of beer, and includes a feature on the "Beer of the Month." Participant p-map posts a form by which visitors can have their addresses added to a mailing list so that they are notified when his site has been updated. Participant m-s solicits members for her girls' club with a form that requests a respondent's name, age, state, preferred club job, and e-mail address. Participant i-li introduces her 31-question form by explaining that she is curious about the clientele her site is attracting. Among the information she solicits are the age of respondents, how they learned of her site, and the browser they are using "[s]o I can make the pages compatible for more browsers."

Given the ease with which one can click on an e-mail hyperlink and activate, in most popular browsers, an e-mail application together with all its composing and editing resources, it is unlikely that such forms facilitate a correspondent's work. However, they do emplot the relations the readership is expected to have with a Web proprietor. With forms, proprietors set the range and sequence of topics of exchanges; the surfer is cast as respondent to these initiatives. The relationship is not so much one of two equal citizens as it is of an enterprise and its passing clientele. For citizens of the advanced capitalist societies that dominate the Web's population, individuals long positioned only as respondents to the forms regularly found in magazines, in product documentation, at government bureaus and through public and private agencies, posting a form is a legitimate and fairly tantalising publishing activity

hitherto exclusive to institutions. By adopting the discursive practice for their own composition, they enact the process of synthetic institutionalization by which they can vicariously establish legitimate relations with the public.

While guestbooks and response forms are well-recognized institutional technologies, they are only the surface of institutions' relations with the public, the face of power. Other genres are enacted behind the scenes, in situations in which those on the outside do not even have a role as respondents. As such, synthetic institutionalization draws primarily on the most visible relations between institution and the public, as these are the most accessible models and discourse technologies for mass media relations available to most citizens. Without the power of institutions to sustain such relations, Web authors face contradictions between their access to such technology and their restriction from the authentic discursive practices embodied in it. We consider these contradictions in chapter 9, where we again take up the posting of response forms.

Subject positions — social identities

As we have seen in chapter 7, Fairclough characterises subject positions as a function of the constraints and opportunities made available for individuals to adopt in discursive situations. Though Fairclough does not define the long-term structural effect of *social identities*, we may perhaps conceive of it, following Bourdieu, as a consequence of inculcation, in which an individual's instances of adopting various subject positions cumulatively contribute to what is recognized as an individual's enduring identity.

In composing and maintaining a personal Web site, often an autobiographical exercise, individuals potentially construct two kinds of positions or identities for themselves: authors of a text; and topic of that text. We might distinguish these as the subject of representation and the object of representation, respectively.[34] Much of this project touches on how various kinds of subject positions both motivate and constrain individuals who seek to occupy the Web. For instance, cases of the subject position of Web site producers are discussed in passing in the above sections of this chapter. In the Content section, we have seen how, by creating their own graphics, sixteen participants positioned themselves as producers rather than simply as consumers of Web graphics. In the Social Relations section, we have seen how the use of *welcome* as a Web site greeting positioned site authors as proprietors of a publically accessible spaces.

In this section, I explore subject positions and social identities in greater detail by examining how synthetic institutionalization results in positions and identities derived from institutional models and practices. First, I focus on the subject of representation, the position of producer and Webmaster of a continuously "broadcasted" public display; second, I focus on the object of representation, the display of the individual identity as seen through the "eyes" of institutional discourse.

Institutionalized subjects of Web composition

In claiming a speaking space on the Web, one can occupy the subject position of homepage producer in a number of ways. In the previous chapter, for instance, I explore how some participants draw on specialized information at their disposal to construct subject positions of experts or guides. With such positions, individual Web site producers can legitimate their presence before a broad international audience. In chapter 6, I describe how some participants draw on their speech habitus and bodily hexis, transcribing their face-to-face strategies into written text for the dimensionless Internet. With these bodily strategies, the Web site producer is represented as a host, in real space and time, making sounds as a means of socializing with his or her guest.

The strategy presented here, one of modelling one's position on that of an institutional producer, juxtaposes most acutely with those strategies derived from the speech habitus and bodily hexis. With synthetic institutionalization, the semiotic resources on homepages represent otherwise undistinguished individuals in the guise of a corporate entity or practice. The semiotic resource may be a specific sign, such as a proper noun or a logo belonging to a collective entity, or it may be a discursive practice that recognizably models itself on institutional practices.

The institutional entity or practice represents a more expansive presence than that of the individual in his or her occupancy of the immediate here and now. The entity may have a membership, for instance, or some semiotic means of representing the solidarity of individuals joined across cyberspace. Likewise, the institutional practice could be one that manages time in a manner that institutions can but individuals usually can't. With such synthetic institutionalization, individuals construct a subject position that is oriented away from the limitations of the individual speaking body toward the greater scope and endurance of an established corporate body. It is a subject position that can more convincingly claim the production regimes made available in mass media communications, and hence legitimate its

public presence.

Examples of specific signs, from the corpus of homepages examined in this study, that have such affiliations include those of guilds, rings, awards, and public service organizations. For instance, participants b-kcb, d-ad, d-h, k-sk, and m-m each proclaim their membership in one of the "guilds" that have sprung up among Web writers, the most common of which is The HTML Writers Guild. As well, as discussed in chapter 4, ten participants' sites are nodes on one or more Web "rings." In linking one's homepage to a ring, the homepage author downloads and displays a few graphics and accompanying HTML code that identify the ring theme and provide navigability to other homepage nodes linked to the ring. The ring sequence is operated from one server such that a surfer can hyperlink through the sequence from node to node.

Eleven sites in the sample feature awards; eight of these sites feature more than one award and, in the case of one acquisitive participant (m-bm), at least 66 awards. While Web-based awards have developed some notoriety for their gratuitous excess, this dilution of the prestige of awards would not outweigh the recognition that these eleven participants may feel awards would convey. Indeed, some individuals have taken up this prerogative normally reserved for institutional producers: two participants (m-bm, g-jg) have created awards which they seem to offer, rather liberally, to whoever asks.

In lieu of establishing affiliations with existing institutions, some participants have created their own institutions. For instance, as we have seen above, participant v-s maintains the very successful "Vampire White Pages," a site that, through its sectors "Vampyre Homes," "Vampyre Connection," and "Vampyre Yellow Pages," offers wannabe vampires links to homepages, personal ads, and organizational sites by, about, and of interest to vampires. Participant h-s runs her own "gossip column" called "The Rumor Mill," which solicits, and apparently receives, salacious gossip through the Internet. Participant v-mk's site is set up to host a penpal service, though at the time of this study it had apparently not yet succeeded in

soliciting applications. Participant m-s and two friends run "The Girls Club" for girls aged 7 to 18, which also did not appear to have caught on at the time of this study; the three have adopted the titles of "President," "Vice-President," and "Publicity Person," while m-s herself runs the club's "Gabby Newsletter."

In the environment of the Web, in which individuals and their homepages occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of prestige, importance, and Web visibility, individuals are by default cast into a subject position that, as discussed in chapter 4, presents them as motivated perhaps by vanity. In shifting attention away from themselves, individuals can perhaps re-narrate that default account of their personal homepage, reconceiving the protagonist of that story. The semiotic resources that accompany organizational affiliations can help accomplish this. With guild memberships, rings, awards, and organizational accreditation, individuals can build the credibility that could legitimate the perceived audacity of their personal publishing. The institutional basis of these semiotic resources contribute to such an ethos. For instance, all the guilds, rings, awards, and some of the service organizations are named with proper nouns, a prerogative usually reserved by institutions for the naming of the products, services, or territories under their control. More prominent than our unnamed personal connections, they offer titled connections that bring definition and visibility. As well, all the guilds, rings, awards, and some of the service organizations feature signature graphics which, like institutional logos and crests, have traditionally been exclusive to production regimes, in particular those of institutions, that can marshal the technology and expertise to produce graphic designs and display them on all documentation. They signify order, planning, organization, power over material and financial resources. The display on personal homepages of the proper nouns and graphic logos of these grassroots organizations constructs the individual homepage author as synecdoche for a larger corporate entity. This synthetic institutionalization provides the sanction for one's perceived illegitimate subject position of mass media producer.

While guilds, rings, awards, and service organizations offer specific semiotic resources for

synthetic institutionalization, longer-term institutional strategies offer a model of how individuals' subject positions as producers of continuously broadcasted messages can be sustained.

Most individuals will have had relatively few experiences as producers of continuously active and changing projects. In their writing experiences, the exigencies of academic and work-related deadlines inevitably foreclose the writing process. Indeed, according to Walter Ong (1982), closure is a feature of the print medium in general; the text takes on an identity aloof from the vagaries of time (pp.132-35). As well, the text is detached from its author, rendering a life's work of writing as really a series of successive short-term engagements. Beyond their deadlines, individuals' discursive products are seldom revisited for further development or revisions.

The Web, however, provides the technological capacity and, increasingly, the social imperative to maintain a long-term continuously broadcasted public presence to the world. As such, the Web presents individuals with a production regime that few individuals have ever confronted in their writing practices: publishing to an anonymous international public, as an individual without institutional sanction, and maintaining an active broadcasted public presence over time. Institutions, by contrast, have traditionally operated with that production regime through their well-established practices of maintaining and developing public images. Institutions develop new products and updated versions of old products, engage in elaborate advertising and marketing campaigns, undertake long-term contracts and projects, revise their corporate goals, and generally seek to maintain a continuous, visible presence in the community—to fashion a long-term relationship with their employees and with the public. Hence, the production regime of long-term maintenance and development of a public presence is a potentially fertile ground in which to explore the discursive process of synthetic institutionalization in the subject position of homepage producer.

The results of the survey of the 110 homepage authors demonstrate that at least some degree

of Web site maintenance and development is practised by almost all respondents. Almost all respondents, 106 of 110, indicated that they had made changes to their sites since first placing these sites on-line, and again almost all, 105 of 110, indicated that they intended to make changes in the future.

Questions #11b and #12b of the survey asked for explanations of why past or anticipated future changes were undertaken or being considered. While some respondents characterised their site changes as a cleaning task—removing errors—a majority indicated that they had some experience in having made major revisions to their sites or some conception of a developing Web site. Hence, the understanding of a homepage as a long-term, evolving communications project seems to be popularly held.

To illustrate why homepage maintenance and development would be subject to synthetic institutionalization, let's first re-consider an imaginative metaphor introduced above in chapter 5: Tim Berners-Lee's envisioning of a Web homepage as a gnome displayed in front of a home. Berners-Lee's distinction between the intimacy of the private home and the formality of the public gnome in the front yard offers a rough-fitting but nevertheless relevant illustration of the range of conceptions survey respondents revealed about their Web sites. The literal home, of course, is the site of familiar discursive practices of individuals, practices among family and friends. The literal gnome, by contrast, is the public display continuously present and continuously visible to the neighbours and to passing strangers. Prior to the Web, such a display would have been among the few semiotic means by which individuals would "broadcast" their work to an anonymous public. Now, on the Web, Berners-Lee's metaphorical gnome is constituted in part by the process of synthetic institutionalization: not one's "home" discourse but the discourse of media relations.

This is not to suggest that conceptions of "home" are absent from the Web. Indeed, as we have seen in chapter 6, many participants draw on their conversational habitus to compose Web documents that have the informality of a localized, friendly encounter. Rather, the

Web's bridging of mass participation with the mass media has created the conditions by which synthetic institutionalization is among the more viable responses. As a result, there is a greater imperative for the strategies that produce metaphorical "gnomes" in individuals' discourse than there is in other contexts.

To establish the contrast in the long-term development of "homes" and "gnomes" on the Web, let's first illustrate the differing conceptions of Web "homes" and "gnomes" expressed by the survey respondents as they accounted for the changes, past and future, to their homepages.

Home = organic

Some conceptions of homepage change can be characterised as *organic*, in part because of the terminology with which respondents conceived of their changing sites: terms such as "fresh," "stale," "stagnant." Some expressions of organic conceptions of Web site change draw on the analogy of change in the self:

- "My page is a mirror of myself and my family. As we grow our pages grows [sic]." (t-tg)
- ". . . as I grow as a person, my site will grow to manifest it. . . ." (i-li)
- "Life is constant change, so why shouldn't a creation also be?" (a-ma)

In these explanations, we see how Web sites are conceived of by some homepage authors as more than free-standing timeless documents. Web sites, metaphorically, behave as their creators do, growing and changing in tandem. They are text, but text that develops organically.

Gnome = strategic

The "gnomes" of the Web are conceived of differently. This conception of change over time could be characterized as *strategic*, a term that Fairclough borrows from Habermas (Fairclough, 1989, p.198). Fairclough glosses *strategic* discourse as "discourse oriented to

instrumental goals" (p.198). The "gnomes" are strategic because, broadly speaking, these conceptions of past and future changes are more directly concerned with getting results: maintaining ethos, encouraging return visits, and so forth. In contrast with the organic conceptions illustrated above, the strategic conceptions account for homepage changes by pointing to the exigencies created by the environment and the audience of Web communications:

- ". . . a page must be a place to come back to" (l-fl)
- "New content brings users back. I know I have regular readers, so I try to keep adding material." (g-kgi)
- "Simple changes can help visitors return to the site, if only to see if it has been updated, or changed." (b-to)

With these explanations, these participants seem to conceive of their "gnomes" as marketing tools to increase local traffic. These participants express an awareness of audience loyalty and use change as part of their discursive strategy to maintain a regular clientele.

Having considered the explanations of survey respondents, let's now consider some of the manifestations of synthetic institutionalization in the production of personal homepages in the sample. First, I describe a few brief statements identifying homepage change, and then I explore one of the longer-term practices of homepage change.

First, there are a number of familiar signs and phrases generated by institutions in their activities of remodelling themselves and their public image over time or in promoting new products and services. Some of these appear on personal homepages in the sample. Consider the following three banner statements:

- Drawing perhaps on the practice seen in the announcements of companies which build ethos by trading on their longevity, one participant (d-mdr) displays beneath the title of his homepage the announcement "Since July 5th, 1995," a long commitment by Web standards.
- Another participant (g-kgi) uses as a header a claim that resembles the publicity claims

surrounding the annual updates that characterize automobile manufacturing and other industries: "New for 1997!"

- Reproducing an announcement that resembles the banners across movie advertisements that appear prior to a film's release, two participants (o-so and l-ajl) introduce projected site developments with the announcement "Coming soon!"

By far the most conspicuous of phrases derived from institutional discourse are the ubiquitous *under construction* signs, which have quite successfully colonized the Web. The terms traditionally reserved for changing and developing text—terms such as *composition* and *revision*—almost never appear; in the sample there is no instance of a sign or announcement stating *under composition* or *under revision* or other similar expressions. At most, there are occasional references to new sections that homepage authors hope to "write."

The usage *under construction* is a revealing example of synthetic institutionalization. Institutions *construct* edifices. Individuals, by contrast, may *write* or *compose* a document, and individuals may *build* a tool shed, but in general individuals have not hitherto *constructed* objects or spaces or had them *under construction*. Construction is a long-term activity, a public activity, a prestigious activity, and, in the eyes of many, a masculine activity. Writing, composition, and revision are popularly perceived to have few of these qualities. Likewise, on the Web, a *site* (not a set of *documents*) is *maintained* and *updated* (not *revised*) by a *Webmaster* (not an *author*). In this market, synthetic institutionalization offers Web writers a means of representing their ongoing composition activities with the legitimacy of industrial production.

Second, perhaps the most ambitious practice of long-term synthetic institutionalization is the regularizing of change according to the calendar. For instance, eight sites in the sample make a promise of a weekly change or update. These weekly changes include promises of new photos (p-sp), new jokes in a joke archive and new personal "reports" (g-kgi), new feature links to select exemplary Web sites (v-s), new vocabulary words on a page devoted to

improving one's vocabulary (g-kgo), newly written haiku in a personal haiku collection (a-aa), new gossip solicited from surfers for a "gossip column" (h-s), and new "rants" on a site authored by self-proclaimed "slackers" (y-gy). As well, another five survey respondents, though they were not asked about the regularity of their updates, did suggest a degree of regularity of their site updates, ranging from once a week to once a month (b-cb, b-to, m-lm, r-ir, r-mr).

Perhaps the most familiar models of these regularized changes are publishing strategies and institutional practices that adopt precise units of time: weekly magazines, book-of-the-month clubs, quarterly reports and, of course, the organization of most work lives in week-long segments. Marshalling time is a result of the capacity to command the human and material resources with such precision as to plan the future and bring those plans to fruition. In institutional practice, such a manifestation of power constructs a narrative of security in an otherwise disordered world, projects a regime of control over employees and customers, and establishes the subject position of the powerful actor rather than the acted-upon. On homepages, the weekly changes would be unlikely to represent the organic flux of personal growth. In the synthetic institutionalization of homepages, the untamed time of organic change is overcome by the power and prestige of strategic, controlled mathematical development. Colonization expands from discourses of greater social power to those of lesser power.

Carrying out these promises of regularity is another matter, especially in these cases of personal Web sites, in which one's primary resource is simply oneself. In six of the eight weekly practices discussed, there is clear evidence in the dates of the site archives that the weekly intervals became significantly longer than seven days. (On the other two sites, there was no dated evidence with which to reach a conclusion one way or the other.) The most common pattern is a maintained commitment over the first few weeks, followed by gaps or periods of slack.

When these writers confront the discrepancy between advertised practice and actual practice, they are compelled to abandon the production regime implicated by synthetic institutionalization and return to an organic approach. For instance, one participant (v-s) "apologizes for taking over a month to get a new link of the 'week'...." Another participant (g-kgi) introduces the "Joke of the Week Archive" by joking, "Additions have become a lot more sporadic than once per week, but it's still a catchy title!" After a lapse of several months, another participant (a-aa) re-introduces his "Haiku of the Week Archive" with a title page that blurts out, "Welcome to the Rebirth of Haiku: The Haiku of the Whataver! [sic]."

With these examples of signs and practices of homepage composition and development, we have seen how the subject positions that individuals take on as producers in a new mass medium are influenced by established mass media production regimes. This context for their communications provides not just a handy set of semiotic resources but also an established market from which legitimacy may be purchased in the form of established practices of authority. The colonization process that I characterise as synthetic institutionalization is sustained because of this power difference. For undistinguished individuals establishing a speaking space in the mass media, the institutional subject position is recognized as carrying far more prestige than their own.

Institutionalized objects of representation

As audacious as broadcasting to an international audience is perceived to be, broadcasting a message about oneself is even more so. As we have seen in chapters 4 and 7, for instance, not all sites reveal personal information. Being the object of discourse can be a greater affront to legitimacy than being its subject. By maintaining anonymity, individuals may speak without being spoken.

To the degree that any discursive practice would be resistant to the process of synthetic

institutionalization, the personal subject matter of one's identity would seem to be the least accommodating to formal, institutionalized genres (Bakhtin, 1986, p.63). As we have seen in chapter 6, for instance, many participants represent the situations of their homepages in the chronotope of the present and the local. They draw on a habitus developed from such environments to use strategies rooted in their bodily hexis, strategies such as the use of transcribed colloquial pronunciations, exclamations, and facial expressions. Experiences of oral self-presentation would be very familiar to all individuals, and would, hence, provide a ready model for self-presentation on the Web.

As we have seen in chapter 7, however, many participants also sense that legitimacy on the Web is a function of the information one dispenses. Participants responded to this feature of their new environment with semiotic resources that symbolize the appearance of information: formats such as lists and tables, for example, which perform the textual function of constructing structure and order in one's message.

Hence, where the topic of a page is oneself, we might expect some participants to represent that topic with semiotic resources that optimize its representation as information. On a larger scale, Marshall McLuhan observes such an orientation as a characteristic of new media in general: "In this electric age we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information . . ." (1964/1994, p.57). Within the cultural context of most Web communicators, perhaps the most common experience of oneself as information is derived from one's interaction with institutions, interactions which are most typically mediated by the genre of forms and conducted on the basis of how one's responses fit the forms' pre-established categories. The form is designed to optimize the information extractable from a transaction: structuring the untidiness of a self-representation into two columns of category and data; ordering the categories in a vertical, and hence implied logical, sequence; and removing all verbiage but for the data entry lines designed to accommodate just the requested data and no more. In reducing the raw data of the world to regular structure, the genre of the form becomes a technological means of producing information.

In introducing and describing themselves on their homepages, at least 11 participants adopt this genre. Each of these writers reproduces the two-voice "dialogue" of forms: the institution's voice setting general categories and the individual's voice in response. The first few rows of participant s-js's form illustrates this practice:

Name:	John Killoran *
Address:	Esslingen, Germany
Birthday:	14. October 1965
Occupation:	mechanical engineer

* My name has been substituted in place of the participant's name.

The two roles in the dialogue of the form complicate the subject positions Web writers may occupy. On the one hand, by reproducing the genre, individuals on the Web are reproducing and occupying the subject position of the institution that controls such information: the institution sets the categories and questions in the first place, normalizes the solicitation of responses, takes possession of the resulting data. From this subject position, the discourse of the writer is no longer the casual "Hi. I'm John" type of expository prose. Instead, the subject position bespeaks the order, efficiency, and control of official discourses. Every piece of data about oneself is dignified with a title; the whole display resembles "information." The self-representation is disciplined, Cartesian, a product not of the slovenly human body but of systematic institutional discourse.

On the other hand, the right-hand column of a form, the respondent's role in this genre, also implicates participants as objects of representation. Fairclough reminds us that the conventions embedded in "discourse type[s] embody ideological representations of subjects and their social relationships" (1989, p.157). In the case of official forms, Fairclough observes an increasingly prevalent "discourse technology" by which organizations both normalize the act of individuals revealing information about themselves and control the parameters and content of such self-revelation (p.218, 222). In the context in which forms are

normally distributed (by institutions) and filled in and submitted (by individuals), both of these actions contribute to the subject position of individuals. Let's consider both of these actions: first, how the social relationship between individual and institution compels individuals to take on the subject position of respondent; and second, what the content of the self-representation is and what its implications are for individuals' social identities.

First, in chapter 7, I discuss how the concept of subject position is used both by Fairclough and by social psychologist Rom Harré and his research associates. For Harré and van Langenhove, the form is an example of a communication type that they call "forced self-positioning," in which the prerogative of positioning the individual lies with someone or something else (1991, p.402). To illustrate their point, Harré and van Langenhove discuss the actions of institutional positioning (pp.402-03), such as the act of asking someone to fill out a questionnaire (p.405). Though always to a degree flexible, such positioning can cumulatively demarcate the range and pattern of available subject positions individuals have in their repertoires of communicative behaviours. For Davies and Harré,

> A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position. . . . (1990, p.46)

As we have seen above, a similar point is made by Fairclough, in the relationship he establishes between short-term situational "constraints" and long-term "structural effects": the cumulative effect of "systematic" constraints on subject positions influences social identities (1989, p.74). Bakhtin as well suggests a cumulative relationship between the small-scale individual voices and the larger-scale conceptual construction of one's world:

> The ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others. . . . Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior. . . . (1981a, pp.341-42)

Bourdieu, of course, has written at length about how subjects develop their communication behaviour and even personality traits through their habitus, in a process of inculcation based on their cumulative experiences of being positioned.

It is thus perhaps such an inculcation of one's conception of the world and of one's position in it that may be developing through the countless encounters in which individuals are expected to release self-identificatory information to institutions. In the usual contexts of these encounters with institutions, filling out a form reinforces the practice of certain correct and efficient behaviours. As H.P. Grice proposes in his maxims underlying conversational implicature, one makes one's contribution concise, perspicuous, relevant (1975). One makes one's response in the spaces allotted. Subjecthood is recognized by the tight choreography expected between a form's categories and responses. By its role in emplotting individuals in the protocols of question and answer, category and response, protocols learned through repeated practice by all literate citizens in contemporary bureaucratized societies, the genre interpellates the individual's permanent position in a social order populated by powerful institutions.[35] Individuals learn within the repertoire of their behaviours the position of efficient supplicant to institutions.

That this discursive behaviour is reproduced in the Web writing of participants may indicate the success of the genre in colonizing subject positions beyond its formal bureaucratic range. Subjects, recognizing their Web situation as one in which they should perhaps represent themselves in writing, draw on their repertoire of subject positions as self-representers in writing. Such positions as initiators of written self-representing are, for many individuals, rather rare. It is not a common practice in academic or professional writing, in which the self must be suppressed, and with the exception of those who win the fame to warrant an autobiography, one cannot legitimately claim the position to self-present in a written monologue. Hence, individuals may adopt those positions which many will have previously held, not as initiators but as respondents in "dialogues" that institutional operations have repeatedly presented them with. It is through the familiar and socially validated discursive

habit of being a respondent that this practice of synthetic institutionalization emerges.

A second action of a genre such as the form is the influence it exerts on the contents of individuals' self-representation. Many contemporary scholars have argued that self-identity, rather than being a fixed element, pre-existing any situation, is instead contingent on a situation, or at least cued by a situation. For instance, communications scholars Russell Spears and Martin Lea draw on social psychological work with social identity and self-categorization theories to develop their Social Identity and Deindividualization model of computer-mediated communication, with which they propose that one's communicative behaviour is contingent in part on such situational conditions as the varying salience of one's group affiliation against one's individual identity (1994, pp.442-43). Citing Foucault, Spears and Lea suggest that computer-mediated communication does not merely condition behaviour by virtue of its public exposure and gaze, but also contributes to the construction of the self (p.440). Psychologists Hazel Marcus and Paula Nurius argue that the composition of one's "working self-concept" depends on what one's current or recent context has cued or "elicited" (1986, p.957). By their reproduction in form after form, certain legal and socio-economic dimensions of identity may become cued by situations of official display of oneself as citizen, an object of the social order: surnames and maiden names, various institutional identifications, locale, gender, age, ethnicity, language, education, occupation, and so forth. Bourdieu perceives much of this kind of information as classificatory, assessing one's ranking in the social hierarchy (1984, p.482).

Though the long-term construction of the self is beyond the scope of this study, the Web sites in the sample offer suggestive evidence that the institutionally-dominant environment of Web communications is eliciting "official" versions of self-identity. Consider, for example, the first few rows of participant v-j's form, which she introduces as encompassing her "vital stats":

Height: 5'1"	Weight: 140 Lbs
Age: 26	Hair: Long, Midback dark hair
Eyes: Black	Background: Black and Japanese

All six of these categories identify some dimension of the body: its size, its colour, its background. Though her gender may contribute to this salience of the body's appearance (the female body being a currency in the patriarchal social economy), such a focus might also be a consequence of the cumulative action of encounters with social institutions, in which identities are often defined by the measurable parameters of the body.

Aside from the eleven participants who reproduce the genre of the form, comprising both category headings and data responses, many other participants reveal about themselves primarily the kinds of information that is requested in forms or in other encounters with institutions. Frequently, this is presented in the format of a list or in telegraphic phrases. For instance, of the 106 participants whose Web sites were examined in this study, 55 explicitly identify their occupation, and several more suggest their occupation by implication. That's not far short of the 59 who, using perhaps the most unique semiotic resource of subjecthood, identify themselves using their full names. Berners-Lee's distinction, discussed above, between the home and the gnome, illustrates the prominence that the Web confers to "official" versions of the self. One's occupation is for most one's primary contractual affiliation with an institution. It is how we are acknowledged and recognized in contemporary capitalist societies. When presented with the exigence to broadcast something to the world, individuals respond with the institutionally-cued elements of their social identities; they reproduce the gaze by which they are seen as objects of the social order. With this discursive process of synthetic institutionalization, individuals invoke an identity that has acknowledged legitimacy to represent a topic that has no recognized legitimacy in being published in the mass media: the introduction to the undistinguished individual citizen.

* * * * *

In this chapter, we have explored one dimension of how the Web, seemingly a medium of unfettered discursive liberty, in fact exerts social constraints on the kinds of contributions individuals make, constraints which some individuals comply with willingly. While much of the public discourse surrounding the Web is enthusiastic, optimistic, and visionary, the medium itself has been developing hierarchies by which its products are measured and differentiated. In the contents of their Web sites, in the relations with their readers, and in the subject positions they occupy, many individuals adopt the more highly validated practices of institutions.

This process of synthetic institutionalization puts into relief the problematic status of individuals' legitimacy on the Web. The legitimacy of institutional discourse that seems to warrant its colonization of individuals' discourse derives ultimately from the power that institutional voices have in our society. Such a dispensation portends a future in which we all maintain and develop not homepages but public relations sites for ourselves; not, to use my own name, "John Killoran's Homepage," but rather "John Killoran Ltd.," or "John Killoran, Inc.," or "John Killoran .com."

In the next chapter, we return to this practice of synthetic institutionalization to explore how participants deal with the contradictions in their own roles bridging both subjecthood and, discursively, organizational status.

The Comic Frame

In chapter 8, we examined one strategy by which individuals proceed in an otherwise challenging production situation. In a medium in which their contributions co-exist with those of institutions endowed both with substantial resources and with the already-won legitimacy to publish, individuals find one of their few accessories of legitimacy in the discursive practices of institutions. Through synthetic institutionalization, the contents of homepages, the relations between producers and their public, and individuals' positions as producers are all modeled on the precedents of institutional practices.

Sustaining such a discursive stance, however, is not feasible with the limited publishing resources that most individuals have at their disposal. While "signs of wealth" are widely, indeed ubiquitously, displayed to citizens of contemporary, post-industrial societies, and while the media "literacy" to reproduce at least some nominal features of such signs would have been inculcated through years of exposure to the media, the concentration of resources required for a credible voice would be prohibitive for most citizens. This lack of sufficient resources reveals itself in the strain between their adopted signifiers of institutional practice and credible contents, relations, and positions. The Web presents an opportunity without clear means of fulfillment. The chasm between their technological access to publish and yet the perceived invalidity of their potential contributions places individuals in a no-win situation.

In this chapter, I explore this problem by analysing how the contradictions inherent in such use of institutional practices find release on individuals' homepages. This release takes the form of parody, in particular a parody of the very institutional discourses and practices that also serve as models of legitimacy. First, I draw on Hodge and Kress, Bakhtin, and Burke to explain how and why parody would be the strategy of choice for so many Web authors. Then, in parallel with the discussion of the preceding chapter, I analyse, in three successive sections, how the contents, relations, and positions of institutions are parodied by personal homepage authors.

Modality and parody

Above, I represent individuals' position on the Web as being problematic, caught between the recognizable criteria for media legitimacy and their few resources with which to secure such legitimacy. It is a resolution of problems that Fairclough identifies as one of our motivations to produce texts in the first place (1989, p.169). Problems arise in conjunction with "the 'destructuring' of orders of discourse" (p.171), in which established discursive practices and discourse types can no longer function with the same effect they formerly had. As we have seen in the previous chapter, such a condition would well characterize the communication situation of the Web, the first mass medium enabling popular participation, disseminating individuals' unsanctioned, unvetted texts. The previously established publishing genres and practices of mass media networks effectively preclude the usual contents, relations, and positions of the vast majority of the population, undistinguished individual producers: the "undistinguished" contents of their potential messages would in many cases be limited to what is perceived as unnewsworthy personal trivia; their viable one-to-one relation types among friends, co-workers, and neighbours would be incongruous with the anonymity and potential mass-market reach of the media; and their habitual positions as conversational partners and as private correspondents provide little experience for ostensible multi-media producers and broadcasters. These writing challenges faced by individuals are not simply ones of individual computer literacy, education, and skills, but of individuality as a status. As Fairclough points out, "[w]hat are experienced as individual problems can be interpreted socially as indicators of the de-structuring of orders of discourse which occur in the course of social struggles" (p.172). Though nominally on the Web, individuals in the role of publishers have yet to consolidate a socially valid stance of addressing a potential world-wide audience, a validity that institutions have long since established. Instead, individuals are confronted with contradictions between their statuses as individual citizens and as "synthetic institutions." They must engage in a necessary "de-structuring" to accommodate representations that are both authentic to the realities that they experience and legitimate in a mass medium.

This interaction between whose "realities" are represented in discourse and how various realities are valued is addressed by Hodge and Kress in the relationship they establish between the mimetic and the social "dimensions" of language (1988, p.261). Fundamental to Hodge and Kress's framework is the semiotic interconnectedness of the mimetic plane of meaning with the semiosic plane of meaning: "The semiosic plane is the indispensable context for the mimetic plane, and the mimetic plane is an indispensable constituent of the semiosic plane" (p.262). The fidelity or infidelity a text posits with respect to "reality" is a function not only of its mirroring of that reality (the mimetic plane), but also of the social context (the semiosic plane), the power or solidarity of the text's producers with its receivers and, by extension, with the prevailing "system" (p.123). Hodge and Kress characterize the former dimension of meaning, a text's posited fidelity or infidelity with the reality it represents, as a text's *modality*. Though *modality* as used by linguists has traditionally referred primarily to auxiliary words such as "might" and "would," Hodge and Kress expand the concept to include all dimensions of a text's degree of fidelity with reality, such as the visual accuracy of graphics (pp.128-42).[36] They define *modality* as "the status, authority and reliability of a message, . . . its ontological status, . . . its value as truth or fact" (p.124). As is suggested by the first few attributes in this definition, modality is also inherently a function of the latter dimension of meaning (meaning in the semiosic plane), the power or solidarity of a text's producers with its receivers and with the system, a quality which they call *affinity* (p.123). Meanings in these two planes share a direct relationship. Thus, a text that posits a high fidelity with reality—that is, a text with high modality—is equivalently a text with a high affinity between its producer and the prevailing system, a condition of which is solidarity between that producer and that system. By contrast, a text that posits a low fidelity with reality—that is, a text with low modality—is equivalently a text with a low affinity between its producer and the prevailing system, a condition of which is a lack of solidarity between producer and system, a difference of power (p.123).

This social framework of power, solidarity, and hence affinity is readily applicable to individuals' status on the Web. Marginalized as they are from authentic participation among

the recognized mass media producers, aspiring individual contributors to the Web may easily feel solidarity with other individuals contributing to the Web, but not quite so easily with the system of mass media production and distribution dominated by institutions. In their status at the low end of the Web's hierarchy of contributors, individuals may find their posted contributions receiving relatively few visits and may find relatively little acknowledgment for their potential role in developing the Web. Once again, in the mass media, they are relegated to being recipients, not producers. Though their sites are, figuratively, adjacent to institutional sites, and though most homepages offer navigation to some of those insitutional sites, such a close juxtaposition of institutional and individual contributions only highlights the power difference between these classes of contributors. Thus, individuals would have a low affinity with the mass media system that overshadows their small-scale efforts on the Web.

As Hodge and Kress have illustrated, this low affinity can be expressed in the semiosic plane of meaning by a text that, in the mimetic plane, is low in modality. Such low-modality texts appear fairly frequently in the sample of Web sites. Following Hodge and Kress's characterization of modality as the "reliability of a message" (1988, p.124), we might consider the degree to which homepage messages are cued as reliable or not. Samples of passages that are patently not reliable by virtue of their tone or content are featured in Appendix E. These samples are selected from the sites of 70 of the participants, almost two-thirds of the total sample. The means by which these passages signal their unreliability are explored in more detail throughout this chapter. Briefly, we can observe here that their unreliability draws from meanings that are recognizably make-believe, exaggerated, inapt, or incongruous, and tones that seem better styled to evoke laughter than trust. In short, in the mimetic plane of meaning, these passages flaunt their incompatibility with prevailing conceptions of reality.

The frequency of such unreliable messages should not lead us to dismiss personal homepages as the detritus of irresponsible or indifferent writers Rather, this low modality observed in the mimetic plane of meaning can be a manifestation, in the semiosic plane of meaning, of the low status and power of individuals in this mass medium, of their lack of affinity with the

dominant system of media production and distribution. "Reliable" information is the product of institutional practices and institutional sanction. As Michel Foucault (1979) demonstrates with his fusion of power-knowledge, the knowledge that has been discovered or produced has been created in conjunction with applications of power. Though power circulates everywhere throughout society, individuals outside of some institutional affiliation would usually not be able to marshall the power to produce what is recognized in contemporary society as "knowledge." Thus, for a group with little capacity to establish new knowledge, and hence with little capacity to offer high-modality messages that matter, the humour and deliberate incongruities of low-modality text create viable speaking spaces unoccupied by institutional voices. They are akin to what Bakhtin characterizes as the carnivalesque, the discourse of the street, of the common folk, that is juxtaposed with the official discourse of the church and state. Such humourous and playful usages contrast acutely with the sobriety of institutional practices and synthetic institutionalization. The production regimes of such carnivalesque discourse, unlike those of institutional practices, are wide open to ordinary individuals.

These contrasting discourse types are not simply unrelated extremes of Web discourse, the inauthentic and the authentic, the carnivalesque occupying the content, relations, and positions eschewed by institutional practice. As we saw in chapter 8, with the capacity for change in response to the "'destructuring' of orders of discourse" comes the occasion for "restructuring," the resolution of problems through the fresh combination of available discursive resources (Fairclough, 1989, p.171). Chapter 8 explores a kind of "restructuring" for one kind of problem, one in which individuals attempt to reproduce institutional practices as a means to achieve legitimacy. As discussed above, the contradictions entailed by such attempted reproduction preclude this practice for many individuals.

Yet "innocent" humour and lightheartedness is not their only recourse. As an alternative, individuals may resolve the problems accompanying their Web production by "restructuring" *in opposition to* institutional practices, challenging the legitimacy that accrues to those practices and hence to the agents of those practices. For Fairclough, just as the destructuring

is not the fault of isolated individuals, so too can restructuring be seen not just as the outcome of individual inspiration but "as moves in social struggles" (Fairclough, 1989, p.172). Like Fairclough, Hodge and Kress emphasize the social narrative that envelopes the production of text, and like Fairclough, they also incorporate the means for change in that narrative, or at least in the discursive practices of its logonomic systems, such as through the function that modality has in the larger social narrative:

> Modality is . . . one of the crucial indicators of political struggle. It is a central means of contestation, and the site of the working out, whether by negotiation or imposition, of ideological systems. It provides a crucial component of the complex process of the establishment of hegemonic systems, a hegemony established as much through the active participation of social agents as through sheer 'imposition' of meaning by the more powerful on the less powerful participant. (1988, p.123)

It is individuals' capacity as "active . . . social agents" whose responses are not fully predetermined by hegemonic-induced practices that enables symbolic action that does more than attempt to reproduce prevailing legitimate practices. In lieu of silence or of consent to such practices, individuals can mount resistance to the hegemonic systems that have naturalized their roles as only recipients of public communications.

Thus, we may interpret humour not as indifference to the serious, as an abandonment of social and political struggle, but as an engagement with the prevailing practices of the "serious" world. Humourous is humourous in part because it is related, incongruously so, to real contents, relations, and positions. Specifically, humourous texts on personal homepages are, in several cases, low modality versions precisely of institutional discourses.

In the remainder of this section, I draw on several theoretical approaches to explore specific language mechanisms by which the authors of these texts, rather than simply accepting the colonization of institutional discourses, or simply being frivolous for the sake of frivolity, are "restructuring" the prevailing standards of media discourse. They do this by both using these institutional discourses and "abusing" such use through low-modality renditions. Making a

virtue of the contradictions of synthetic institutionalization, individuals are not attempting to elide the incompatibilities between individual and institutional production, but rather to produce meaning, and in doing so from marginalized positions, they expose the unequal distribution of legitimacy among production groups by highlighting such incompatibilities through exaggeration, inaptness, incongruity, and humour. Some specific language mechanisms for how "unreliable," low-modality representations can highlight this alienation of individual producers in the mass media are suggested in the work of Bakhtin, Hodge and Kress, and Burke. I discuss the perspectives of each of these theorists in turn.

As we have seen in chapter 2, Bakhtin's representation of language emphasizes its sociological dimension, the demographic qualities that ground its occurrences: which social groups use such-and-such pieces of language, and in which contexts. Though Bakhtin does not pursue a political interpretation of the kind that Hodge and Kress develop to explain how the language-context associations are produced and reproduced, he does suggest the consequences that ensue from violating this bond between words and their social context. Words, when not emerging from their habitual settings and the mouths of their habitual users, sound "foreign" and, hence, by virtue of their incongruity, lose some of their capacity for action, instead becoming recognizable as word-objects (e.g., 1981a, p.289, 294). For like objects, word usages are subject to localization in space-time; they are recognized as "owned" by certain groups in certain epochs, used only in certain locales at certain times of the day, for certain situations. Like objects, they can also be alienated from those who don't own them, and they can be appropriated.

Such an incompatibility between language and context is implicated with producers' capacity to produce high- or low-modality representations and producers' own compatibility or incompatibility with their context of production. If a text foregrounds its status as an object, then its referents are overshadowed, submerged. As its referentiality to *other* objects or reality is clouded by its salience as an object in its own right, its capacity to offer a high-modality representation of reality is diminished. The text cannot convincingly cue the mimetic plane of

meaning, or to the degree that it can cue the mimetic plane, it does so errantly. Instead, what is evoked more conspicuously is the anomaly of the text, its doubtful reliability.

As we have seen, the modality of a text manifests the degree of affinity of its producer with some elements of its context. Thus, the solidarity a producer shares with the system of production would be expressed in part be a capacity and a willingness to represent the world of the system transparently, reproducing its habitual discourse naturally, gracefully, as an "insider" would. Conversely, a lack of solidarity with the system, a difference of power, would be manifested by the incapacity, or unwillingness, to render the system in "natural" discourse. The discourse would be in some way incongruous, unable to consummate the ideology of the system and would instead call attention to the awkwardness of its appearance. This might be due, for instance, to the producer's alienation from the conventional situations of production for such discourse, the producer's position as an "outsider."

Agents are, of course, not unwitting producers of transparent or opaque discourse. Bakhtin emphasizes the fragility of discourse outside its conventional environment and the facility of making an object out of an erstwhile transparent carrier of direct meaning:

> By manipulating the effects of context, it is very easy to emphasize the brute materiality of another's words, and to stimulate dialogic reactions associated with such 'brute materiality'; thus it is, for instance, very easy to make even the most serious utterance comical. (Bakhtin, 1981a, p.340)

Thus, for instance, in appropriating usages of public relations genres from the mass media for their personal homepages, Web authors disassociate such usages from their conventional production regimes. These usages, to the extent that they are unfit for their new environment, unable to pass as serious, display themselves as objects, humourously incongruous, flaunting their inappropriate *kairos*, manifesting a lack of affinity between their current producer and their "home" environment.

To produce language objects and, hence, to express low affinity, agents have a number of

dimensions along which to manipulate the hinge between language and its environment. The one that is most fruitful for our consideration here draws on Bakhtin's conception of the environment as itself constituted of various words and utterances. Each new utterance engages intertextually with its antecedents, as if performing an illocutionary action of utterance upon utterance:

> Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere. . . . Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. (1986, p.91)

Bakhtin never theorizes any social or political alignment among this congress of voices. Indeed, it is the absence of a pre-established alignment or program that allows for the generative capacity of such freely circulating voices. These voices embody the capacity for change, a dexterity that outmanoeuvres the monoglossia of any dominant set of voices. Within this fertile environment, language users have the capacity to play their voices off of other intertextual voices to create fresh perspectives on those other voices:

> [E]ach utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reaction to other utterances. . . . Both whole utterances and individual words can retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated (ironically, indignantly, reverently, and so forth). Others' utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. (p.91)

The mechanisms by which such "re-accentuated" and reinterpreted usages can engage with their antecedents include some of the same tropes that produce the humourous excerpts collected in Appendix E: "emphasis on certain elements, repetition, [the] selection of harsher (or, conversely, milder) expressions, a contentious (or, conversely, conciliatory) tone, and so forth" (pp.91-92).

One of the most "widespread" re-accentuated forms is parody (1981c, p.51). Bakhtin's conception of parody is especially relevant here because his explanation of how parody operates encompasses the characteristic features of many of the incongruous, humourous excerpts displayed in Appendix E and throughout this chapter. Parody "ridicule[s] the

straightforward, serious word in all its generic guises" (p.52) by its effect of rendering the "serious word" as an object (p.51, 61). Bakhtin observes that this obscuring effect creates distance between language and its referents:

> Language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality. (p.61)

This distancing effect of parody is precisely in line with Hodge and Kress's characterization of modality. Parody draws as its primary resource the language of the "absolute dogma," language that makes a strong claim for its veracity, as its "monoglossia" admits no alternative representation of reality. Such "straightforward" usage is a defining characteristic of high-modality discourse. Once parodied, this language is rendered as the "working hypothesis," openly tentative, acknowledging its possible misinterpretation of reality. Such parodic re-accentuation, with its implied qualifications, is characteristic of low-modality discourse. Thus, we may bring into dialogue Bakhtin's work on discursive objects and parody with Hodge and Kress's work on modality and social affinity. Parody is essentially a lowering of the modality of a discourse, its reduction to object status, and can be seen as the manifestation of a low affinity between the author of the parody and the original context of that "straight" discourse.

Bakhtin explains that parody actually operates through the juxtaposition of two voices: the parodied voice, described above as the straightforward voice of "absolute dogma"; and the parodying voice, the one that creates ridicule by intruding awkwardly upon the transparency of the straightforward voice (1981c, p.75). Though Bakhtin does not advance an explicit socio-political interpretation of the interests and orientation of these two voices, it is interesting that he illustrates his explanation with examples that are alienated from each other on the demographic spectrum. The example of the former voice (the parodied voice) is from among the genres that Bakhtin has denigrated elsewhere for their centripetal pretentions: the heroic poem, a product of established high literature. Examples of the latter voice (the parodying voice) are genres and discourses that Bakhtin has celebrated for their enriching,

centrifugal dynamism: "low prosaic language, familiar conversational language, the language of the realistic genres, 'normal' language," and so forth (p.75). A similar discursive opposition dominates Bakhtin's work on the carnival voices of laughter in his Rabelais study (1984): the vivifying voices of the street are presented in juxtaposition to the sterile voices of the church and court.

With the help of Hodge and Kress's perspective, we can perhaps complete a social interpretation of these two voices of parody. The original high-modality of the voice to be parodied would be, for Hodge and Kress, a product of producers with a high affinity for its typical context of production. Once parodied, by a different producer of course, that voice has a low modality, and would thus be a product of a producer with a low affinity for that typical discursive context that normally produces that voice. Indeed, it is that low affinity that would likely have motivated, in the first place, the ridiculing orientation that finds expression through parody. We might further speculate on the source of the second voice, the voice that disrupts the decorum of the straightforward voice. Might it not emerge from the habitus of the author of the parody, a voice with which he or she obviously shares a high affinity (since he or she skillfully renders the parody as indeed parody and not simply a malapropism), and a voice that would seem as incongruous with the parodied voice as its alienated author would seem within the discursive context of the original parodied voice? As we explore, throughout this chapter, cases of low-modality renditions of institutional voices, we consider the source of this second voice, and we explore the ideological potential of its juxtaposition with the institutional voice.

In their interpretation of Bakhtin's work, Morson and Emerson obviously do not pursue the ideological questions that characterise the scholarship of social semioticians and critical discourse analysts. They do, however, develop an interpretation of parody that focuses not just on language but on language users. Like a number of the language theorists discussed throughout this work, Morson and Emerson acknowledge the capacity of individuals as creative agents, not simply beholden to act out their emplotted roles in accordance with

authority:

> Parodic forms enable us to distance ourselves from words, to be *outside* any given utterance and to assume our own unique attitude toward it. Thus, the parodic words we use are important not because they can change reality (they need not), but because they increase our freedom of interpretive choice by providing new perspectives. (1990, p.435)

This focus on the liberating perspective to be gained from outside a given discourse is developed, quite independently, in Kenneth Burke's treatment of the incongruity of words with their context. I'll close this theoretical development of the fertility to be found in the juxtaposition between language and its context with Burke's perspective on these issues. Burke develops the juxtaposition between language and its context with his concepts of *perspective by incongruity* and the *comic frame*. For Burke, the incongruity of words with their context can create *perspective by incongruity*, "A method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking'" (1959/1961, p.308). Burke contends that the clash between a linguistic foreground and its contextual background can have purposive, enlightening, "moralizing" effects "since it interprets new situations by removing words from their 'constitutional' setting" (p.309). Words develop a perspective from one situation onto another, not just by accidental juxtaposition but on the basis of "rational criteria" (p.309) that bring formerly unassociated words, and hence their situations, together.

Burke reviews the preconditions for perspective by incongruity in his discussion of an associated concept, the comic frame. The comic frame of motives is the epistemological structure that enables the dual viewpoint required for perspective by incongruity. A precondition of the comic frame is the assumption of human capacity for action beyond motion. Writing of the essentialist strategy of some thinkers to reduce human motivation to "social necessity" and "material interests" (1959/1961, p.166), Burke counters not with a purely humanistic perspective on human action but with a play between the two extremes: "A comic frame of motives avoids those difficulties, showing us how an act can 'dialectically'

contain both transcendental and material ingredients, both imagination and bureaucratic embodiment . . ." (pp.166-67).

Burke's negotiation between the extremes parallels the thinking of other theorists discussed in this work. For instance, it accords well with Giddens' reworking of sociology's macro-micro problem, wherein Giddens posits a social subject whose actions are both directed by social precedence (loosely paralleling Burke's motion) but also capable of novelty (Burke's action). As we have seen, Hodge and Kress and to a lesser degree Fairclough posit a roughly similar language producer, both constrained and yet creative in productive potential. For Burke, it is in the dual capacity of both acting and being self-conscious of those actions that we can locate the perspective engendered in the comic frame: "[T]he comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*" (1959/1961, p.171; italics in original). Giddens refers to this latter condition as subjects' "reflexive monitoring" of their actions (1984, p.5). It is such an assumption that encourages an examination of incongruous language for the motives of its usages. Usefully for the present purposes, Burke extends the range of the comic frame well beyond the critical analysis of experts to include "folk criticism" (1959/1961, p.173), the scope of which ranges over

> the resources of 'popular' philosophy, as embodied not only in proverbs and old saws, but also on the working vocabulary of everyday relationships. Thus we can incorporate the remarkable terms of politics and business, two terminologies which quickly chart and simplify constantly recurring relationships of our society. (pp.172-73)

It is with the assumption of the comic frame that we can most easily account for the kind of subject who is sensitive to the pressures of synthetic institutionalization, but who, rather than complying with these colonizing forces, responds by establishing a fresh perspective. Agents fluent with the diverse language resources at hand and conscious of contradictions in their contribution potentials can deal with their new situation by appropriating the language of other situations to establish a fresh perspective on their situation. These writers are not necessarily

just going through the motions of communicating by poorly plagiarizing other voices, but may be deliberately constructing symbolic distance between themselves and the prerogative of institutional practices. In so doing, they promote a more insightful perspective and critical awareness of the communication situation of individuals in a medium and a society crowded with institutional voices.

In the rest of this chapter, I focus on how homepage authors redress the constraints exerted on their contribution potential as a consequence of the suppremacy of institutional discourse. As in chapter 8, I follow Fairclough's framework of three types of constraints and structural effects:

1. contents,
2. relations,
3. subjects.

In each of these three sections, using the perspectives of Hodge and Kress, Bakhtin, and Burke that are sketched above, we explore how various uses and abuses of institutional discourse contest the preeminence of institutional practices in the mass media and the marginalization of individual voices.

Contents

In chapter 7, we saw how, in the context of Web communications, some individuals respond to the perceived imperative to offer something of value by representing their contributions recognizably as "information." Since homepage authors would obviously know something about computers and the Internet to have put up their sites in the first place, it is not surprising that the intellectual capital with which they could purchase legitimacy would include information about the medium.

In chapter 8, we saw how some homepage authors, through the process of synthetic institutionalization, represent the content of their sites with the legitimacy of institutional discourse. Such a colonization of individuals' discourse is most viable where individuals' access to resources can provide and sustain the gloss of institutional discourse. This is the case, for example, with easily copied semiotic resources usually produced by or for large-scale producers, resources such as graphics, the copyright symbol, and proper nouns. As well, institutional discourse can be sustained when homepages offer goods, services, or information that can support the interpretation implied by the terministic screen of, for example, commercial practices.

In the discursive practices explored in both of these chapters, the "constraints" on content are, more specifically, constraints on which content is legitimized. Individuals are of course free to post almost anything on their sites, and the sample of homepages reveals a diversity of topics. However, the Web, by virtue of its kinship with other mass media and of the narrow scope of legitimate media contributions, invites some discourses more than others. In the case of synthetic institutionalization, the range of easily accessible institutional resources, and the capacity to sustain practices that are at least recognizably analogous to institutional practices, are both rather limited. Most individuals do not have access to the resources to maintain anything more than the veneer of mass media legitimacy. Moreover, the content of their personal messages, messages that would ideally validate their interests, do not correspond

with credible broadcasting, publishing, or public relations content.

Facing such incompatibilities between their potential and the practical realities of their situations, some individuals respond in a way that, as we explore below, makes the incompatibility itself the "content" of their messages. They do so by "re-structuring," drawing on the resources they can access: voices of legitimacy and their capacity as creative agents.

Among the discursive voices that have the legitimacy and influence in society, the ones that have the most power are often relatively unfamiliar to the public. These are the discourses that elites use when speaking among themselves, what Bakhtin would identify as the professional genres that appear transparent to the initiated but not to others: the legal jargon of judges and lawyers, the backroom talk of politicians when voters are absent, the discourse among professors when students are absent, among corporate business people when consumers are absent. It is with such discourses and within the proper field that, as Bourdieu observes, one accrues symbolic capital; but the contexts of their use guarantee that such discourses would tend to remain the exclusive domain of those who secure an officially sanctioned status within a field, lest their profit potential become diluted. These voices are learned only by apprenticeship. As voices of power, then, it is not surprising that these discourses seldom appear on the personal home pages. They have never been popularly available to be widely quoted or mimicked or parodied.

Instead, individuals make do with the discursive resources they can access. What they see and hear are the manifestations of power as it is displayed in public view, the voices of institutional influence and authority exercised in contexts of public consumption. These would be the discourses of institutions—schools, companies, governments—that are most salient to the public ear and eye, and especially those discourses, such as advertisements, through which those institutions transact with the public.

While normally excluded from active participation in such productions, most individuals in

contemporary industrial society would have enough regular encounters as recipients of published and broadcasted institutional voices to allow for a recognition and a modest degree of fluency in the most common forms of these voices coming at them. In this section, we consider three such discourses:

- "fine print"
- advertising
- logos and trademarks

Each of these appear on personal homepages but in a patently inauthentic form. In their authentic appearances, the content of these messages is, directly or indirectly, the goods and services of consumerism. By their inauthenticity, their content, as I show below, is the very dispensation of public legitimacy, the dispensation that sanctions messages of institutional interest while not recognizing messages of individuals.

Fine print

One familiar though often overlooked discourse is the notices that appear, usually in small print, on the documentation accompanying consumer products or services. Such notices regularly serve an advisory function to the consumer, positioning the product or service within a broader context of legal practice or physical safety. Such content is usually not part of the more idyllic personal narratives that consumers have for using the product or service, nor is it usually part of the marketing narratives that commercial enterprises construct and advertise to create social meaning for a product or service. Indeed, fine print usually contrasts strikingly with the design, graphic, typographic, and narrative assertiveness of most product packaging. It is regularly placed beneath this other documentation, suggesting the reality of its content in opposition to the ideal displayed above it.[37] As such, these fine print messages are dynamic sites for the open display of legal and corporate realities. Usually their appearance is prescribed by legal statute, or proactively inserted by a combination of legal precedent and corporate practice. Their tone is sober, suggesting both a power that, because of its official

sanction, need not be shouted, and a message that, because of its contrast with the more idyllic social or consumer myths, is kept from being shouted. These are powerful official messages, more so than the idyllic messages displayed above them. They perform a metacommentary of qualification and negation on the less dignified discourses that envelope the product or service.

The familiarity, regularity, and social and legal importance of such messages make them fruitful sources for appropriation by the voices of relatively powerless individuals. Consider the following examples from Web sites sampled in this survey:

- At the bottom of her "Cyber-Divorce" site, which offers "certificates" to applicants who want a divorce from a friend in cyberspace, participant h-s displays, in small print:

  > For entertainment purposes only. The divorce you obtain may not be legally binding in your state of residence.

- At the bottom of one of her pages about "The Church of Styrofoam" (CoS), participant a-ka writes:

  > CAUTION: If you already belong to another religion, be sure to check with them before joining the CoS. Failure to do so may result in eternal damnation, excommunication, or something equally nasty.

- At the bottom of a page in which readers are to match their personalities with the personalities of eight Loony Tunes characters, participant g-kgo writes:

  > Disclaimer:
  >
  > I'm not a psychiatrist, and I'm not trying to be. These are for entertainment only and are mostly my opinions. If I'm wrong, don't sue me or mail-bomb me. If you get that mad, maybe you should see a real psychiatrist.
  >
  > (3.00/min, adults only. Just kidding)

Each of these tongue-in-check notices brings closure to a tongue-in-check service that is modeled on real services provided by social institutions: legal, religious, psychiatric. The fine print has no real referents, however, and the accompanying "services" are offered absent of

their legitimating ceremonies. These mock legalistic details consummate the playful illusions of these pages, but to what effect? Participants could easily have saved their labour by abstaining from such far-fetched, obviously-unsanctioned uses of this otherwise sober, impersonal discourse, but they didn't.

These uses may be better understood not as curious and perhaps wasted efforts but as manifestations of the contradictions in their context of production. Preparing a personal site for public display, individuals would undoubtedly have plenty of personal content which they could represent with a high modality but with no legitimacy, and plenty of exposure to legitimate media voices but without the content and the sanction to credibly occupy such voices. As discussed above, fine print is one of the more public, recognizable manifestations of legal and commercial power. Alienated from the production regimes of such legitimate discourses and in lieu of silence, these participants published shells of powerful, legitimate text, recognizable objects of official discourse, but having little real content, few real referents in the mimetic plane of meaning. What we might call the "content" of these messages can be found predominantly in the semiosic plane of meaning. They respond intertextually to the authentic appearances of fine print text, but parody these authentic uses with their make-believe applications. By their parody, these passages highlight and contest the power differential that leaves individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy of public discourse producers, with nominal access but without legitmate content to earn recognition for their potential "serious," high-modality representations.

A more intensive, overt manifestation of such a low-power, alienated position is featured on the homepage of participant a-aa, an American male in his early twenties. His large sprawling site, devoted mostly to his literary writing, offers no hint of any affiliation with the socio-economic practices around him except in a subsection that reveals his former membership in an unknown, now-defunct rock band. The largest passage of text on the index page of his site is the following announcement:

> This page is child-resistant. Keep this page out of the reach of children. This page is

> not a toy. This page may cause disorientation and/or abdominal cramps. If dizziness occurs, discontinue use. Do not apply page to broken skin. Please put litter in its place. Store this page in a cool, dry place. There are no known cures for this page. Please, do not make this page come over there. Do not play on or around this page. If this page comes in contact the eyes, flush immediately with water. Do not induce vomiting. Call your physician immediately. Certain Distant Konran [the site title and possibly a pseudonym] assumes no responsibility for damage to person or possessions inflicted by this page. If this page does not kill you, Certain Distant Konran makes no guarantee that this page will make you stronger. In order to make full use of this page, consult the diagram at the right.

The passage reproduces a cacophony of advisories, directions, instructions, and warnings. It brings together the powerful statements and imperatives of drug companies ("Keep this page [capsule, bottle] out of the reach of children."), utility companies ("Do no play on or around this page [site, transformer]"), and manufacturers ("In order to make full use of this page [tool, instrument], consult the diagram at the right."). Because of the scale of institutional practices, these statements and imperatives of consumerism and technology become part of the public "literacy" available to participant a-aa through his role as citizen-recipient of these statements and imperatives. In their usual contexts, these institutional voices have authority as well as socially and legally legitimate contents. By contrast, the content that participant a-aa could produce offers none of the excitement, promise, or danger that the products of these institutions would offer. As large as his site is, "this page" would be perceived as innocuous in its context of the Web and would merit no directions, instructions, or warnings or other evocations of danger. As a relatively disenfranchised, young ex-rock-band-member, nothing he could write would bear the authority of these widely disseminated institutional statements. In his relatively powerless position, participant a-aa adopts these well-recognized imperatives, voices of authority, but by using them outside of their habitual production regimes and by inserting "this page" in lieu of their usual referents, empties them of the content that grounds such authority. What is left are low-modality shells of authorative voices, accumulated incongruously one after the other. Stripped of the referents that "naturalize" them, and

decontextualized, these accumulated imperatives are, as is suggested by Burke's perspective by incongruity, exposed as the hollow set of instructions for being an obedient citizen-consumer. The parody of these voices both acknowledges the precedence of institutional voices that command authority and obedience in public discourse and yet contests the social dispensation that leaves individuals like participant a-aa with little "serious" content that would even merit such an acknowledgement, that would make a difference.

Advertising discourse

Where fine print is the subdued real, the ground of public communication, advertising discourses construct, more ostentatiously, the ideal. In a medium in which millions of multi-media texts are easily accessible to a reader, both amateur and professional Webmasters may respond to the exigence not so much to inform their audiences as to promote their site and its contents. Moreover, advertising is ubiquitous in all other mass media and, hence, would be perceived to make for the "natural" and inevitable content of the Web, too.

Such an emphasis on advertising and promotional discourse at the expense of "real" content has been noted by Fairclough, who observes a trend toward a "promotional culture" overtaking other cultural practices:

> The concept of promotional culture can be understood in discursive terms as the generalization of promotion as a communicative function . . .—discourse as a vehicle for 'selling' goods, services, organizations, ideas or people—across orders of discourse. (1993, p.141)

The source of this colonization is, of course, the dominance that commercial ventures have gained in societies based on capitalism; the economic basis of the social order requires that marketing be a primary function of media discourse and consumerism a primary purpose of citizens. It is as recipients of advertising discourse that individuals acquire a "literacy" in how products, events, attitudes, and people are to be represented in public discourse. As Web

writers enter into their new situations as producers of mass communication, these advertising voices are prominent among the models made available to them for the content of their sites.

Hence, it would not be surprising that the content of personal homepages would include advertising messages, seemingly a feature of authentic professional communication. Some participants, however, included on their homepages such promotional discourses as jingles, slogans, and sales pitches that are evidently not authentic:

- Notice featured below home page counter: "You get a **special prize** if you are the 1 millionth visitor!" (p-kp)
- Wording of a large text button beside participant g-hg's link to a guestbook that has but a handful of recorded comments: "Join the thousands that have visited Heidi's Power Page"

  A similar guestbook link on a page devoted to former Tiger's baseball player Kirk Gibson: "Join the hundreds of other Gibby Fans"
- Subtitle of a page about participant a-ka's parodic "Church of Styrofoam": "Your one-stop convenience spot for spiritual enlightenment!"
- Participant w-jw introducing a hyperlink: "It's new! It's fun! It's free!!!! I'm talkin' about the new online phone book. Yes, now even you can look up your freinds [sic] on the Internet. Where is it, you ask? What is it called? The answer to all of your questions can be summed up in one word . . . [Hyperlink appears here.]"
- Beneath a regularly changing "thought of the hour" on a-aa's index page: "There are 24 thoughts-of-the-hour. Collect them all!"
- Concluding d-cad's brief answer to her theme "What i [sic] have been doing with my life": "**Why I am here, pt. 1** *(soon to become an exciting new mini-series, starting spring 96 on PBS. Check your TV guide!)*"

Each of these passages is in part metatextual, referring nominally to other content on the site or to an off-site hyperlink, and each functions, superficially, to motivate that content, so each is, in appearance, promotional. However, each draws on very recognizable advertising clichés

and, if read literally, appears disingenuous or exaggerated (e.g., g-hg's homepage has not received thousands of recorded visitors, and p-kp's millionth visitor will be a long while in coming yet). The clichés and exaggeration undermine the transparency that authentic promotional messages strive to maintain to fulfill their persuasive function, and instead call attention to promotional pitches as, in Bakhtin's characterization, objects, artifacts of commercial language. Their promotional function is mimicked, not imitated. Displayed on personal homepages, outside of the era or the situation in which they have or had authenticity, they appear as parodies of promotional discourse.

Such low-modality messages could manifest an alienation felt by these participants with the aggressive promotional function expected of their public contributions. The messages respond intertextually to their authentic antecedents by calling attention to the glibness of such discourse and hence contest the unquestioned role of promotional content in media communications. Moreover, such messages preemptively distance individuals from the promotional positions now assumed by default of much mass media communicators. In their relatively powerless positions on the Web, individuals can't easily allow themselves to be seen taking themselves too seriously. In these cases, the incongruity—empty advertising clichés produced not by advertisers but by individuals—precludes this possibility, signalling an awareness of the assumed self-promotional function of their sites: "This loud media voice is not mine," they seem to suggest. As Burke indicates in his discussion of the comic frame, this capacity to act and to see oneself acting creates the opening for an enlightening use of such perspectives.

We can see a clear case of an uncomfortable embrace of the promotional function on the site of one participant who actually does have something very real to advertise. Participant w-kw, a freelance poet, uses part of her site to market a small-press book of her poetry. Over several separate pages, her site features a sample of her poems, scanned images of the front and back covers of her book, several brief sales pitches, and instructions on how and where to send the $6.00 (US$) payment. In the brief bio featured on the book's back cover, we learn that

participant w-kw is a single parent, earning her living "work[ing] various meaningless blue-collar day jobs," "a disenfranchised member of an indifferent society."

As someone who is on the margins of both the publishing community and of middle-class America (after all, she's a poet), trying to engage in an activity—marketing—independent of the institutional forces and networks that sanction that activity, she has few recognizable models that would offer either credibility or a heuristic for getting on with her objectives. Freelance vendors might sell hot dogs or consulting services, but (outside of university literature departments) the hawking of self-published poetry is not an activity that has generated its own dignified discursive precedents.

Attempting to engage in an activity that is otherwise practiced almost exclusively by publishing enterprises, she uses what might appear as the unusual strategy of appropriating the most garish clichés of the advertising industry, using them as titles and slogans on the three pages directly devoted to the sale:

- "You've seen the Website - now buy the book!"
- "not available in stores! while supplies last!"
- "It makes a great gift for That Special Someone."
- "Buy this book - and rest safe in the knowledge that no animal testing was involved in the development or distribution of this product..."
- "Buy one. Buy two or three."
- "Be the first (if not the only one) on your block to own this book!"

The familiar slogans nominally fulfill the ostensible purpose of this section of her site: to market her book. Yet their inappropriateness to her "product" and their excess—the irrelevance of animal testing, biodegradability, unavailability in stores—call attention to more than just the book. As an aspiring poet, she could likely have composed a more dignified, sincere message, but didn't. Her position is an awkward one: a poet compelled to participate unceremoniously in the "legitimate" economic practice of marketing. Her response is to

display a low-modality reproduction of that practice.

Her text engages her in, but also distances her from, the act of promotion, indexing instead the perspective of the agent aware and perhaps self-conscious of the contradictions of her situation. The voices of the advertising industry, outside of the production regimes of their commercially-legitimate producers and saleable referents, sit on her pages as discursive objects, exposed as promotional discourse, but unpersuasive. This is what marketing is, this thing. Her representation of it contests not only the legitimacy it ordinarily has in its transparent form, but also her disenfranchisement as an unrecognized discourse producer whose message to the public must be promotional rather than poetical.

Logos and trademarks

In chapter 8, we saw how the invention or adoption of proper nouns, normally the prerogative of institutions, provides status for the otherwise unsanctioned, freelance work of unrecognized individuals. Proper nouns such as trademarks and registered corporate names offer among the most clear cases of what Bakhtin would characterise as words' demographic grounding: they not only recognizably "belong," in a social sense, to certain groups of users or contexts of use, but they also belong in a legal sense, with the status of private property, usually of some institution. Reinforced by a capitalist ideology that naturalizes the conception of private ownership, every appearance of proper nouns instantiates and reproduces language's status as possessive: this is mine, not yours.

Above, I point out that the medium itself is among the most frequent topics of personal Web sites. When individuals contest the dominance of their activities by forces beyond their control, it is computer companies, not surprisingly, that are singled out for symbolic action. The more dominant the institution, the more likely it is to be recognized as a symbol of power, and the more likely that power creates the exigence for a response by relatively powerless

Web writers. In these responses, it is the proper nouns of those institutions, their symbolic property, that become the stage for the struggle against their dominance. Some participants appropriated the familiar registered names and icons of the computer industry, taking what is not theirs legally and symbolically, and making it their own. They appropriated such symbolic property by inventing homonyms ("Windoze" by participants g-kgo and v-hvz, and "Microsnot" by participant y-gy) and antonyms ("Lose 95" by participant v-hvz). The multi-media capability of the Web also enables, for Web writers with access to graphics applications, the visual appropriation of familiar icons. One of the most ubiquitous icons on the Web is the familiar "Netscape NOW!" rectangle adjoined to an image of a large uppercase *N* rooted in a silhouetted landscape. Two participants recomposed this graphic, both converting for their own purposes the *N* of *Netscape* to a *D*; one rewrote the slogan to substitute his own surname for *Netscape*, so that the icon on his site reads "D_____ NOW!" (d-td; his surname has been omitted here); the other has rewritten the slogan to read "Democracy NOW!" (g-jg).

These cases share parallels with the case of graffiti discussed by Hodge and Kress (1988, pp.8-12). In both, there is a "rewriting" that retains the original text. Hodge and Kress point out that though such a defacement of legitimate commercial discourse may be dismissed as puerile, even that dismissal is itself part of the context of logonomic systems that prescribe discursive practices and of ideologies that sustain them (p.11). Such a dismissal would index a solidarity with the commercial practices of private companies. We can more fruitfully approach these rewritings by their social context: asking by what system the ownership of the antecedents of these symbolic usages is established and by whom the practices of this system have been flaunted.

The distorted trademarks and icons are not merely synonymous with opinions such as "Windows is not a good operating system," or "Microsoft is not a good company." Statements such as these are high-modality expressions of free speech that implicitly consent to the same system of symbolic ownership as their targets. By distorting the symbols

themselves, these participants contest the foundation of intellectual property itself, undermining the ideology of "mine" and "yours" that leaves individuals with very little legitimate content that is "mine."

By way of contrast, the ubiquitous Blue Ribbon graphic symbolizing the populist Internet free speech campaign was distorted by no one among the participants. Instead, 14 participants made this icon part of the content of their sites. The blue ribbon is the symbol by which perhaps the most salient sense of community has been constructed among the diverse individuals surfing the Web. More than an endorsement of free speech, it has defined what it means to be an individual on the Web, disenfranchised but united against the power of institutions and governments that would curtail the speech of individuals in the interests of a regulated, uncontroversial, and commercially friendly cyberspace environment.

A more elaborate challenge to the idea of discursive property is offered in the representation of one participant's family milestones. In bullet form, the chronology displayed by participant d-mdr itemizes the unexceptional developments of a middle-class heterosexual family: the 1992 marriage, 1993 move to a new house, 1995 birth of a daughter, and her 1995 baptism. Added beneath each item, however, is a version number: Rel. 1.0, Rel. 1.1, Rel. 2.0, and Rel. 2.1 respectively (*Rel.* likely stands for *Release*). The daughter's birth is announced as "a fantastic new upgrade," and the occasion is used to rename the family (using my surname as a pseudonym) "Killoran 95, with a whoppee 8 days advantage on Microsoft Windows 95." The list closes with the announcement, "We have big programs: stay tuned!"

This extended analogy between the human and the institution is similar to the cases of synthetic institutionalization discussed in chapter 8; indeed, on one level it is an exemplary case, as the depiction of the birth of a child as "a fantastic new upgrade" is so patently a reversal of personification. In a society that now assumes mutability as a given, but is suspicious of optimistic narratives, a digital record of evolving stages is a revealing scientific representation of what is otherwise "analogue" family growth. Family events seemingly have

no legitimacy on their own, but earn legitimacy if their content can be represented by the trappings of institutional discourse. However, the excess of this terministic screen strongly suggests an intended humour; referring to one's daughter as a family "upgrade" would otherwise necessitate a determined reading-in of modal qualifiers (e.g., "She can perhaps be thought of as an upgrade"?) to be understood even half seriously. Anything on the theme of computers is popular content in this medium, as we have seen, and such a playful appropriation of computer industry discourse would likely win the indulgence of its readership.

The juxtaposition of these institutional discourses and the human content creates a perspective not merely on the personal through the gaze of the institutional, however, but also on the institutional through the gaze of the personal. The powerful productions of institutions are here brought down to the same level as the private, random events of individual families. The bathos of this new perspective mocks the ideology in which corporate practices merit more discursive accouterments than do individuals' lives. Participant d-mdr stages a conquest of Microsoft by scooping its new "product" with one of his own, and with an eight-day lead no less. Moreover, as Alleen Pace Nilsen explains, trademarks are often formed of invented or unusual usages so that the product or company remains the exclusive referent for the new signifier (1994/1997, p.372). Their liberal use in this family parody, however, dilutes the exclusiveness of such discourse. To the extent that "Windows 95" becomes generic, the trademarked label will be available to serve other intentions, including its use as fodder for jokes and clichés.

* * * * *

In closing this section, I wish to recall Hodge and Kress's social framework for symbolic usages, in particular the social dimensions of solidarity and power that exert such an influence on textual production. Of the 14 participants whose writing is discussed in this section, 10 are between the ages of 15 and 24, and all but one is younger than 35. Individuals at these youthful ages often have few resources and little stake in the official practices and values of their societies. In understanding their social status, we can perhaps better understand the reason that much of the content of personal homepages is playful, humourous, and parodic. It is produced by individuals who command little social power of their own, and who feel little solidarity with the educational, commercial, or legal systems that envelope them. They have relatively little stake in the serious, in high-modality representations of the current reality. Their humourous distortions of established symbolic usages are thus their means of responding to this social dispensation. We return to this condition of production in more detail in the next two sections on Relations and Positions, both of which invoke age-sensitive modes of social interaction and social being.

Relations

As is discussed both in this chapter and in chapter 8, the constraints on contents, relations, and positions do not operate independently of each other. For instance, the examples of fine print and advertising discourse discussed above in the Contents section of this chapter would cue relations of the type between marketers and consumers, though the parody of such media content would simultaneously undermine the credibility of these relations. Likewise, the invented organizational positions discussed below in the Position section would cue relations of the type between bureaucratic structures and ordinary, untitled citizens, though again the parody of such positions would undermine the credibility of these relations. In this section, I maintain the organization of the chapter 8 counterpart by focussing only on the most explicit interactions between homepage producers and receivers, interactions in which authors are most likely to refer to their audiences and, in many cases, to attempt to engage their audiences directly and invite them to respond.

To consider the relations made possible by the Web, we must first consider the role of technology in shaping the channel of communications. As is evident in the chapter 8 discussion of synthetic institutionalization, some of the impetus for the colonization of individuals' writing by institutional practices draws from the technological novelties of Web communications. Whereas most individuals' habitus as discourse producers draws from "low-tech" practices, the Web invites its authors to adopt "hi-tech" practices involving multi-media and interactivity. While Web writers may opt not to include such applications on their sites, for many it is precisely the appeal of being multi-media producers that has motivated their efforts to build Web sites. As we saw in chapter 4, for instance, one incentive to producing for the Web is to claim membership as an active participant in the computer revolution. One participates to the fullest by commanding as many of the unique practices of the discursive market as one can, practices which, in this market, are most readily recognized by their technology. It is the technologically distinguishing elements of the medium, such as hyperlinks, counters, and graphics, that become the most characteristic features of the

homepage; each has specific HTML tags or software applications to advertise its presence. Of the survey respondents who acknowledged the influence of other Web sites in their thinking about their own sites, many located this influence in the technical know-how they could glean from the coding and applications of other sites. This technological imperative is evident as well in the sample of homepages. For instance, the majority of sites in the sample display counters. All but a few sites feature external hyperlinks and all feature graphics. Most sites include a diversity of design features, such as different font styles and sizes.

The primary precedent for some of these technological applications, and the primary models on which these Web-capabilities are based, are pre-Web institutional practices developed in the print, sound, and film media; some such applications covered in chapter 8 include graphics, guestbooks, and CGI response forms. With this precedence in institutional practices, it is not surprising that such applications form part of the agency of synthetic institutionalization. Individuals experimenting with such applications on their Web sites find their potential contents, relations, and positions in part preordained by the institutional practices that inspired these technological applications.

Since much of the novelty of the Web derives from the interactive potential of the computer network, it is the relations between producer and receiver that are perhaps most accutely influenced by technological applications. In this section, I focus on three applications that, directly or indirectly, frame some of the interaction between Web producers and Web surfers:

- counters,
- e-mail links,
- response forms.

Because of the incompatibilities between low-tech habitus and high-tech medium, and between individual status and "synthetic institution," these technological applications also serve as means of resistance to the practices embedded in their institutional precedents. For each application, I explore how, with "restructured" versions of the discourses associated with that application, authors may resist the ready-made institution-consumer model of relations.

Counters

As we saw in chapter 4, many individuals may be motivated to publish on the Web for the acknowledgement they vicariously experience. Tracking that acknowledgement can be done quantitatively with a counter, which records the number of requests made of a file on a Web server by client computers. Counters can be conceived of as the "genitals" of a Web page, the part that is visibly "stimulated" with each client request.[38] They are featured on 64 of the sites in this study, a clear majority. By tracking visits and displaying the tally, counters are a sign recognizing rudimentary but nevertheless real producer-receiver relations. Typically, this recognition is articulated with a phrase such as "You are visitor #[counter number] since [implementation date of counter]." The relations represented by such a statement suggest the kind of proprietorial relations discussed in chapter 8. The surfer is frequently referred to as a "visitor" and hence, by implication, the Web author must be a proprietor or owner. The surfer's status is that of one number among a population of hundreds, thousands, or more, and hence is acknowledged only as a unit of a larger class. The tally signifies that it is the aggregate, and not the individual, that is being recognized, much in the same way that it is box-office numbers in aggregate that are recognized by Hollywood film studios, or voters in aggregate recognized by political parties. The counter thus represents relations with a one-to-many, higher-to-lower framework similar to that represented by institutional discourses.

Displayed on the homepages sampled in this study, however, are several striking corruptions of this norm:

- "You are Hunter number . . . [counter number]" (d-wb, on his "Aliens & Predator" site)
- "This page has been seen by [counter number] slackers since 2/13/96." (y-gy)
- "the oracle at Web-counter says that you are number [counter number] to stumble upon this madhouse" (g-kgo; underlined word is hyperlinked)
- "You are visitor number [counter number] to give a *darn* (gotta watch out for Telecom . . .) about 4-H club" (i-li, on her sub-site about the 4-H Club)

- "You are MUNchkin number [counter number] to use and abuse my page." (i-li, on her page about *M*odel *U*nited *N*ations research)
- "Thanks for visiting my site. You are the [counter number] person/iguana to do so since the 15th of December 96" (f-fr, on her site composed as if from the perspective of the family's pet iguana)
- "Welcome, choad-monkey-love-bunny! You are fan/stalker number [counter number]!" (a-ka)
- "[Counter number] cocktails poured" (b-jb, on her site about hosting cocktail parties)
- "[Counter number] deranged netizens served since november 27, 1996" (p-jp)
- "[Anti-counter number] people have been harmed due to misuse of this page." (a-aa, using an "anti-counter" that wildly misrepresents the actual count)

In contrast with the normative counter usage discussed above, these statements represent visitors and their act of visiting in much more idiosyncratic, fanciful ways. Violating conventional practices in this case would not be motivated by a lack of access to institutional resources, or by the forced necessity to improvise. Indeed, it would cost less, in terms of creative effort, simply to adopt the conventional approach like the one illustrated above.

Rather, in inventing and displaying these corruptions of the norm, these participants make salient their departure from standard public relations. All but one of these participants (f-fr) identified their ages as under 25, and four are in the 15-19 year age range. As suggested above in the Contents section, people in this demographic bracket are likely not to have strongly motivated affiliations with any institutional relations, especially as those relations have cast them primarily in subservient positions: student in the student-teacher relationship of educational institutions; minimum wage service worker in the employee-manager relationship of commercial enterprises. As relatively disenfranchised members of contemporary capitalist societies, they may more likely be in low affinity with the systems of relations that parallel those of the Web—institutionally produced relations that dominate broadcasting, publishing, and corporate communications—and may find alienating an attempt to occupy the dignified, high-power end of such relations.

In response, they do not abandon the discourse of professional relations but rather embrace its form, thus evoking its appearances intertextually. But their rewritings of the well-recognized form of the statement do not present authentic content by delivering credible depictions of visitors (Hunter? love-bunny? iguana?) or their act of visiting, and hence may be conceived of as low-modality depictions of Web visits. With such statements, they signal their rejection of the model of institutional relations by distorting its readily-available high-modality discourse. Their ideosyncratic twists of such discourse may instead represent their own desired relations with surfers as casual, good-natured, unique rather than generic.

E-mail links

E-mail is the most direct means by which surfers can interact with Web-site producers, and as such the representation of potential e-mail exchanges can frame the expected relations between Web-site producers and receivers. Most sites sampled for possible inclusion in this study included an e-mail link (this was one of the criteria for inclusion) and an e-mail link to the Webmaster or site maintainer is an expected part of all credible Web sites. The standard e-mail link would consist of a one- or two-word hyperlink such as *Webmaster*, *e-mail*, or the author's name; a small e-mail icon; or a very brief solicitation for comments.

While the typical placement of an e-mail link, usually at the bottom of a page, invites a continuation of the "conversation," a potential switch in the turn-taking from the Web-site producer to the site receiver, it also forecasts that the focus of that conversation be constricted to the preceding "utterance," the main part of the page lying above and hence prior to the e-mail hyperlink. As well, its low placement along side other fine print of a page, such as a revision date, forecasts its relatively minimal importance; the page is rarely *about* establishing direct relations, only that they might happen if some extraordinary situation triggered by the page warrants such relations. Most importantly, the terseness of the typical e-mail link stands more as a formality than as an invitation. The e-mail exchange is not solicited, only made

available perfunctorily. The laconic discourse of such a representation is typical of institutional public relations, in which contact is encouraged only where it follows a pre-established protocol on the institution's own terms (e.g., filling in a form, paying the advertised price for an item, etc.) Outside of the regularity of such a protocol, contact with individual members of the public is time-consuming, and hence potential relations are represented with the parsimony of efficient operations, in which the more powerful party need not "put out" to the less powerful.

However, as we have seen in this and previous chapters, while many individuals recognize their relatively low power and status in the Web hierarchy, they are also motivated to establish and affirm solidarity with other individuals. They construct Web sites in part for the vicarious recognition and acknowledgement their publication would engender. Their sites feature guestbooks, CGI response forms, counters, and other technologies that enable or record human contact.

Thus, not surprisingly, several participants's sites are more engaging with potential correspondents than are many institutional sites: by positioning e-mail links at the top or within the main body of a page; by displaying colourful or animated e-mail graphics; or by soliciting responses with unusual, loquacious invitations, such as the following:

- "More info, comments, questions, etc., hit Pope Dan." (a-ka, with what is an e-mail link apparently to a friend, the pseudonymous Pope Dan, who shares her irreverent beliefs in the "Church of Styrofoam.")
- "Feel free to send me E-mail [link here] with comments, complaints, offers for sex (good-looking women only need apply), or suggestions." (p-jp)
- "Questions, comments, suggestions, random acts of senseless stupidity, or too much time on your hands? E-mail Gabe of Patrick" (y-gy, with two e-mail links underlined)
- "Click here to send any comments, suggestions, offers, flames, love letters, ads, jokes . . ." (f-tf; the entire sentence is hyperlinked)
- "why don't you never write me?" (w-kw; the underlined words are hyperlinked)

As with the examples of counters discussed above, all but one of these participants is under 25. At such young ages, in their positions in contemporary society, these participants would likely not hold an affinity for the system that reproduces conventional institution-citizen relations for, within such a system, they are relatively disenfranchised and powerless. Yet, they do not abstain entirely from the discourse of such professional relations. Each of the first four statements above starts with a conventional solicitation for e-mailed "comments," "questions," "suggestions." Having indexed the very recognizable and expected usage, creating presence for the standard practices of formal relations, their statements then diverge, ostentatiously, from the expected register. Interpersonal actions that, in polite society, are suppressed are here made salient: "flames," "offers for sex," "death threats." The intertextually-cued presence of formal institutional relations is juxtaposed with the earthier relations of real individuals subject not just to formal protocols but to passion. Creating such presence for polite but sterile relations and then abrogating it challenges the decorum of institutional practice with an in-your-face assertion of conviviality. With the fusion of such estranged discourses, these participants contest the artifice of legitimated powerful producers.

Response forms

In chapter 8, we saw how, through synthetic institutionalization, some participants modelled their relations with the public on the precedent of institution-individual relations embodied in the form. The response form is identified by Fairclough as a discursive technology by which "consumerist" and "bureaucratic" practices infiltrate the relations and subject positions of citizens (1989, p.221).

Individuals, by contrast, would have few valid purposes for soliciting structured information to pass between surfers and themselves. They do not occupy the subject positions that would legitimate the solicitation of formatted information from random, anonymous surfers. Surfers may adapt their discourse to the constraints of a response form when the power imbalance

warrants their obedient behaviour, and when filling out a form is a means to an end that they want or need. Institutions hold such power through their financial, legal, and personnel resources, and institutions control the goods, services, and access that surfers want or need. By contrast, individual Web authors have neither the power and resources, nor the goods and services, that would compel fellow surfers, of equal status, to consent to constrain their messages to pre-ordained sets of topics and formats. Thus, while Web authors may feel enticed to experiment with the easy-to-use, dynamic, and prestigious discourse technology to establish contact with others and hence real relations, they do not have the resources to authenticate the hierarchical relations embedded in the genre. The ceremony of the genre can't be replicated convincingly on a personal Web page.

Nevertheless, as we have seen above, individuals' authorship on the Web is motivated in part by the opportunity to occupy mass media production regimes from which they have been excluded, to become creators with the new discourse technologies. For individuals previously limited to producing sentences and paragraphs, the menus, radio buttons, and rectangles of forms are cool. Thus, individuals' illegitimacy in publishing this genre does not restrain their application of its technology, as is illustrated with these excerpts from the forms of eight participants:

- Participant g-hg offers a four-option menu for the subject line of the message:

  This site has it all!

  This site is OK.

  This site needs some SERIOUS help.

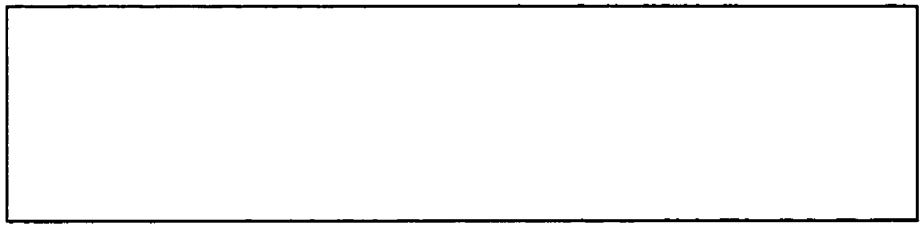
  Other

- The husband and wife team of participants b-kcb, expatriate Newfoundlanders, frame their guestbook form with some of the discourse of home:

  Where's ya from? [ ]

  Where's ya at now? [ ]

What do ya want to go on about?



- Participant d-bdd introduces a draft of a form, not yet operational, on the theme of "cool," with multiple-choice questions such as:

  How cool are you?

  How cool am I?

- Participant a-aa's site features two response forms, which include questions such as the following:

  Do you see double? O Yes O No

  Do you see triple? O Yes O Yes O Yes O No O No O No

- The focus of participant h-s's "Cyber-Divorce" site is the divorce application form, which includes the open-ended question, "State all reasons (and it doesn't matter what the reasons are, all cyber-divorces shall be granted) this cyber-divorce is needed." On her other site, participant h-s features three separate forms, one of which focuses on the S'mores snack and includes questions such as the following:

  Do you know Who made the first S'mores?

  O Grok the Caveman

  O Boy Scouts of America

  O Grampa S'mores

  O Girl Scouts of America

  O Elvis Presley

  O Who give a Shit?

- Participant d-cad uses a form on her index page to provide haphazard access to the various pages of her site, depending on which combination of three multiple-choice options are selected:

  Sex O Male
  ⊙ Female
  O Yes
  O No

  Occupation: ⊙ President of the United States
  O Student
  O Vice President
  O Cult Member

  School Attending:
  ⊙Mills College
  O Oxford

- Participant i-li's guestbook includes "The Weird Gauge [sic]," a long list of questions about pop culture, ostensibly designed to assess one's personality and social and cultural disposition. Some of her questions construct multiple-choice response options with elaborate character voices:

  If someone was talking about No Doubt (random choice... I couldn't care less 'bout 'em), you would say:

  O I'm not a poser like you guys! I've liked them since '88. (Even if you are now only 13 years old.)
  O They are soooo rockin'! Ska puppies like me love "I'm just a girl" and... er... the other stuff they do.
  O Who?

- One of participant g-kgo's two forms uses several conventional, serious questions, but the range of optional answers juxtaposes such seriousness with humour and sarcasm:

How old are you?

[ ]

[ ] I lied about my age.

Are you:

O male

⊙ female

O no comment

O a little of both

What platform are you using?

⊙ Macintosh

O Windoze

O other

And your browser is. . .

⊙ Netscape, naturally.

O That Microsoft schmaltz

O A half-breed with HTML capability (Other)

These questions and their answers obviously transgress the normal conventions and expectations of the genre. Some questions appear obscure or unanswerable or, if serious, are followed by multiple-option answers that include incongruous options and that fail to accommodate a full range of likely answers. The neutrality presupposed of multiple options is violated by options clearly made to sound undesirable. The Standard English and formal tone expected of written forms is juxtaposed with colloquial usages or transcriptions of spoken utterances, the centrifugal voices of unofficial contexts. Excluded from the production regimes of authentic uses of the genre, these participants instead adopted the discursive

technology for ostentatiously inauthentic, playful uses.

Though such humour might be the refuge of those who have little recourse to the position of "serious" discourse producers, it can be seen not merely as a defensive move, occupying a niche undesired by official producers, but also as assertive, a means by which the excluded can contest their exclusion. Revealingly, six of these eight participants are between the ages of 15 and 24. They would likely have only ever filled in forms, never having achieved the status to produce and distribute one of their own invention. They would also likely share little solidarity with the institutions, such as schools, employers, governments, that have elicited completed forms from them. Included in the excerpts listed above, for instance, and in the many other questions and answers on these response forms, are questions and answers that draw not just on any question-answer exchange but on discourses that are recognizable from institutional contexts: administrative discourses (e.g., d-cad's and g-kgo's categories for sex); psychological discourses (e.g., i-li's "Weird Guage" [sic] of personality); and medical discourses (e.g., a-aa's questions about seeing double). In drawing on these voices, participants create presence for powerful official practices, the practices that have the sanction to ask serious questions and to compel serious answers. Yet their distorting responses to these official voices render these voices frivolous, mocking the presumption of validation in official practices. Hence, participants exercise technologically the relations of bureaucrats, psychologists, and doctors with citizens and with their patients, but their parody of the accompanying discourses manifests their resistance to the default model of institutional relations reinforced by the genre. Instead, the transcribed spoken utterances and the "trivial" content that mark their versions of the genre manifest a solidarity with other users of informal speech and trivia: fellow individuals who can share casual, informal relations.

This parody of institutional relations is manifest not only in the questions and answers of the forms themselves but also in some of the framing text for the forms. The site of one participant (g-kgo), a 17-year-old American female in her last year of high school, introduces two forms identified as "tests." From her site, we learn of her aspirations to pursue a post-

secondary education, and while she exhibits a passion for some of her high school experiences, she also reveals a disdain for others. As a student one year shy of adulthood, she is well aware of the rights and possibilities of independence but holds a relatively low position in the hierarchy of power, being subject to the direction of adult educators. Her first form is introduced as follows:

> Hi. I care. Send feedback. Use a #2 pencil. This information will be reported to three colleges of your choice, then three additional colleges at the cost of $6.00 per school.
>
> This one document may determine the next 30 years of your life. That said, have fun!

This page concludes with the following instruction:

> Please put down your pencils. The testing time is up. Thank you.

The second form is introduced as follows:

> Those of you who have chosen this alternative test taking method may use pen, pencil, crayon, Cheez Whiz, grape juice, or anything else to write with except invisible ink and any bodily fluid. Answer the question to the best of your ability. Please include at least an e-mail address. You have 20 minutes to take this test.

Participant g-kgo embeds her forms within the ceremony of the school test, obviously incongruous both with the normal ceremony of tests and with her current mode of communications (e.g., the irrelevance of pencils), and hence her writing may be said to be empty, ineffectual. But her reproduction of familiar test instructions also diverges critically from authentic versions of the genre in, for instance, her juxtaposition of the sober warning about the first test's lifetime importance with the glib encouragement to "have fun," and in her increasingly far-fetched suggestions for writing implements. These parodies of the genre, exposing the arbitrariness and flippancy with which power in such contexts is wielded, emerge from her normal low status as test-taker, not test-giver. Her instructions index the familiar instructor-student relations, but her low-fidelity reproduction of the genre manifests a critique of the power wielded in that relationship. As with the other cases of Web discourse technologies discussed above, a Web technology that has some precedence in institutional practices in used by individuals positioned low in the social hierarchy against the hierarchical relations of those practices.

Positions

In chapter 8, we saw how the positions of individuals publishing on the Web can be colonized by corporate positions and by representations of individual identities as seen through institutional eyes. The impetus for such synthetic institutionalization is the precedent of institutional dominance in public communications in other mass media. Prior to the Web, there were few occasions in which an individual without the sanction conferred by an institutional rank would gain media access to address the public. Hence, the position of an individual as a solo media producer is hardly even recognized, and would perhaps be recognized only as an aberration of the more typical production regimes of public discourse. Even on the Web, homepage authors, producing from amongst the shadows of popular institutional sites, would be little able to overlook the legitimacy of institutional positions that they do not have.

In exploring homepage contents and relations in other sections of this chapter, we have seen, indirectly, how participants have confronted the conflicting pressures placed upon them to construct a public stance with only the positions generally available to private individuals. In the Contents section, we have considered, for example, how participants adopted familiar advertising pitches to form part of the seemingly compulsory promotional component of public communications, and yet, through clichés and excess, parodied those discourses, with the effect of highlighting the glibness of promotional actions. Such parodies also expose the position of promoter in public communications, casting a critical light on the credibility of such a position. In the Relations section, we have considered how participants adopted the discursive technology of the response form and yet parodied the genre with the effect of undermining the structured relations presupposed between form distributers and form fillers. Such a parody also undercuts the position of form distributers, positions invariably occupied by institutions, mocking the seeming obtuseness and neurosis of their structured interrogations.

In this section, I focus more specifically on how individuals react to the "official" stances and identities that accompany organizational positions by producing distorted representations of these familiar institutional stances and identities. First, I consider how individuals respond to the illegitimacy that weights on Web authors by constructing mock organizations, and then I revisit the discursive possibilities of self-representation through one of the genres first explored in chapter 8, the form and its categories and responses.

Organizational positions

In chapter 8, we saw how some participants had found Web-based organizations, such as guilds, wherein they could establish a status within an entity larger than themselves. Some participants had created their own such entities, sites that were represented as service organizations, and within the practices of such sites, they positioned themselves, explicitly or implicitly, as proprietors or managers of these quasi-institutions. Individuals can publish without such infrastructure, of course, and quite easily on the Web, but the stigma of self-publishing may evoke an impression of need. Their affiliation with the larger entity provides validation that an unaffiliated "naked" individual could not attain. Few individuals, however, would have the access to resources to provide meaningful services to the Web public, or the standing to attain more than a low marginal status within pre-existing Web organizations, and hence would effectively be barred from authentic Web positions.

In the absence of authentic, institutionally-sanctioned statuses, one imaginative strategy taken up by some participants is to invent such positions together with the requisite organizational structure for display on their Web sites. For instance, participant g-kgi introduces himself as the "Bartender" of his "Bar & Grill" site. Among the subpages of his site are the "Official History" of the site, a "Bar Rag" (newspaper), his "Weekly Reports," "Almanac," "Joke Book," links to cyberspace acquaintances introduced as "Bar Patrons," and a "Macintosh Division." Participant a-ka invents the "Church of Styrofoam," the details of which

encompass several files on her site. The church has its own pope (a friend of hers), holy days, rituals, and sermons; her own role is as "Mentor of the Styrofoamian masses."

Both participants g-kgo and d-cad, American high school and college students, respectively, present the membership, together with their titles, of fanciful organizations of their peers. In the case of the former, the "Quintumverate roster, including honoraries," includes 10 students with imaginative and obscure titles such as "Huge Cheese," "Resident Gimp," "German Ambassador," "resident Curve-Breaker ®," and "Getaway Taurus Driver." The site author holds, among her many titles, the position of president. Among the group's activities is, apparently, the celebration of their history teacher. In the case of the latter, the "Cult of Cat," with an ostensible membership of approximately 12 students, worships "Cat," one of the 12. The "hiearchy" [sic], presented in stepwise fashion descending the page, includes Cat, "who dies (or styles) her hair for our sins"; "Ratty," who "is the morally Different AntiCat, the prime minion of the Beast"; two "Horsegrrl[s] of the Apocalypse"; three saints, one "Mother Superior" and one "Angle [sic?] of Death."

These "organizations" create a discursive wealth of statuses and offices. As we have seen above, the proper nouns that produce such fixtures are usually the prerogative of institutions, and as such add one dimension of verisimilitude to a claim of organizational status. Of course, these proper nouns are ostentatiously make-believe, having no real referents. But the imaginative scale and well-wrought intricacies of these four constructions shows creative labour, pointing to the gap between the fertile possibilities of the Web and the more prosaic range of real roles of many of the individuals publishing on the Web. None of the above four participants, on their sites, celebrates any of their current real-life roles. We do learn that both participants g-kgo and d-cad are students, and a-ka is apparently a college dropout. Such roles would offer them little real status and would provide little symbolic value if developed on the Web.

However, their playful imaginary constructions suggest more than just a frivolous exercise of

vicarious social power. With the exception of the "Bar & Grill" of participant g-kgi, who, in the 35-44 age range, is significantly older than the others, these sites make no pretense to be analogous to authentic institutions. The constructions, though alluding vaguely to real offices and statuses, are too far-fetched for credible fantasies. If anything, the deliberately low modality of these constructed institutions is indicative of an alienation from authentic institutions. The low modality reproductions of just the discursive accoutrements of high-status institutions, of just the word-objects without the accompanying credible referents, mock the kinds of validation that institutions can bequeath with their discursive practices. Posted on personal homepages, such mockery stands in place of the default position of a homepage author, seen by some as perhaps an undignified position of an unbeckoned individual with no purpose being on the Web but to ask for attention. It highlights and thus exposes the assumption that an office, an affiliation with something of a larger scale, seems to licence purposeful producing and speaking positions for individuals.

While a couple of these participants have little "real" content to sustain their organizational structures, other participants come to adopt institutional positions by virtue of the content of one of their pages, content which invites positions which have a readily-available precedent in institutional practices. For instance, when participants have something to offer that resembles a service, the position of an organization offering such a service is cued, and echoes of organizational discourses emerge from participants' presentations. Here is how three participants proceed:

- Participant f-fr introducing a page of limericks she is writing about iguana names submitted by iguana owners, and then the homepage link leading to this page:

  > I am proud to announce the completion of my iguana-limerick generating machine. It is really a remarkable invention that will soon be marketed in the finer retail chains. Visitors to this site, however, have the opportunity to use this machine completely free of charge. . . . Technology at its best!
  >
  > While your [sic] here, why don't you test drive the *new* limerick machine [*new*

is a graphic; underlined words are hyperlinked]

- Participant p-map opening a page that reveals to visitors all that the Microsoft protocols reveal about the machines they are currently using:

  Here at the The [sic] Big Brother Page, we believe in finding out all we can about our 'visitors'.

- Participant a-aa introducing first an irreverent quiz and then a graphic from a site offering a four-day weather forecast of the Chicago area:

  Certain Distant Reason [an adaptation of the name of his site] and the Jews for Jesus (no relation) are Proud to Present:
  The HIP Quiz!

  [H]ere's a new service from us Certain Distant People. The weather:

In these three examples, familiar institutional voices provide Web authors with a model for the action of introducing a "service" to a broad anonymous public. This introductory function could, in principle, have been achieved in other ways, in words that do not echo the institutional voices. Indeed, to fit into these institutional voices, the referential function of each passage has had to be made literally false at at least one point or another (e.g., the solo authors of these passages are represented as an "us" and a "we" on p-map's and a-aa's pages respectively, and indirectly as a machine in f-fr's). Because these voices are widely recognizable, even clichéd, at least in North American discourse (all three writers are American), and because of some conspicuous falsehoods, these promotional voices cannot retain their promotional functions and are rendered as opaque, as language objects. Without the capacity to appear natural, they call attention to the tenuous stance of corporate goodwill that seems pervasive in much public communications. With these discursive artifacts, participants can, in effect, respond intertextually to the glib, oily sales and public relations positions that crowd out the range of other possible positions.

A similar contestation of the troubled position of homepage author is enacted with practices and discourses that are not institutional in origin, though the effect is similar. For instance, five participants represent their young children (in t-jst and b-kcb) or family pets (in w-kpw, d-rd, and f-fr) as if the toddlers and pets are the authors writing from their own points of view. These points of view need not be false per se, though they would certainly suggest a low modality. Infants and animals indeed have points of view but of course lack the language to recognize and then communicate such perspectives. Participant f-fr's iguana may indeed feel suspicious of the family cat; d-rd's cats may truly enjoy eating and sleeping; t-jst's daughter may indeed feel that "mommy and daddy work for me." Aristotle, in the *Poetics* (Section IX), observes how fiction can have higher aspirations than history, which is wedded to accidental events. Fiction has the licence to develop truths that are not limited by contingencies, and as such can offer an alternative to the "information" that currently represents the pinnacle of what the Web can aspire to.

Such indulgence is a condition of its environment. Personal Web pages are a speaking space for individuals who would not regularly be heard or not heard in *that* way in the institutional contexts that encompass much of their lives and their communication. A literal falseness happens on the Web because it *can* happen. Not only are there no social sanctions, but there is also some social approbation for manifesting one's aptitude for creativity. Individuals, who are less likely to have credible positions from which to speak, can thus create speaking spaces for themselves by occupying points of view that institutions could not and would not occupy. Moreover, they can shift the onus of production away from the unflattering default position—the isolated individual subject needing an audience—onto a position that does not resemble the self-presenting individual. To the degree that validated positions for individuals on the Web are not secure, the first-person singular perspectives of young children and animals are no less ridiculous. Individuals engage in the "fiction" because they are marginalized and stigmatized by the dispensation of communications "history."

Forms

In chapter 8, we saw how synthetic institutionalization positions participants both as subjects of institutional representation and as objects of institutional representation. A genre exemplifying how participants are positioned especially as objects of representation is the form. This bureaucratic genre reinforces a conception of the self as defined by certain socio-economic parameters, the self as seen through the discursive gaze of institutional practice. Its appearance on personal homepages is a result of the naturalization of accommodating institutions and other public offerings of ourselves with structured, socio-economic confessions.

We have also seen how, in line with social theorists like Giddens, scholars of discourse such as Bakhtin, Hodge and Kress, and Fairclough acknowledge a human capacity for change and creativity. Agents always have a capacity which is not completely pre-determined by their environment. This capacity for change is evident in some of the forms first considered in chapter 8. In particular, four participants' forms merit further exploration for how these participants' work is not simply colonized by institutional practice but resists those practices with divergent renditions of the genre. In effect, participants resist being positioned as objects of institutional discourse by undermining the form's capacity for completing official representations of themselves. They do this not by disregarding the genre altogether, but by reproducing vestiges of it, primarily its surface of officially-sanctioned identifiers and demographic categories such as name, age, birth date, and location, and then playing against the expectations of a consummated genre, challenging its integrity with irregular, unexpected voices.

In some cases, the conventional categories and their answers are reproduced as would be expected, but with an excess, an added comment that transgresses the conventions of the genre:

- "**Name**: Katherine (Katarina, Kaffie, Trig, Grand Moff Katherine Solo-Rendar the

First)" (g-kgo)

- "BIRTH:
  28 June 1976 (a little bugger am I?)" (a-ma)
- "Measurements: 6'3" tall, 195 lbs, tends to wear black boots a lot." (p-jp)
- "ETHNICITY:
  I'm Mexican, but most people just think i'm [hyperlink] whatever." (a-ma)
- "**Languages Spoken**: Spanish, English, Pig Latin, JessiKat, Hugeish, some Huttese and some German, Venegonics" (g-kgo)

Insofar as these category titles and the initial parts of these answers remain in fidelity with the conventions of the form, these passages secure the presence of the genre. Once having established a degree of verisimilitude, however, they don't stop. Their excess adds to each parameter of "official" demographic data multiple dimensions of identities, characteristics, and perspectives, an abundance of subjecthood that is never accounted for in authentic versions of the genre. As the official version always comes first in these excerpts, participants' excess constructs a response to that official discourse. This juxtaposition between authenticity and its inauthentic excess highlights the arbitrariness of official dimensions of subjecthood, the nearsightedness of institutional representations of individuals. Moreover, these responses resist the narrow self-representational function of the form by flaunting maxims of cooperative behaviour such as the injunctions to be relevant and perspicuous, maxims which, Grice suggests, are related to the purposes of the communication (1975, p.47). In so doing, these participants may be resisting the genre's de facto purpose to position them as objects of representation by instead using the genre as a foil against which to position themselves. By virtue of their refusal to accommodate the established purposes of efficient public discourse, and of the contrast of their transgression with the sobriety of official discourse, these participants have constructed the occasion to emphasize their independence, creativity, and humour. Playing with the genre becomes a means of constructing and communicating the stance of the artist, the saboteur, the iconoclast; it becomes a way to establish space for their own subjecthood.

After the genre has been indexed and as these forms proceed, the transgressions of the genre conventions become increasingly assertive. Consider how two participants represent what would otherwise be their most important affiliation with society's institutional systems: their "occupation." One, a 24-year-old male, responds:

> Occupation: Technical Support for CIOE Corporation, where I sprout off technical information over a telephone to commputer [sic] illerate [sic] people on a daily basis (*check out my really cool work page that has all kinds of useless information on it .... if you're bored*). (p-jp; underlined words are hyperlinked)

While his first five words satisfy the normative expectation for a reply to the "Occupation" category, the remainder counteract that norm by directly challenging the validity of his occupation and undermining the public image of the prime institution of his life. His message, with its sarcasm and colloquial usages, constructs the voice and position of a free speaker against the backdrop of a formal setting, and in contrast with the obedience of the form-filler.

Another participant, g-kgo, who, as a 17-year-old female high school student, would apparently have no socially valid response to a request for her occupation, nevertheless includes the category in her self-representation, and then adapts it to her own purposes:

> **Occupation**: Student / Webmaster of das Spaß Haus [German for "fun house," the title of her homepage] / part-time fiction author / original member of the Huge Quintumverate / online virtuosa / Member of the Luke Skywalker Estrogen Brigade (LSEB) / Stosh-Fu fighter (quite the Renaissance Woman, eh?)

Instead of omitting a category which, in other contexts, she may have had to leave empty, she uses the cue signalled by the genre, the cue to represent one's economic affiliation with the social system, instead to represent an abundance of personal affiliations. She represents these in the discourse otherwise reserved for those who have institutional sanction to claim proper nouns through their professional titles and affiliations: "Webmaster . . . author . . . member of the Huge Quintumverate . . . virtuosa / Member of the . . .Brigade (LSEB)." The juxtaposition of discourses is made especially salient by her closing parenthetical comment, with its conspicuous oral "eh?" in a passage otherwise dominated by important-sounding, polysyllabic

proper nouns. The colloquial elements in the excerpts of both of these participants act as another dimension of alienation in their tension with the written elements; they make salient that there are two kinds of discourse, ours and theirs.

This above example illustrates how a topic which might not otherwise have been considered by the author or which would not have been validated if the self-representation were occurring in another context, is here cued because of the expectations embedded in the genre. A similar case can be observed in the self-representation of participant p-jp, who lists the category "Address" but then proceeds to deny it a response: "No, I am ***not*** going to give you a street address here, but I live in Lafayette, Indiana.... right next to Purdue University" (underlined words hyperlink). The meaning is different than it would have been had the participant not indexed the genre but instead had simply written, within a paragraph, "I will not print my address on this site" or even "I do not appreciate filling in the paperwork every time I interact with an institution." His refusal to cooperate is made meaningful by being located within the genre. The genre and his response to it create the dialogue between the opposing statuses: the institution, represented by discursive proxy, fulfilling its usual protocol with individuals by demanding a piece of information; and the individual, staging this "dialogue" as a means of creating a speaking space for himself, explicitly rejecting the imperative of institutional practice and in so doing manifesting his capacity to answer back to his social world.

As these forms approach their final lines, they depart from the more generic demographic categories to accommodate the idiosyncratic dimensions of the self:

- "Likes/Dislikes" (g-kgo);
- "Loves," "Hates" (a-ma);
- "Interests" (p-jp).

At this stage, the "counter-colonization" of this institutional genre by non-institutional voices has been well established, and all that remains of the genre is its structural shell. The content within these categories covers a terrain that is not as socially or economically manipulable and hence evinces a restructuring of the genre that now completely separates its form from its

content. Having remade the genre, participants are here both subjects of and objects of their own representation.

As part of their self-representation, two participants single out words, presented within the categories of favourite "Quotes" (g-kgo) and "Personal Motto[s]," an interesting illustration of Rom Harré's view of the self as a "being . . . in possession of a certain kind of theory" of itself.[39] In contrast with the alien discourse of the form genre, these are discourses presumably so much one's own that they capture the self.

The form of participant a-ma, which opens with the category "BIRTH," closes in a statement of black humour with the category "DEATH." The circular development of the form, the closing a mirror image of the opening, only partially exaggerates the scope that the genre regularly aims to encompass. As discussed above, Richard Coe (1987) has illustrated how form in general (as distinct from the genre of the bureaucratic form specifically) is heuristic. Burke similarly argues how a discourse will represent a scene of a particular circumference, invoking some conception of a world but omitting others (1945/1969, pp.77-78). A form—whether it be a job application, a university admissions form, a driver's licence application, a tax return—cues the frontiers of much of an individual life: birth, parentage, gender, body weight and size, education, employment, and so on. It is that domain by which we are known and represented by institutional discourses of our society.

Participant a-ma responds sardonically, however: "DEATH: That hasn't happened yet, but when it does, I'll have someone let you all know!" Her response, with its redundant "That hasn't happened yet" and with its exclamation point, signals humour rather than pessimism, and in so doing clinches her parody of the genre. In its broad but superficial scope, the genre does trivialize the self, locating it within a matrix of labels, measurements, and statuses. In adding that one final category, participant a-ma consummates the entelechial orientation of the genre, naming the usually silent term in its discourse, the partner to the "Birth" category, and the ultimate closure to an individual's circumference.

In closing, let's return to participant v-j's form, first presented in chapter 8, a form introduced as v-j's "vital stats." As we saw in chapter 8, the opening categories focus primarily on the surface of her body, on its various measurements and colours. Not shown in the chapter 8 excerpt is the latter half of the form, which mentions, among other attributes, her generosity, the "sweetness" of her personality, and an enthusiastic comment about "fantasies." Beneath the table, as a caption to her self-representation, she writes:

> Geeez.. I'm starting to sound like one of those Playboy centerfolds. Too bad I don't look like one of them!
>
> :)

Her caption comment is presented as a revelation—"Geeez"—a realization that seemingly struck her after reviewing what she had composed. We might speculate as to whether, if she indeed felt discomfort or shame about her appearance or her self-representation, she would have listed those features in such detail and kept them there, posted to the world. Yet she apparently has not gone back to modify the categories or her answers to them to change her represented self. Instead, she has produced a brief meta-commentary on her work. The playfulness of her meta-comment (a revelation starting with "Geeez", responded to by the jocular "Too bad . . ." line, and closed with the emoticon), together with the dismissiveness of her attitude to pornographic representations ("one of *those* Playboy centerfolds"—emphasis mine), enables her to outmanoeuvre the prevailing patriarchal definitions of a woman by her body. Her site also features a long file of comments about herself that she solicited from friends and acquaintances. Printing these comments—themselves witty, exaggerated, humourous—and more importantly having the self-security and good nature to approach her friends with such a face-threatening act as soliciting comments about oneself, suggest that her approach to self-representation is not defensive but expressive and bold. Her caption positions her as socially aware, not fully captive to the gaze exemplified in the "vital stats," but able to bring forth evidence of that gaze and then to joke about it.

* * * * *

At the opening of this work, I discuss some of the stigma attached to personal homepages, ostensibly works of low-quality by socially-inept, vain people. The frivolity apparent on personal homepages has been an issue among those concerned about the low quality of Web publication and is often blamed on the "noise" of the masses crowding into a hitherto upscale medium. In reply, this chapter shows that low-modality contributions of individuals to the collective publishing enterprise of the Web is not just a problem of irresponsible or careless individuals. The prevailing logonomic system of publishing has already prescribed a marginal position to individuals. That many are opting not to be serious is a reflection of the social context of their communications. The Web has given them technological access, but as yet with no change in their social access. The contradictions exposed between these two conflicting conditions manifests itself in the apparent frivolity of personal Web constructions. Such frivolity and humour, rather than being conceived of as idiosyncratic and apolitical, can more insightfully be explained as deliberately anti-serious. For individuals whose ordinary domain of communication encompasses contents, relations, and positions that are invalidated by the increasingly commercial and professional medium of the Web, the anti-serious undermines the logonomic systems of media publishing. It is a means of validating their contents, relations, and positions by inserting their voice, virus-like, into the voices of the mass-media. The resulting parody creates a liberating perspective on the otherwise intimidating precedence of institutional practices in the media where individuals are assumed not to belong.

Engaging the Web story

The Web announces itself to the world as a product of late-twentieth century technological innovation. Surprisingly, however, the technological wizardry is perhaps among the simplest features of the communications medium. By contrast, its social dimensions resist any pat formulation. This project has revealed a diversity of human responses to the new medium. As is regularly the case with human communications, a cohesive all-encompassing vision remains elusive. One hundred and ten people in any venue would never be expected to concur on much.

A review of their main orientations explored in this project shows that Web authors tend to define their situations in a variety of ways and to respond to those situations with a range of strategies. For instance, as we saw in chapter 6, some homepage authors represent the Web as an informal social space. They create a familiar chronotope for the otherwise ethereal and counter-intuitive electronic medium. Imbued with a conceptual scene, the medium more readily supports the prospective host and the interpersonal social encounters that are staged on a homepage. It furnishes a setting for transactions among social equals, such as the tour of the home, the mutual visits to shared favorite sites, a "conversation" by e-mail, and so forth. In such actions, novice Web authors can comfortably draw on their speech habitus for concrete social settings, speaking as if on a first-name basis with their guests, sprinkling their speech with familiar colloquialisms and other transcriptions of an animated voice. Along with the evidence of their speaking voice, they occupy their sites with other signs of their corporeality, such as their age, home town, photograph, and so forth. This evidence of a bodily hexis invests the medium with the markers of a familiar human scale of space and time. It represents the Web as a local space where individual citizens belong, having the franchise to contribute their point of view. In a medium in which most other communications is sponsored by institutions occupying already-sanctioned *.org*, *.edu*, and *.com* domains of their own, the metaphorically physical domain evoked by a homepage author announces, simply, "I am here."

In contrast with this representation of a Web site as a grounded and immediate social encounter, some authors represent their work on a vaster scale, as a contribution to the boundless project of the Information Superhighway. As we saw in chapter 7, these Web sites, rather than evincing an ontological claim with their corporeality, promote an epistemological claim to one of the niches of the Web's information archive. Exclusively occupying a niche of the Web or orienting themselves to a presupposed audience need becomes a means of purchasing credibility in the medium. Information is dispensed as a symbolic currency in this transaction. By effacing rather than foregrounding their real-life identities, Web authors can construct subject positions as experts, mentors, teachers. Their pages manifest an achievement of a cyber-based subjecthood, not recognized so much by the labour of the body but by the intellectual capital of a well-connected mind.

Some homepage authors, perhaps finding the novel medium most recognizable by its kinship with other mass media, proceed with their own interventions by drawing on the example set by other mass media producers. As we saw in chapter 8, since there is no established, legitimate "rhetoric" for individuals in the mass media, no place for such a private domain as a "home" exposed to public view, they model their Web contributions on more viable antecedents, on the discourses of entities that have a long tradition of media exposure: institutions. With their ubiquitous public relations and advertising practices, institutions have won, by their precedence and by default, the legitimacy to be in the public view. Their discursive behaviour, because it has come to monopolize the media, exerts a normative influence on what is perceived to be the way to do public communications. Established institutional discourses in effect colonize those of novice Web producers. Through this process, which I have identified as *synthetic institutionalization*, apprentice Web authors can proceed with the novelties of presenting media content, managing public relations, and building a credible position befitting a public presence. Drawing on such semiotic signs of institutional wealth as titles, organizational affiliations, brand names, logos, graphics, forms, regular publication schedules, and so forth, individuals represent their own discursive actions through the terministic screen of institutional practices. Their sites make official-sounding

presentations to a public as if on behalf of the proprietor of an enterprise. As a hybrid of institutional and individual, individuals are able to construct what may be recognized as a meaningful, legitmate Web presence.

Yet synthetic institutionalization is ultimately built upon contradictions. Prospective authors, despite their newly granted access to the media, cannot in most cases marshal the resources to sustain a thoroughly authentic institutional stance; they have the technological but not the social access. This is particularly so with younger Web authors, who have few resources and little affinity with established institutional practices. Estranged by default, they, and others, are in a bind. Recognizing that individuality as a status is invalid, that media legitimacy is accorded to institutional producers, that institutional practices are the way to do things in public, they may make their mark not by hopelessly complying with antecedent media practices, but by taking up those practices as one of their few options, by ostentatiously misusing them, flaunting their inaptness. Their response brings into relief the missing "ours" in the face of "theirs." Since individuals have little recourse to credible, sincere statements to the public, they make their niche on a terrain that institutions cannot occupy: parody; deliberately low-modality adaptations of institutional discourse; false, humourous, exaggerated, sarcastic renditions of what currently stand as legitimate public discourses. Among the familiar discourses participants parody are advertising, "fine print," trademark names, organizational titles, forms, and functional Web tools such as fill-in forms, counters, and e-mail links. By parodying these discourses, homepage authors foreground their incommensurability with the established mass media and the established norms of media legitimacy; they expose the institutional licence to speak for its arbitrariness and shallowness; they mock the kinds of validation that institutions bequeath themselves with their practices; and they contest their own estrangement from the new medium. In short, they answer back.

This set of seemingly contradictory responses does not, on the surface, make for a settled narrative of the emergence of personal homepages. Moreover, several participants blended elements of the various approaches throughout their sites. Yet the 110 participants did not

produce just an unmanageable muddle of 110 electronic dabblings. A closer examination of their work reveals a flexible repertoire of strategies in response to the same social environment. The technological capacity of the medium explains little. Underlying the chaotic surface of the corpus of personal homepages, consistent throughout the four general orientations explored in chapters 6 through 9, is a sensitivity to the social conditions of Web communications. A new communications medium is established, but unlike its predecessors, it is decentralized, combining hi-tech multi-media mass appeal with popular productive access. Within its scope are joined established and resource-rich public presences with legions of curious neophytes. These neophytes come equipped with their own dispositions for communicating with each other, their technical and intellectual resources, and their humble positions in the real-world infrastructure of society. Developed in response to their environment, their repertoire of strategies extends to the range explored in chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9: flaunting their parvenu status, striving to position themselves within the new marketplace of the Web or the well-established marketplace of the media, or protesting their lot at the margins of the new market.

At the confluence of these four orientations is a story of dissonance, of the disproportionate scale between people and their new international environment, of the disparity between people and the institutions that normally dominate such an environment. The unassuming protagonists of the story are individuals with some resources deriving from their communications dispositions, access to computers, and possible access to selective information. The antagonists are Goliaths to these Davids, institutions with well established prerogatives to publish and broadcast and bountiful resources to invest in credible media positions. Their field of engagement extends in space to encompass an American and increasingly international forum, and, just as importantly, extends in time to encompass mass media traditions and practices and recent changes in the fast-changing Web.

In this chapter, I discuss some implications of this unfolding story. First, I explore a sample of the influences that may trade across the membrane between the culture of the Web and that

beyond the Web. The new medium, as is already evident, will exert an influence throughout society, just as social conditions have and will continue to influence who and what emerges on the Web. Next, I survey the potential research opportunities revealed by the Web's emergence. The novelty of the medium and its unsettling of the entrenched division between communication receivers and communication producers invites scholars to examine their own perspectives for the theoretical insights that might be coaxed from such an unprecedented communications forum. Finally, I return to a problem I raised at the opening of this work, a problem that points to differences between print-based and Web-based literacies. The Web's likely central role in the future communications infrastructure of our world challenges educators to consider their pedagogy in educating Web-literate mass media consumers and producers, the little Davids of our future.

From social egalitarianism to social distinction

Throughout this work, I have developed a perspective on Web homepages that encompasses not just homepages per se or even cyberspace as a whole but also the social and media environment, the "real" space in which these texts are appearing. What emerges in cyberspace, this perspective implies, is in part a function of the full social environment. Likewise, we can infer a reciprocal influence: as the Web continues to grow, that broader social environment will come to be, in part, a function of the pervasive new medium is has engendered. Cyberspace and "real" space are certainly not yet in full harmony with each other. For instance, the Web has emerged as a brash, unruly subculture, though one increasingly co-opted by corporate and mainstream society. As they continue to cohabitate and grow, cyberspace and real space may each force changes on the other. To illustrate this dynamic, I explore two such mutual influences that have been raised by my research:

- the tradition of gender roles in society and its influence on the demographics of the Web-literate sub-population;
- the requirements for a credible presence in cyberspace and the possible formative influence these may exert on people's non-Web careers and lives.

First, largely because of its technological complexities, the Web has emerged at such a point in the social infrastructure that it echoes, rather than overcomes, demographic inequalities. Above, we have seen how the homepage population is conspicuously unrepresentative of the world-wide population: it is disproportionately male, American, and young, and therefore already among the most upwardly mobile, privileged groups. Optimists may see beyond these pronounced differences to envision a time when the Web is as representative as its name promises—the *World Wide* Web. Yet despite the popularity of the social narrative of human progress and increasing equality, there is no guarantee that recent trends might not hit a plateau; equality has remained frustratingly elusive in other social venues. Just as the boardroom, the stock trading floor, the senate, the barracks, and the sports arena have each come to validate some people, to disregard others, to circumscribe members and thereby to

define yet another form of ostracism, so too may the Web become, conceptually, one of those spaces, fostering some populations more than others.

Despite the optimism of recent Internet surveys, which show, for instance, continuing quantitative progress toward gender parity, the quality of Internet participation may remain different for different segments of the population. Umberto Eco foresees such a difference in Internet participation as the axis of a "new class struggle . . . between those who know how to deal critically and actively with the new media and those who use them passively" (Kingwell, 1998). This qualitative difference is evident, for instance, in the low percentage of female-authored homepages relative to the higher percentage of female Internet users. The difference may be a consequence of a lack of various key resources: the technical knowledge to code Web pages, the financial capital to invest in graphics software and a computer of one's own, and the free time to play with a machine.

Yet even for females with access to technical training, computers, and time, homepage authorship may nevertheless remain a weaker inducement for Web participation than it is for males. In her review of research on gender and the cultures that have emerged around computers, Mary Lay discusses several factors that may contribute to the relatively low rate of female participation with the new technology. Among them are the weak appeal, for women, of the human-machine relationship in lieu of human-human relationships; the interest among women in the computer's pragmatic value as opposed to its intrinsic properties; and the culture of violence and competition, which is especially evident in such applications as computer games (1996, pp.63-66). Together, these factors contribute to a "male subculture" permeating our developments with the machine.[40]

This study raises other possibilities that may be relevant to women's role, or lack of a role, on the Web. One possible manifestation of a male Web subculture is the medium's preoccupation with data and information in lieu of other discourses. In oral communications, Deborah Tannen (1990) has observed a gender-marked contrast between "report talk" and

"rapport talk," each correlated, respectively, with males and females. Report talk may find a welcoming non-talk parallel in the data-filled presentations of the computer screen, whereas rapport talk may find little analogous application in the new medium. Another manifestation of this subculture may be seen in the motivations for constructing a homepage. As the chapter 4 discussion of survey findings reveals, among the primary motivations for undertaking such an enterprise are the wish to express oneself and the desire to be part of the new phenomenon. The Web is a forum in which the relatively powerless can enact, and sometimes achieve, the discourses and practices of power, at least the power to speak. The well-documented needs of the male ego may be motivating the much higher proportion of male participation; creating a homepage becomes a means of securing a forum for one's voice, a venue for self-display, and a piece of the "territory" of the Web. If creating a personal Web site indeed serves as a vicarious experience of power, this would suggest that surveys measuring just Internet participation may overlook key differences in the degrees, qualities, and motivations of participation. In sum, the medium's subculture may induce males to seek a more active role for themselves as creators and authors, whereas females may remain disproportionately in the relatively passive role of Web surfers and readers.

Such a preponderance of males on the World Wide Web, supposedly our future world agora, our international vox populi, would bolster the plurality of male voices in public forums just when the traditional media are increasingly accommodating a greater proportion of female voices. Moreover, such a plurality may reinforce itself, rather than diminish, over time. This reinforcement would be due in part to the ad hoc initiation procedures to the Web that most aspiring Web authors receive. For instance, as discussed in chapter 4, one motivation for composing a Web site is precisely to learn how to do it. The vast majority of participants indicated their desire to maintain and further develop their sites, some with the purpose of learning and adopting new Web developments and technologies as they emerge. If the recent past is indicative of the momentum of the Web's development, new learning opportunities will continue to present themselves. Among the technologies featured on the homepages of participants are CGI-based forms, animated images, java script applications, sound clips, and

movie clips, each of these appearing as a consequence of some degree of self-education by a homepage author.

The alternative, learning by more formal means, does not seem broadly viable in the foreseeable future. The proportion of females among Canadian students enrolled in such computer-related disciplines as electrical engineering and computer science has actually dropped over the past 15 years (Ramsay, 1998). A recent study of U.S. public schools found that while the gender gap in such disciplines as math and science has been receding, a new gap in the use of computers is emerging. Compared to their male peers, girls take fewer computer-related courses, simpler computer-related courses, and use computers less frequently outside of school ("Boys club," 1998). As well, in the current climate of restrained public spending on education and with the high capital cost required to invest in computers and computer teachers, self-education is and will continue to remain the primary means of developing Web know-how.

As a consequence, if constructing personal homepages is one of the main means of increasing one's mastery of the medium, then males are the primary ones receiving what is a free, marketable, hands-on education. Computers may thereby become tools for both active self-education and careers for males, while they may remain tools of relatively sporadic education and keyboarding jobs for females. If such a link between hobby and career perseveres, it could entrench rather than dilute the current male preponderance in the high-tech domains of the economy.

Overcoming the apparent bottle necks that constrict a more active female participation in computers and related technology is key to ensuring that the Web does not just become a new male-dominated forum of wealth with its corresponding new female-dominated forum of poverty. A continued imbalance would portend a future in which, along side the world's fastest growing communications medium is, ironically, the world's most populous communications ghetto.

This tradition of gender roles illustrates how an existing imbalance in society can carry over and perhaps even be amplified in a new medium. The medium can also exert an influence in turn. Not only might external social conditions such as gender roles influence homepage participation, but homepage participation may come to play its own role in the economy of social distinctions.

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but after new technologies and social practices become established, their utilitarian functions become imbued with the concomitant symbolic function of sustaining social hierarchies. They come to participate as signs of wealth in an economy not of goods and services but of social subjects. For instance, Bourdieu (1984) has demonstrated convincingly that, at least in a class-based society, cultural practices and cultural taste also function as currency with which to purchase distinction. Other technologies and practices show similar propensities to developing hierarchies and thereby engaging in the symbolic economy of social valuation: clothing, cars, homes, and speech all have stylish and boorish poles. As our electronic visage to the world, a Web site and the presentation of ourselves we make through it will no doubt acquire currency as part of this symbolic economy. Web pages will develop a system of symbolic valuations with high-brow equivalents to the pin stripe suit, the Mercedez Benz, the mansion, and the Queen's English; and, of course, with the corresponding, less-distinguished equivalents to the blue jeans and sweat shirt, the Lada, the trailer park, and cockney.

If, as it is not unreasonable to expect, having a personal Web site evolves from a playful indulgence to a professional necessity, we may all feel the imperative to maintain professional appearances, a virtual fashion statement equivalent to our tailored clothing, our stylish automobiles, our well-decorated homes, and so forth. Some Internet insiders predict that more individuals will begin "branding themselves," distinguishing themselves, much as products are distinguished, by a brand image (Orr, 1998). The chapters above suggest some of the criteria that the smart Web page strives to achieve. For instance, we have seen how a

homepage can be validated with a presentation of "information." Unlike the discourse of, say, a conversational exchange, a Web site emerges as a response to an implicit interrogative: what info do you have to offer? In order to satisfy the imperative to claim a niche, to have something important to say, to occupy credibly a space on the Information Superhighway, we must have a connection with information. Moreover, it must be specialized information, exclusive or at least somewhat restricted. Search engines rank highly those pages with the greatest keyword focus, and directories and indices strive to build order, not disorder, to the Web. Eclecticism is a nuisance in an information-rich environment. The intensive medium is impatient with redundancy, with generalist pages.

If the Web, like other semiotic domains, comes to privilege some kinds of contributions, might it not thereby come to privilege some kinds of contributors. Much as the computer revolution has already induced a revaluation of "geekdom," the Web may compel a further revaluation in the hierarchy of personal qualities. While the "well-rounded" generalist may thrive in face-to-face social encounters, he or she may appear superficial on the screen. This well-rounded-versus-focused dimension of how we value personalities may thereby reverse in its axis. In the emergent hierarchy, we may become known to colleagues and acquaintances by our specialty, the information focus we cultivate on our Web site. The Web will compel us to remake ourselves as specialists.

Such a prominent forum as the Web can thereby bring into relief the ownership and distribution of information in our society and throughout the world. The medium thus becomes not just an intellectual forum of information exchange but also a social arena in which to divide the information-rich from the information-poor. This shift entails a social and political reorientation of the populist conception of the Web, from the horizontal plane represented in its rhetoric of egalitarianism to a less harmonious vertical axis of hierarchy. As illustrated above in the discussion of gender inequity, when technology and society interact, each exerts a reoriented trajectory to the other.

Scholarship in response to the Web

The "profit-potential" of a research agenda can be expressed both in terms of general knowledge—theory—and empirical knowledge—practices—and, more ambitiously, in the confluence of the two: the cross-breeding of theory with studies of actual textual practices. The former adds perspective and insight onto the latter, prioritizing research agendas, recognizing problems, asking productive questions, offering methodologies by which to analyse and synthesize, pointing to potentially profitable directions of further inquiry. The latter can add vigour to the former, reinforcing a theory's explanatory potency, confirming some assumptions and conjectures, challenging others, highlighting or bringing into relief formerly overlooked or seemingly tangential points, extending the range of a theory's sovereignty.

While the optimal contributions of theory and cases of discourse may be the complementary and reciprocal influence of each, each engaged in the hermeneutic circle of interpretation, it is no less likely that each may blinker us to the broader complexity of the other. In the chapter 2 review of several theoretical perspectives on discourse and power, I implied that some of the perspectives may be more compatible with certain types of discourses than with others. The relationship between theory and cases of discourse might be a causal one, one influencing our view of the other. For instance, it is a common folk wisdom that if one has a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. A theoretical perspective might thus precede actual practices to some degree, and either find fertile ground only on the most accommodating "nails" or recognize everything in its applications only by its "nail-like" characteristics.

Alternately, it is quite plausible that theories emerge and take shape by pragmatic, Darwinist forces, in accordance with the conditions of their textual environment. Hence, for instance, Bourdieu's work on cases of speech and Fairclough's on published print texts may have led these scholars to formulate their separate though complementary perspectives, each most amenable to the type of discourses he examined. If theoretical perspectives are, in this

manner, contingent on their textual environment, the emergence of a new medium can be received opportunistically, in the community of discourse studies, as an occasion to reinvigorate theoretical capital. To the degree that a theoretical perspective might be arbitrarily limited by the communications environment out of which it was bred, a new communications environment can affirm the robustness of its original insights, or perhaps expose its limits.

Theoretical models that position discourse within a broader social environment, an environment that includes power, hierarchy, and domination, may find especially engaging applications and challenges with the Internet. In both its physical organization and its social dispensation, the Internet decenters power. No central agency controls the dispersed architecture of servers, routers, backbones, and transmission lines. The relative anonymity and transnational scope of computer-mediated communications renders regulatory enforcement difficult if not impossible. Its social dispensation still resembles a lawless frontier society of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness more than the officious civil society of peace, order, and good government. Commercial, educational, governmental, and personal interests all share the same forum, with little formal class system to distinguish among them.

With the dissolution of formal frontiers between public and private, between mass media publishing and personal posting, between institution and citizen, between commercial and intellectual interests, society's zoning of "places" has lost its most palpable signs: the real landscapes and edifices that demarcate and thereby define social activities. The equivalent "spaces" on the Web are patently metaphorical and hence rhetorically flexible. Lines of power that have long since consolidated in commercial, educational, civic, and national environments persist but are still diffused and unorganized in the fast-growing, increasingly multinational, unregulated Web.

The potential commerce between former solitudes, the vastly different and seemingly

incompatible discourse universes as mass media publishing on the one hand and private messages on the other, suggests a greater fluidity in the demographics of discourse than might otherwise have been assumed. In other environments, it is precisely because we "know our place" that production regimes, logonomic systems, genres, constraints, and regular language demographics are reproduced and endure. These other environments would not regularly have fostered the extreme cross-fertilization observed between two species of agents: institutions and individuals. That such a strategy as synthetic institutionalization emerges now is because a new environment has brought together, in the same discursive space, two solitudes that have never so clearly shared the same platform. Their emerging environment includes not just the tumultuous, relatively accessible Web, but an industrialized society in which the collective securities formerly ensured by governments and communities are being retrenched, leaving individuals increasingly to fend for themselves. It is in this environment that we see emerge a contemporary to such fantastical hybrids as the mermaid, centaur, and werewolf, reconceived in their computer-age manifestations: half-human, half-institution.

The cross-breeding of personal and institutional stances and the crossing from speech and print into computer-mediated communications presents opportunistic possibilities for a theoretical repertoire hitherto cultivated from more established and regular environments, environments in which a social and discursive order has long since congealed.

Perhaps one of the more promising terrains in my analysis and discussion is the bringing together of two solitudes that have not formerly had much commerce between them: the written discourse of "ordinary" citizens, and theoretical perspectives on the role of discourse and power. In general, the former has already been treated quite extensively, but most frequently from the vantage point of academic composition and pedagogy. Somewhat less common are explorations of extra-curricular, non-workplace writing, if only because there is relatively less of this writing available to be studied (aside from private journals, private correspondence, and similar types of texts). Less common still, of course, is such writing empowered to be in the public eye.

Traditionally, individuals have produced writing primarily at the behest of the institutional bodies in their lives: their schools, their employers. Perspectives that integrate discourse with power would sometimes, in such scenarios, apply fairly reductively. The dimensions of power are already fairly explicit, defined in the very status labels "student," "employee," and so forth, and many of the constraints on discourse are unambiguous. Though power is ever-present, theoretical perspectives bridging power and discourse may find relatively fertile ground where the parameter of power is not so fixed and its engagement with discourse not so unambiguous. Perspectives such as Hodge and Kress's and Fairclough's make more valuable contributions in settings where power is disguised or contested. The Web is fertile ground for these perspectives. The power to publish is no longer so monopolized; and the discursive practices of the fast-growing, unregulated medium have yet to consolidate themselves. Both the parameters of power and of discourse are open to contention.

This absence of a clear power center may, however, unsettle theoretical perspectives and methodologies that presuppose a strong *dirigiste* hand. The explicit "apparatus" that has sustained prohibitions on the symbolic production of subjects has no counterpart in the new medium. Thus, as I have argued above, there is still some semblance of restraint, but such restraint perseveres primarily in a less prescriptive, more circuitous form than that represented in some theoretical models. Ironically, one of the most acute renditions of the operations of Web behaviour is Bourdieu's, a perspective developed primarily from cases of low-tech speech behaviour in national settings but that finds fertile parallels in high-tech world-wide computer-mediated communications. The current nascent stage of Web communications, like the informal, off-the-record status of much speech, is beyond the scope of much explicit censure, but is nevertheless influenced by the pressures of social exposure, social acceptance, face, ridicule, and so forth. With his concept of the habitus, Bourdieu develops a formative mechanism for a regime of domination and constraint that one, in effect, carries with oneself. As with the concept of the panopticon explored by Foucault, in which the gaze of power is internalized and hence applied even in the absence of power's agents, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus can account for the echoes of domination and compliance that resound even in a

stridently free and free-for-all environment.

If, as Steinberg (1996) has predicted, the volume of the verbiage on the Web would soon, if it has not already, surpass the volume of discourse in the Library of Congress, then the new environment entreats scholars of discourse to account for the emergences and actions of this new bounty and of our future public forum. What is Web communications doing to our society and how is it doing it? What new rhetorics, and by what new modes, will persuasion and social formation be enacted?

For instance, the new medium foregrounds multi-modal communications to the degree that, arguably, visual semiosis now takes precedence over words and sentences. It is this shift in modality that most acutely challenges existing theoretical perspectives to "keep up with the times." In chapter 8, we have explored the disenfranchisement of a Web voice without graphic support. The ostentatiously endowed Web compels further research on the rhetoric of such multi-media riches as screen design, graphics, colour, sound, and interactivity, in collaboration with, as well as in the absence of, words and sentences.

Similarly, other attributes of the Web that are not as prominent in print media or in spoken discourse also invite further research. For instance, the Web has a temporal dimension that, in print, is diluted by the timeless fixity often presupposed of the published page. As is suggested in the chapter 8 discussion of strategic and organic change, a Web page's expected mutability allows and encourages roles for discourse that print could never sustain. This diachronic functionality compels further exploration of how, in both its composing processes and its rhetoric, a Web site continuously emerges over time.

The Web, observes Graham Spencer, a key figure in the development of the Excite search engine, is "about people finding people . . ." (Steinberg, 1996). My research has discussed how Web authors both draw on their social networks to construct their sites and, to a lesser degree, expand their social networks as a consequence of their sites. The new possibilities of

community in the supposedly individualistic culture of the Web invite further research: research on alliances between individuals and communities, on international alliances across political and demographic boundaries, on Internet-based collaboration, and on the processes and discourse in these alliances and collaborations.

More than any other electronic medium, the Internet has reified McLuhan's prognostications of a global village, an international communion among people. Because of its emerging international scope, the medium not only bridges individuals but also juxtaposes cultures much more easily and acutely than do other media. Indeed, the early US lead in the Web may lead ultimately to an American hegemony in this village, as international communications converge around a set of consistent standards. Such hegemony could be characterized by the preponderance of American English, American-style promotional discourse, and American social, political, cultural, and economic assumptions and preoccupations.

Alternately, or perhaps concurrently, the Web may also bring into relief the multi-cultural nature of the international village, and thereby create an unprecedented profligacy of both cultural hybrids and cultural resistances. This dynamic will be among the most salient manifestations of how social, political, cultural, and economic worlds are constructed and mediated through semiosis. As such, the Web's stunning emergence as a central communications medium inadvertently offers perhaps the best free advertising that communications scholarship has ever received. The opportunity is rich for communications scholars' response.

A pedagogy for Web citizens

In introducing this work, I describe a quandary I face in my teaching of a course about professional writing and computer communications. For the main assignment in the course, my students propose and construct a Web site. The assignment specifies criteria that are familiar to all teachers of professional writing: that a student's work seeks to fulfill meaningful purposes with real audiences in response to a real need or opportunity in its environment. I have generally found such criteria to be rhetorically and pedagogically smart; adapted for different courses, they have consistently brought forth engaging writing and meaningful learning experiences.

But adapted to the Web, the assignment produces different results. In contrast with other assignments, it seems to offer fewer opportunities for successful student practice. The kinds of needs and opportunities available on the Web, the kinds of purposes that the medium is suitable for, perhaps do not readily call to mind meaningful positions for individual writers. The Web is a large environment, out of proportion with its individual contributors, and my students perhaps feel very small within it. The assignment seems to bring forth defensive postures from my students. They compose as if bereft of any possibilities to develop their own ethos. Their sites put forth the faces of organizations and bodies of information. As a result, the students seem so much less in command of their projects, so much more beholden to someone else's information, to the prerogative of that information for its own sake. Their sites offer a volume of information more for its value as evidence of organizational status or its bulk value to satisfy the required assignment length than for a rhetorical engagement. Apart from the accumulations of data, these organizations, and behind them my students, do not seem to have much to say.

The fault is not with these students. Indeed, they might be commended for recognizing, through their surfing activities, the kinds of discourses and public positions that typically occupy the Web. The assignment implicitly asks for a credible Web site. The Web is the big

leagues. Its space encompasses Microsoft, Yahoo!, and other world-stage organizations. Any claim to a niche demands the "official" representation of that niche, a comprehensive authorative coverage of its topic. Students recognize this imperative and the hierarchy of contributors who can satisfy this imperative, a hierarchy in which organizational status and command of "information" are among the most pivotal criteria. Their efforts in this assignment are responsive to such precedence. Unfortunately, this precedence seems to be contributing a measure of self-effacement and self-censorship: students are overlooking or eliding their own possible positions and perspectives, their own voice, something they tend not to do so readily in other writing assignments.

On the Web, the individual acting with his or her own personal knowledge and experiences risks stigmatization. Unlike in a report and, more so, an essay, on a Web site, the role for rhetorical invention is less recognized. The Web has little patience for subjectivity, argumentation, nuance, and insight. The paragraph and, more particularly, the exploration of a perspective that it can embody, are out of place. Reading off the screen is not soothing to the eyes, and the continuous scrolling of the shallow window of the computer screen is not conducive to concentrated reading. Adapting to its advantages, the Web has become a sensorily rich but, in some ways, a shallow medium. The salience of the Web's sensory marvels overwhelms subtler issues of process, strategy, rhetoric, and ethics. Its potential as a space for the development of perspective has been condensed to the myopia of technical wizardry: formatting codes, the trickery of hyperlinks, prefabricated screen designs, computer-assisted and computer-generated graphics, animated images, sound files, and so forth. Such multi-modal semiosis has intricate rhetorical possibilities, yet these are frustrated by the current low fluency in these relatively sophisticated discourses, estranged as they are from the mother tongue of most language users. It is perhaps not an accident that we say that Web sites are "constructed," not "written." Working with information not of their own discovery, with tools far removed from their intuition, on sites out of scale with their own status as subjects, students of the Internet are left with less of the prerogative of their classical counterparts, commanding just the canons of stylization and delivery of on-line postings whose invention is

seemingly too important to be left to mere individuals.

My experience with this assignment initially encouraged a defensive reaction to my students' work, as I wondered despondently where they, or I, had gone wrong. My response, perhaps endowed more with professorial force than with pedagogical wisdom, has been to continuously redefine the assignment term by term and more vigorously encourage my students to explore possibilities that would allow for their engagement with writing. With the experience and findings of this research, however, I am now trying to work out a more proactive response to my students.

The issue may not be just with the assignment but with the possibilities created, or denied, by the new medium. The Web has the potential to become the most vibrant civic forum of the 21st century. Yet as we have seen in the chapter 7 discussion of the Web's valuation of information, and in the chapter 8 discussion of synthetic institutionalization, this civic space is already instilling a discursive version of class-based distinctions among its discourses and participants: those who have information and those who have not; those who can occupy credible organizational or specialist positions and those who cannot.

In a medium that seems so ostentatiously to invite all contributors and to stridently denounce any censorship, might we not raise and discuss the less visible, insidious pressures of hierarchy and self-censorship. If the only viable alternative to being data-presenters is being glib, parodic, or mute, might we not explore strategies by which to cultivate a public position. And if synthetic institutionalization is one of the few viable options, might we encourage the kind of collaboration that can produce grass-roots organizations in which people can make a difference: a practice of computer-mediated collaboration, a rhetoric of public advocacy, an attitude of civic responsibility, and the confidence to make a difference. We need to educate not future Webmasters but future world-citizens: citizens who have the critical perspective to interpret and explain the emerging hierarchies in their civic space; citizens who have skills to develop a public ethos; citizens who have the confidence to post their full names on their sites

and to occupy socially responsible public positions in their own right; and citizens who have the rhetorical resources to outmaneuvre the imperative for information with, instead, the opportunity for insight, the uniqueness of perspective, the wisdom of experience. To foster citizenship in a computer-mediated world, a future-oriented pedagogy must direct itself at such a broadly conceived literacy. It is the means by which we can secure our franchise in our future virtual environment.

Notes

1. The assignment description is currently available at http://www.erin.utoronto.ca/academic/profwp/wri305h/assigns/project.html.

2. The full title of Rheingold's book, *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*, is the source for the title of this dissertation.

3. The survey researchers caution that because of the survey's recruitment procedures, the sample of participants is biassed toward more experienced and more frequent users of the Internet (GVU, 1998). Another survey, this one of those who have created "personal" homepages, estimated that 6% of Internet users had personal homepages (Buten, 1996).

4. "Microphysics of power" is Fraser Easton's (1992) characterization of Foucault's reconception of power from its traditional model of centralization to a model of dispersion throughout society.

5. Because my project inquires into the practices of individuals as producers of mass media text, rather than in their more habitual roles just as receivers of media communications, I sometimes favour below the term *production regimes* for its focus on the conditions of production.

6. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is thought by many to be authored by Bakhtin (morson and Emerson, 1990, pp.101-102).

7. This revision of Burke's well-known "definition of man" is discussed in Stillar (1998, pp.76-83).

8. The earlier, better-known version of the definition adds to this phrase the following parenthetical comment: "or moved by a sense of order."

9. Tacit knowing, the "knowledge that we may not be able to tell," is explored by Michael Polanyi (1966, p.10).

10. During the sampling procedure for my formal study, I found that the proportion of non-occidental names that turned out to belong to female authors was extremely low. At one point, in working through the alphabetical sequence at a point dominated by popular Asian surnames, I found over several dozen sites by males before finding one site by a female.

11. In chapter 7, I explore how some participants, with access to specialized information, conceived of their sites as contributions to the Web as a whole.

12. Weighted samples are discussed by Fowler (1993, pp.16-18).

13. With the "D" file, the first to be sampled, intervals of ten screen-depths were used throughout. Because the response rate proved to be surprisingly successful, the intervals were

doubled to twenty screen-depths for the other files.

14. This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Waterloo's Office of Human Research in the autumn of 1996.

15. With the browsers widely available in early 1997, Web sites could be downloaded only one file at a time. Because of the size of some sites, encompassing hundreds of files each, and because of the off-site sources of some files, not all of the sample of 106 Web sites were downloaded completely. As well, to conserve hard-drive space, only text files (almost all) and graphics files (most) were downloaded. Hence, a realistic estimate of the typical volume of a personal homepage would be higher than that which could be inferred from the download tallies reported above: well over a half megabyte, encompassing well over 50 files, per Web author.

16. One respondent (b-kcb), a male and hence nominally included among the 55 male respondents, checked off both *Male* and *Female* designations, with the explanation that the homepage was a collective husband-and-wife effort. Other homepages also showed clear evidence of having been collective efforts, but in each case the single survey respondent identified only his or her own sex. Hence, the 55 *male* and 55 *female* selections represent only the sex of the survey respondents, not the more intricate networks of collaborative authorship. A more elaborate set of survey questions would more clearly elucidate the scale and range of such collaboration in Web site construction.

17. Teresa de Lauretis draws attention to Hollway's application of Foucault's ideas (1987, p.16).

18. "Self-fashioning" is Stephen Greenblatt's (1980) well-known usage.

19. The client computer can, of course, be the Web author's own computer, a search engine spider, or the same computer that just made a request moments ago. Hence, counter tallies may not be indicative of the number of visitors.

20. Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson define "positive face" as "the want of every ["competent adult"] member that his [or her] wants be desirable to at least some others" (1987, p.62)

21. Burke introduces consubstantiality, the state of shared "substance" and hence of mutual "identification," as an alternative to rationality in explaining how persuasion happens (1950/1969, p.21, 46).

22. For Polanyi's concept of "tacit knowledge," see note #9.

23. For Burke's concept of "consubstantiality," see note #21.

24. Because of ambiguities, a couple of these 14 participants may be revealing home towns of their youth, not necessarily their birth.

25. "Exigence" is Lloyd Bitzer's usage to describe the catalytic role of the rhetorical situation in summoning forth discourse (1968).

26. Fairclough does not trace the genesis of his use of the concept, though his conception is quite similar to Harré's.

27. Grice proposes four categories of criteria that would fulfill the Cooperative Principle, summarizing these with the qualities I listed, namely that a contribution be informative, true, relevant, and perspicuous (1975, pp.45-46)

28. Foucault's concept of power-knowledge is discussed above in chapter 1.

29. "Conceptual classification" is one of two orientations of "visual structures of representation" described by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p.79).

30. Coe characterises information as "data . . . *in formation*" (1987, p.16).

31. Burke's concept of consubstantiality is discussed above in chapter 4. See also note #19.

32. Marxist scholar Louis Althusser uses "apparatus" to refer to the agencies of domination, "repressive state apparatus" and "ideological state apparatuses" (1969).

33. Barton and Barton (1985, pp.136-37) observed, well before the Web was invented, a similar preoccupation with visuals among their students introduced to graphics software. Visuals proliferated in student reports regardless of their utility.

34. Peter Gollwitzer makes a similar distinction between individuals "conceiv[ing] of themselves as the object of their concerns [or] as the subject of their actions" (1986, p.152).

35. "Interpellating" is how Althusser characterizes the activity of ideology on individuals: "Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (1969, p.170).

36. See also Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, pp.159-180).

37. See Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, pp.193-94) for an interpretation of upper and lower elements in document design.

38. The client computer can, of course, be the Web author's own computer, a search engine spider, or the same computer that just made a request moments ago. Hence, counter tallies should not be equated with the number of visitors.

39. Quoted in Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.102). The original is from Harré (1985). See also Harré (1983, p.265).

40. The computer's "male subculture" is suggested by Spears and Lea (1994, p.450).

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey

This is the text of the questionnaire sent by e-mail to respondents who had agreed to participate in the study.

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Research on Your Homepage: Interview Questionnaire
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Thank you for considering participating in this study of
homepage composition.

A separate e-mail message describes the study and the role of
participants.  This message contains the interview questions,
which focus on two areas:
1. general demographic information,
2. your composing process for your homepage.


==============================
Part 1: Demographic Information
==============================

1. What is your gender?
( ) Male
( ) Female

2. What is your age?
( ) under 15
( ) 15-19
( ) 20-24
( ) 25-34
( ) 35-44
( ) 45-64
( ) 65 and over

3. What is your nationality?
```

==========
Part 2: Your Composing Process
==========

1. What led you to decide to compose a homepage?

2. At the time you began composing your homepage, how many different Web sites had you seen? (Estimate)
( ) under 30
( ) 30 to 100
( ) 100 to 300
( ) 300 to 1000
( ) over 1000

3a. Did seeing other Web sites have a role in your thinking about your own homepage?
( ) Yes
( ) No

3b. (If you answered "Yes" to #3a) How did seeing other Web sites have a role in your thinking about your own homepage?

4a. Did you plan out your homepage before you began to type the actual page details?
( ) Yes
( ) No

4b. (If you answered "Yes" to #4a) Please describe how you went about planning your homepage.

5. How did you decide on the subject matter (i.e., content, topics) of your homepage?

6. A site's organization includes such features as the order in which material is presented on a page and (if the site has

more than one page) the distribution of material among different pages. How did you decide on the organization of your homepage?

7. How did you decide on the page layout and design of your homepage?

8. (If your homepage includes hyperlinks to other sites) How did you decide on the hyperlinks to include on your homepage?

9. (If your homepage includes graphics) How did you decide on the graphics to include on your homepage?

10. How did you decide that your homepage was ready to be placed online?

11a. Have you made changes or additions to your homepage since it was first placed online?
( ) Yes
( ) No

11b. (If you answered "Yes" to #11a) Why did you make these changes or additions?

12a. Do you intend to make changes or additions to your current homepage?
( ) Yes
( ) No

12b. (If you answered "Yes" to #12a) Why do you want to make these changes or additions?

13. What is your purpose for having a homepage?

14. Who is your homepage for?

Thank you for completing this interview questionnaire. Your answers, which will remain confidential, will be helpful in this project. Please return this questionnaire to one of my e-mail addresses below.

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Appendix B: Participants

List of 110 participants, together with the demographic information provided by their survey responses.

Participant	Sex	Age	"Nationality" *
a-aa	M	20-24	[probably American]
a-aag	M	20-24	Portuguese / American [probably lives in US]
a-ca	F	25-34	[perhaps Filipino]
a-ka	F	20-24	English citizen [lives in USA]
a-kal	F	25-34	USA
a-ma	F	20-24	Mexican [lives in US]
a-mar	M	20-24	Swedish
b-cb	F	25-34	American
b-jb	F	20-24	USA
b-jbo	M	25-34	caucasion [sic; spouse is "Spanish / Japanese"]
b-kcb	M & F	35-44	Newfoundlanders - well, OK, we're Canadian
b-lb	F	25-34	American
b-sb	F	20-24	Canadian
b-tb	F	20-24	Caucasian-American
b-to	M	25-34	Caucasian [lives in USA]
c-amc	F	20-24	Filipino
c-dc	F	25-34	us citizen
c-jc	M	20-24	Canadian
d-ad	F	20-24	American
d-bdd	M	20-24	American
d-cad	F	20-24	United States

d-cd	F	20-24	US
d-dd	M	20-24	Caucasian
d-dnp	M	35-44	White European Male [lives in USA]
d-h	F	25-34	Dutch
d-jd	F	15-19	caucasian
d-md	M	35-44	white
d-mdr	M	25-34	Italian
d-n	F	25-34	American
d-nd	F	25-34	American
d-rd	M	45-64	American
d-rdp	M	45-64	American
d-td	M	20-24	Swedish
d-wb	M	15-19	White, Anglo-Saxon
e-el	M	25-34	Born in America with a little of everything . . . in my blood lines
e-ke	M	25-34	usa
f-fr	F	35-44	Israeli and Canadian
f-tf	M	25-34	German
g-hg	F	20-24	American
g-jg	M	25-34	Danish
g-jgd	M	35-44	United States of America
g-kgi	M	35-44	American
g-kgl	M	< 15	Canadian
g-kgo	F	15-19	caucasian / white [probably American]
g-l	F	25-34	United States of America
g-ncg	M	20-24	American
h-ah	F	25-34	U.S.

h-bh	M	25-34	US
h-dgr	F	25-34	Canadian
h-eh	F	20-24	USA
h-rh	M	25-34	Canadian Indian
h-s	F	25-34	usa
i-ai	M	25-34	Italy
i-li	F	15-19	[American]
j-aj	F	45-64	American
j-rj	M	35-44	Borned [sic] in Texas, USA White
j-s	F	15-19	American
j-wt	M	15-19	American
k-ck	M	15-19	Anglo-american
k-lk	F	45-64	Canadian
k-mk	M	25-34	Japan
k-mr	F	20-24	American citizen
k-sk	F	35-44	Canadian
k-tk	M	15-19	U.S
l-ajl	F	15-19	[lives in USA]
l-bl	M	25-34	American
l-fl	M	35-44	Dutch
l-jl	M	45-64	USA
l-tl	F	25-34	Caucasian
m-bm	F	15-19	Norwegian
m-cm	F	20-24	American
m-jm	F	45-64	U.S.A.
m-lm	F	25-34	American/Caucasion [sic]

m-m	M	35-44	US Citizen
m-rm	M	25-34	American
m-s	F	< 15	I am a filipino [sic], but I live in the USA, and was born in the USA.
n-tn	M	25-34	American
o-so	F	20-24	White (American)
p-dp	F	20-24	Italian-American
p-jp	M	20-24	Uh, Caucasian, White Male, American
p-kp	F	15-19	Caucasian
p-map	M	20-24	United States (California Native)
p-sp	M	35-44	american [sic]
r-cr	F	20-24	American
r-gj	M	25-34	USA
r-ir	F	25-34	U.S. Citizen
r-mr	F	35-44	United States citizen
s-as	M	25-34	US
s-e	F	20-24	USA
s-es	F	15-19	[born in Ecuador; lives in US]
s-gs	M	45-64	USA
s-js	M	25-34	german [sic]
s-jsb	F	20-24	U.S.
s-s	M	25-34	American
t-gt	M	> 65	US
t-jj	F	20-24	Vietnamese [but lives in USA?]
t-jst	M	25-34	Hispanic [lives in California]
t-mt	F	20-24	Finnish
t-tg	M	45-64	USA

v-hvz	M	20-24	Dutch
v-j	F	25-34	Black & Japanese [lives in USA?]
v-mk	M	15-19	Chinese [studying in California]
v-s	F	15-19	white
w-a	F	35-44	United States
w-jw	M	15-19	not sure, but I am white.
w-kw	F	35-44	United States native and citizen
w-kpw	M	35-44	American/Anglo-Saxon
w-pw	F	45-64	U.S. Citizen
w-tw	M	< 15	US American
y-gy	M	15-19	American

* Items in the "Nationality" column are quoted verbatim from participants' survey responses, with my observations added in square brackets.

Appendix C: Content is for audience

This selection of survey responses illustrates how participants conceived of their own motives and of their site's content not by topic alone but as an engagement with and offering to their audience.

- "I wanted people to know what I was interested in." (k-sk)
- "i wanted it [her site] to be a way to have people get to know me virtually. . . ." (g-kgo)
- "I wanted people online to know a little about myself. . . ." (p-kp)
- "I wanted them [people in general] to see who I was. . . ." (v-j)
- "I decided I wanted a place that could, in a sense, offer people a glimpse into who I am." (d-n)
- "[I was attracted to the] idea of people around the world being able to know what kind of person I am. . . ." (w-tw)
- "[I published] [p]urely things that interested me, functional and thematicly [sic]. By publishing my iterests [sic] to the world, people that view the pages get a good idea of what I'm like and what motivates me." (s-gs)
- "Popular demand." (a-ka)
- "I just wanted to let people know about me and my deafness." (m-bm)
- "To have people become better aware of who I am and the area I live in." (d-jd)
- "To give everybody the possibility to read about me if he/she wants." (f-tf)
- "[The homepage] provide[s] a method in which [sic] people can learn more about me. . . ." (l-tl)
- "I felt it was a great way to offer others a chance to download my shareware program and to see a picture of me." (l-tl)

Appendix D: Non-standard English usage

This list of non-Standard English usages, from the sample of homepages, includes colloquialisms, slang, expletives, neologisms, and other usages. In cases in which the data provides variant spellings of a word (e.g., the several degrees of "hmmm . . .") *and variations on the use of upper- and lower-case spellings, all variations are included. As well, where ellipses, exclamation points, and other punctuation may be part of the expressivity of the word, such punctuation is included.*

a [for "of," as in "a bunch *a* links"]
a--hole
aaah
Ack!!!
a-fuckin'-GAIN [i.e., "again" spliced with "fucking"]
Ah!
Ahh
ahem!
Ahh
Ahhh...
a la Madonna
Anal-ness
angst-y [in "teen angst-y"]
Arf!Arf! [i.e., dogs barking]
arg..
arse
autoble [neologism of "autobiographical ramble"]
AWESOME!
aye
barf!
believe you me
Best Buds [i.e., "buddies"]
big-ass
bitch [verb]
bitchin'
bitching
biz-nang
blah
booze
'bout [for "about," as in "How about"]
buds [for "buddies"]
bullshit
bummed
Bzzzt

'cause
'Cept [for "except"]
C'mon c'mon
Congrats... [for congradulations]
coo-coo
cool [i.e. the expression of approval]
cooouuurrse [as in "of cooouuurrse"]
'Course [or "of course"]
'coz
crappy
cunt-ry [for "country music"]
cuz [for "because"]
d*mn
damn
da [for "the"]
dat
donno... [as in "i donno..."]
droppin'
duckies
duh!
dum-dum-dum
Eek
eh?
'em [for "them"]
enginerd [i.e., a neologism combining "engineer" and "nerd"]
...er... [indicating indecisive pause]
Erf!Erf! [i.e., dogs barking]
fave Faves Fave's
fishface
fishies
fixin's
freakin'
froggies
fuck off
fucked up
FUCKIN'
fucking
Gawk
gazillion
G'day!!
Geeez
geek
Geez...
Giddyup

gonna
goof
gotta
groovy!
HA!
Haha
hahahaha....
Ha-hah-ahhah-hhhaah!
heck
heh
hehe
hehehe....
Heh-heh
Hell
hey Hey! HEY!
Hip-Hip-Hooray
hmm... hmm
hmmm...
hmmmm.....
hmmmmm...
Hooray!
Hubba hubba!
huh huh?
Hurray!
Ick
indy
jerkoff
jivin'
'kay?
lil' [for "little"]
linkin'
lotso [for "lots of"]
ma [for "my"]
Maaaaan
measley
MMMMM
Mmmmmmm....
MMMMMMMMM
momma
mucho
mushball-y
n' [for "and"]
neato
nevermind

niccccce	
nope	
nutin [for "nothing"]	
oh	Oh
ohhh	
Okay	okay!
ol' [for "old"]	
Ooder [for "other"]	
oodles	
Oooh...	oooh
oooooh	
oOoOoOoO...	
Oooooo	
OUCH!	
oughta	
piss off	
pissed	
Pleeease	
Plop plop fizz fizz	
Prez [for "President"]	
rags [verb]	
rawks ["rocks," as in "this band rawks"]	
scantronish	
School Daze	
scrumpdiddlyupmtious	
Sheesh	
Shit	SHIT
shitty	
skewl [for "school"]	
Slurp!	
Sniff	
somethin'	
Sooo...	SOOO
soooo	
Sooooo...	
soused	
spif-tacular [for "spectacular"]	
suck [used derogatorily]	
sucks [used derogatorily]	
teenie weenie	
Thanx	
tho [for "though"]	
Tonite	
tooshies	

u [for "you"]
UH
um...
umpteen
umm...
Ummm....
Uh
uhhh.... Uhhh
...um...
uuhhh
Uuuummm...
Wadda wadda wadda!
Waitaminute!
WakWak
wanna Wanna
Wanta
weenie
weirdnuz [for "weirdness"]
Whoa
whoops
wobblie
Woo!
Wow wow WOW wow!
ya [for "you"]
yadda yadda yadda
Y'ALL
Yay!
yeah! yeah
yep Yep.
yer [for "your"]
Yikes!
yo!
you'z
Yup
zillion

Appendix E: Low-modality samples

Approximately two-thirds of the Web sites include text that is humourous, playful, sardonic, make-believe. This table illustrates samples of such discourse from 70 such sites. Underlining indicates hyperlinked text.

Participant	Age	Text sample
a-aa	20 - 24	several sardonic points throughout his site, such as the index page "anti-counter" that presents random five-digit numbers, used with the phrase, "[Counter here] people have been harmed due to misuse of this page."
a-ka	20 - 24	among the most thoroughly playful, sardonic, and sometimes bitter sites in the sample; much of the index page discusses "persons or items [which] really twitch my uterus and blow my mind"; a section of several pages devoted to "The Church of Styrofoam," "[y]our one-stop convenience spot for spiritual enlightenment!"
a-kal	25 - 34	explaining her hobby: "I began collecting tsubas in self defense (bad pun fully intended)."
a-ma	20 - 24	some self-effacing and sarcastic comments throughout, such as the annotation for a photo of herself: "Hurry! Throw some pig's blood!"
a-mar	20 - 24	caption for an animated graphic, positioned right beneath his name, of a muscle-man flexing his chest muscles: "(OK, this is not really me.....)"
b-cb	25 - 34	a modified photograph of two sculptured Mayan heads, in which thought bubbles have been graphically inserted to show the two speaking to each other: "Another excellent adventure!" "You always say that."
b-jb	20 - 24	maintains a posed, exaggerated identity of "Miss Joanna" on her site about hosting cocktail parties; annotation of an internal link to a page about TV: "A recovering TV addict, indeed. Miss Joanna still indulges this vice, so don't phone during the X-Files."
b-jbo	25 - 34	describing their infant daughter, only a few months old at the time: "Apparently her mom's shopping genes are very dominant."

b-kcb	35 - 44	offers a diploma to "Honorary Newfies," who must fulfill three requirements, the third of which is described as follows: The final act is to 'down a shot of Newfoundland Screech' and repeat after us: 'Long may your big jib draw.' (Unfortunately, here we can't help you we haven't found a way to FTP a bottle of Screech, yet but the testing is going well, hic ... [ellipsis in original; the passage continues without closing the parenthesis]
b-lb	25 - 34	on a site of a family who run dog kennels, the dogs are referred to variously as "a large black and tan thing glued to your side," "large hairy black creatures," and the "rulers of our existence"
b-to	25 - 34	title of their site, referring to the aliases of the husband and wife respectively: "Badger 3/4 and Dreamer2!" [the "2" is an exponential power]
c-amc	20 - 24	explaining emoticons to the uninitiated: And where, one might ask, would you ever need an electronic smile? Why, in e-mail, of course. The very word conjures images of bespectacled geeks and teenage delinquent hackers and rich techno-wizard tycoons (Bill! Hello!)....
c-jc	20 - 24	some well-worked spoofs of professional discourse, including a 10-amendment "Beer Bill of Rights" and a page of several invented news stories featuring beer companies and beer-related issues
d-ad	20 - 24	index page marquee referring to photo of her and her boyfriend: "Aren't Will and I just adorable? :-)"
d-bdd	20 - 24	main heading on index page reads, "Are you wearing the correct pants?"

d-cad	20 - 24	entire site accessible through a fill-in form on the index page, which directs visitors to the various site pages depending on their choices from among these three categories: Sex O Male ⊙ Female O Yes O No Occupation: ⊙ President of the United States O Student O Vice President O Cult Member School Attending: ⊙Mills College O Oxford
d-cd	20 - 24	title and subtitle of a page listing various nick-knacks: Stuff Courtney will be happy to let you buy her This was for Christmas, but what the heck! I'll just make the amendments and you can buy me the stuff I didn't get!
d-dnp	35 - 44	main page includes profiles of the family members and to two family pets, who are quoted as saying "Hi" to everyone: "Arf! Arf!" "Erf! Erf!"
d-h	25 - 34	opens her innocuous site with the warning: **Beware... you're entering...** ***Hilly's place***
d-md	35 - 44	a marquee scrolling across the screen bottom reading, "oOoOoOoO"
d-mdr	25 - 34	labels milestones in the family's history in terms of computer upgrades: for example, the 1995 birth of the first child is labeled Rel. 2.0, or Killoran* Family 95, with a whoppee 8 days advantage on Microsoft Windows 95 * *Killoran* is substituted for the family surname
d-n	25 - 34	a snappy personal profile that ends with her increasing participation with computer applications: "I'll be a geek before you know it. For now, let it suffice to say, I'm a geek in training."

d-nd	25 - 34	introducing a link to her section of family photographs from the 1970s: They're also proof that fashions come, go, and come back! (No, I'm not about to run out and buy bellbottoms and polyester again, thank you very much.)
d-rd	45 - 64	profiles his four cats from their own point of view, using the first person pronouns; the marquee scrolling along the screen bottom reads "Mouse Mouse Mouse"
d-rdp	45 - 64	lists the interests of all family members, including a daughter whose interests are "BOYS!, piano, soccer, rap music"; and the "interests" of the family dog, which are "barking, sleeping, food!" the dog is also provided with a hyperlink, labeled "Sparky's favorite page."
d-td	20 - 24	lists of thanks to people variously affiliated with a computer group and of hellos to acquaintances, lists which includes such annotations as "what? Didn't You like fries up your nose while sleeping?!"
e-ke	25 - 34	in a brief description of his background, he begins, "Life before college was spent in the Birthplace of American Liberty (yes, sometimes the irony could be a bit much). . . ."
f-fr	35 - 44	an entire site presented from the first-person point of view of the family's pet iguana; main feature of the site is an "iguana-limerick generating machine" which "will churn out a limerick especially for that special green thing in your life"
f-tf	25 - 34	a hyperlinked line at the bottom of his homepage: "Click here to send comments, suggestions, offers, flames, love letters, ads, jokes, ..."
g-hg	20 - 24	an e-mail form in which the options for the subject line are: This page has it all! This page is OK. This page needs some SERIOUS help. Other

g-kgi	35 - 44	uses himself and his experiences and attitudes as a source of humour and self-effacing comments throughout the site; for example, at the end of a page which offers a fill-in form that calculates and returns one's animal sign in the Chinese zodiac: All this information was gleaned from a placemat at a Chinese restaurant, so you *know* it's accurate! Thanks to *Hunan Wok* in Dallas for having this information available to catch soup spills. When in Dallas, try their lunch buffet!
g-kgl	< 15	annotates a homepage link to his science project as follows: Still don't know a thing about atoms? You know, those really little particles? Click here to read my Atoms Science Report!
g-kgo	15 - 19	among the wittiest and most playful sites in this study; introducing a change made to the "bathroom" location in her site (which is based on various rooms of a building): Some of you who have visited the Haus before may have noticed that there used to be a bathroom where this arcade is now. However, after exhaustive market research, we decided that people needed to play funky bitch-ass shagadelic Java and Shockwave games in an area with lots of flashing lights with more urgency than pee. Besides, the Male Room guys were taking some female visitors into the Loo and doing the horizontal tango, which I didn't exactly approve of.
g-ncg	20 - 24	after posting a message from a friend criticizing the movie reviews offered on his site, he writes, Upon reading some of my reviews and realizing how wrong Nate [the friend] is, please send him hate mail [. . .] Also, You may want to click here incessantly to add numbers to Nate's Home Page counter. [these links actually bring surfers to another page on his site that begins, "Just kidding."]
h-dgr	25 - 34	index page identifies author by the title "Reigning deity" and the first paragraph begins, "Blah blah blah usual disclaimers: this page is (perpetually) **under construction**."
h-eh	20 - 24	a solicitation for e-mail: "If you are bored enough to come here, then you might be bored enough to write me, so go ahead."

h-s	25 - 34	on one of her sites, she offers a "cyber-divorce" service: Click here if you need to cyber-divorce your husband. OR if you know of someone that you would like to cyber-divorce their husband. Not sure if you need their permission, I really didn't think about THAT. Ah, what the hell. Who cares??? They might even thank you for it!!!! much of her other site revolves around the theme of the s'mores snack.
i-li	15 - 19	a large, informative site permeated with frequent humourous interjections, such as, "I feel a Barney song coming on . . . I think I'll stopSLAP! Okay, I feel better." annotation of a link on a page featuring useful on-line graphic resources: Paint Shop Pro is a *great* graphics program that you can download for a trial period. All my graphics are done with PSP. But don't let that turn you against it . . .
j-s	15 - 19	after revealing that she also speaks Finnish: "And because I'm nice *snicker* I won't cuss you out in Finnish!"
k-ck	15 - 19	a section of his site devoted, for no apparent reason, to an eclectic assortment of things related to the word *Brisk*
k-lk	45 - 64	several animated comments punctuate her long description of a trip to England and Israel, such as: Next and last stop was Buckingham Palace. The flag indicated that the Queen was in residence but actually--can you believe the temerity?--she didn't show her face!!!!! .
k-mr	20 - 24	most of the site, describing eight female Princeton University roommates, is lighthearted, such as the description of one of the eight roommates: "Her tongue can touch her nose, and she likes her pizza cheeseless with extra sauce."
l-ajl	15 - 19	accompanying the links to four friends' sites, perhaps as an inside joke, are playful names such as "Futty Dutty Butty," "Idy Bidy Willie," and "Itzy Bitzy Fritzy"
l-bl	25 - 34	one of the items in a list under the heading "Some Information About Me!": "If someone was to give me a million dollars, it would not hurt my feelings."

l-jl	45 - 64	annotating his photo from his 1955 yearbook: (That's Jim in the left column, second from top. He's really not mad at anyone. That's what four years of Mechanical Engineering study does to you.)
m-lm	25 - 34	in large bold font at top of "The Kids Page," a page of links for her nieces: "No one over 12 to enter!!! Unless your parents have to type for you!"
m-rm	25 - 34	introducing a page about his hobbies: "In my spare time (I get alot [sic] of it considering I'm finishing my Ph.D., married, and have a son in his terrible twos.)"
n-tn	25 - 34	an internal link described as "Minnesota State Bird," which leads to a graphic of a mosquito
o-so	20 - 24	on a short page introducing herself, she describes the evening of her birth: My parents had watched Star Trek that evening while eating some salmon fillets. This is remarkable only because, in adulthood, I have discovered that I love both the old and new incarnations of Star Trek, and detest salmon (and all other fish) with all of my being.
p-jp	20 - 24	a hard-edged sarcasm throughout, such as this excerpt of a description of himself: Also Known As: Terminator, Termie, Mr. Asshole, or That dolt in the corner Measurements: 6'3"tall, 195 lbs, tends to wear black boots a lot solicits e-mail concerning "comments, complaints, offers for sex (good-looking women only need apply), or suggestions."
p-kp	15 - 19	a friendly sassy tone throughout, such as her introduction to a list of music links: "If you see a name that catches your little peepers, go ahead and click on it."
p-map	20 - 24	introducing "The Big Brother Page," which gleans information from the client computer and displays it to the surfer: "Here at The Big Brother Page, we believe in finding out all we can about our 'visitors'."
r-gj	25 - 34	a site full of humourous definitions and bizarre mathematical problems, such as: the definition of "umpteen": "47,012" the definition of "a lot": "265,503.12"

r-ir	25 - 34	elaborate drinking game rules cued by predictable dialogue and plot events in Japanese animation shows; her rendition of the plot of the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* includes frequent sardonic parenthetical comments, such as in the sentence "Eventually Dr. Caligari does return, and is bummed to see Cesare dead (the only one, apparently. Except me)."
s-as	25 - 34	titles his site the "World Wide Scam! Site"
s-e	20 - 24	annotating a link to the "Internet Directory": "I'm in it, so how bad could it be??"
s-es	15 - 19	a 6 x 4 rectangle of 24 arrows, each hyperlinked to a different mystery site
s-gs	45 - 64	an internal link: "More pictures of me (4/96) than anyone could want to look at!"
s-js	25 - 34	describing the seven-step process of making scotch whisky. Step #3 reads, in part, "Mix the gist with hot water and cook it while saying 777 times: ***'Double, double, toil and trouble,*** ***Fire burn and cauldron bubble'***
s-jsb	20 - 24	after introducing the car she hopes to buy after college, and its cost: "Mom, Dad, you reading this?"
s-s	25 - 34	much of site experiments with playful content and formats, such as an off-site link that first leads surfers to an intervening on-site page with a Beavis and Butthead graphic, which in turn leads surfers to their destination; one page entirely in pig latin, another an Ebonic rendition of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Bells*, and yet another a rendition of the same poem in which most nouns, verbs, and adjectives are replaced by the word *blah*
t-jst	25 - 34	a page in which their infant daughter is presented in the first person pronoun, describing such developments as her "Groundbreaking Discoveries": I like cows, dogs, ducks, and pigs (people are ok, but, you know ...) Bugs taste terrible Paper has no taste Tub and toilet water splashes the same [no end punctuation in original]

v-j	25 - 34	after describing herself: "Geeez..I'm starting to sound like one of those Playboy centerfolds. Too bad I don't look like one of them! :)"
w-a	35 - 44	a page of links titled "the good, the bad and the just plain weird"
w-jw	15 - 19	introducing a link to a David Letterman site: LETTERMAN **IS** THE MAN!!! Sorry, had to get that out. Anyway, you can visit Dave on the net now. Just click on his pretty little face. [a graphic of David Letterman follows.]
w-kw	35 - 44	describing the activities of a group of poets: **What we do** • organize & host native tongue • art, man, art • poetry, man, poetry • starve, man, starve **Why we do it** • because we love you • because we can't afford therapy
w-kpw	35 - 44	a page for each of their two pets, presented from the pets' point of view using the first person pronoun
w-pw	45 - 64	on the index page of the site of a middle-aged woman, an internal hyperlink described as "What I could look like with enough money"; the link leads to a graphic of a buxom young blond in a bikini
w-tw	< 15	"I graduated from 8th grade this year so you're more than welcome to send me $ome money! :-D"
y-gy	15 - 19	a site by a pair of self-proclaimed "slackers" who post weekly "rants," loud and full of profanity, by themselves and others; e-mail solicitation reads, "Questions, comments, suggestions, random acts of senseless stupidity, or too much time on your hands? E-mail [. . . .]"

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