THE GILDED MASKS OF DIGITAL RHETORIC: SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EVOLVING PARALINGUISTIC ELEMENTS IN WEB COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

THE GILDED MASKS OF DIGITAL RHETORIC: SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EVOLVING PARALINGUISTIC ELEMENTS IN ONLINE COMPOSITION

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Over the past few years it has become apparent to educators that the traditional focal points of composition are being necessarily shifted, outside of the classroom, because of the rhetorical spaces made available by the Internet. In the wake of the Web 2.0 revolution, when social networking and the production of web texts are flourishing, it's more important than ever for educators to take note of the changes occurring in discursive habits and of the ability of students to respond to those changes in a way that will allow them to participate in and shape the dialogue. In undertaking a study of some of the most academically weak but rhetorically strong elements of online composition, emoticons, I argue that the use of these symbols as gestural representations are one indication of a collective attempt to remove composition from the institution of education. Furthermore, I believe that proficiency with content production and interpersonal communication on the web is a survival skill, emerging as a result of what economists and scholars call the "information economy," and that using

emoticons to augment linguistic communication is a subset of that development. As a result of the division between academic composition and web composition, the forms and styles of online writing are left to evolve unguided by education and have important implications, not just for pedagogy, but for the social constructs which govern the ways we use language to create and disseminate information. The manner in which educators succeed or fail to address changes in composition will have a direct bearing on how students identify themselves as writers, how they evaluate content, and with what authority they speak online.

INTRODUCTION

Because the mask is your face, the face is a mask, so I'm thinking of the face as a mask because of the way I see faces is coming from an African vision of the mask which is the thing we carry around with us, it is our presentation, it's our front, it's our face.

—Faith Ringgold

About a year ago, I became intrigued by the strong resemblance borne by the emoticons of web composition to the gilded Dionysian masks used for Ancient Greek Theater and Japanese Noh Theater. The masks used in theatrical performances served several functions: not only did they help the audience to identify class and gender differences between actors, but they amplified the actor's voice and served as a means to convey tone and feeling across the yards of space between the speaker and hearer. It occurred to me that the resemblance between emoticons and those theater masks extended beyond aesthetics and that there might be a rhetorical value to emoticons that hadn't yet been fully explored. I wondered if there wasn't something more to emoticon use than lazy text shortcuts and if they, in fact, possessed a capacity for pathetic appeal where textual language sometimes fell short of expressing sentiment. Maybe emoticons, I thought, have the ability to head off the misunderstanding that seems to be such a frequently occurring problem with interpersonal communication online.

This revelation came on the heels of two weeks spent intimately with a book by Jaron Lanier, called *You are not a Gadget,* in which he expressed

concern about how a user's identity and authority are affected, not just by the anonymity of online composition and communication, but by the phenomenological swell of "crowd wisdom" made possible by the digital collectivism inherent to the Web (138-42). His primary concern, which became mine as well, was that the most accessible content on the Internet is not necessarily the most credible and, as a result of that, people must be able to approach web content more critically than the peer-reviewed content they traditionally access in an educational institution. The language that evolves out of online communication, including emoticons and, similarly, texting language (acronyms like LOL or "actorisks" like *squeals*), appears to reflect Lanier's concern that full inclusion in the dialogue is, in fact, reducing the conversation to the lowest common denominator (55-57).

The problem I saw in reconciling these two things—the rhetorical value of online linguistics with their potential to diminish the dialogue to "average"—was that educators weren't paying the *right* kind of attention to composition outside of the classroom. Richard Webster writes, "Never have so many typed with so little regard to their messages, content, and intentions." As I'll discuss in Chapter 2, Webster, a specialist in Online Education and Instructional Technology, is not alone in his perception of much web composition as thoughtless, reductive, or downright frightening. Many educators are quick to condemn the language of technology as scary or boring, marginalizing it to make room for the print texts of tradition. Their aversion isn't altogether unwarranted.

In 2008, a PEW Internet study on teens and writing reported that 40 percent of teenagers have used texting language in their academic writing and that more than 60 percent intentionally mispunctuate or use informal text in their school assignments (Smith “Grammar in the Digital Age”). One in four of those studied admitted to having used emoticons in their academic writing. Instances like these are reasonably infuriating to educators, whose instinct may be to censure or even rail against what research analyst Amanda Lenhart calls a “new hieroglyphics” of online linguistics. However, because, as I will detail further in Chapter 2, online composition is quickly becoming the preferred means of communication for most Americans, banning these elements from academic writing *without further attention* can’t be the answer to the problem of a reduced dialogue, unless educators want to push composition out of the academy and deeper into the electronic environment toward which, as will be discussed further in the following chapter, it already appears to be migrating. Rather, a better solution is for academics to take a closer look at the elements of online composition and attempt to identify the social contracts that bore them in order to adjust their pedagogy accordingly.

Laura Gurak describes the aim of this academic attention to technology and composition as “cyberliteracy.” Cyberliteracy entails much more than mastery of computer skills. This particular literacy requires an understanding of the implications of Computer mediated communication (CMC) for social/cultural relationships. By 2012, people have become so inundated with electronic communication that they may not necessarily be conscious of the processes that

they go through in communicating online or be aware of how that technology and those processes affect them. The presence of those technologies, though, is so strong that it's nearly impossible for the daily barrage of data, and the interfaces through which they're disseminated and parsed, not to inform attitudes and behaviors. Like Lanier, Gurak's cyberliteracy attempts to prepare students for critical evaluation of content and to impart, to them, the wherewithal to understand the real implications of the language they use in online writing. My addition to this theory is that it should call for instruction in determining what linguistic and paralinguistic elements are appropriate for various rhetorical situations.

My initial instinct—that there is a deeper discursive value in the seemingly immature implementation of emoticons and texting language—is rooted in a firm belief that delivery and style are as important to a rhetorical situation as invention. As I'll be discussing in the next chapter, those particular linguistic elements are a means of deploying gesture in a rhetorical space where there are no physical bodies present, which affords them a prominent location in online delivery. Since emoticons will be my vehicle into many of these larger social and academic issues—the relationships between online composition, delivery, and the academy—I'll begin this study with a short exploration of the function of emoticons and texting language as surrogate gestures, looking specifically at their connection to the changing role of delivery in composition studies.

CHAPTER ONE: CYBERLITERACY AND PARALINGUISTIC CUES IN ONLINE COMPOSITON

It's a rather rude gesture, but at least it's clear what you mean.

—Katharine Hepburn

At the center of Gurak's "cyberliteracy" is a theory about electronic communication, developed by Walter Ong, called "second orality." Second orality, simply put, is the idea that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is a new medium between written and spoken language, which contains elements of conversation. It's helpful to see the special literacy of CMC as a midway point between print and oral literacy. Like oral speech, Ong says, electronic communication is "aggregative," "empathetic and participatory," "redundant," and "situational" (qtd. in Gurak 14). He notes that it is "additive rather than subordinative," taking on form and style as sentences are built on top of and in response to one another (Ong 36-37). Like oral conversation, electronic composition and communication are more casual, more fluid, and more immediate than print. As Ong puts it, this type of communication is "close to the human life world" (42, 80). At a glance, this theory appears to be stating the obvious but, according to Ong and Gurak, it's important to give attention to the conversational nature of online composition in order to see how drastically it differs from either of its contributing literacies.

Computers—like the stone and paper record keeping devices before them—speed up the travel of information (Gurak 17, 30-31), thus shortening,

even more, the informational thoroughfare between two communicating bodies. If word-of-mouth were comparable to walking, letter-writing to bicycling, and news printing and television to automobile travel, then electronic communication would be comparable only to things found in science fiction: warp speed space ship travel, deploying one's own apparition, or having Scotty beam us up. The most commonly used interfaces—email hosts, social networking sites or chatting programs—are designed for quick communication. Those interfaces function on immediacy. They work quickly and encourage the user to keep pace. A person chatting, for instance, doesn't necessarily have the luxury of sitting down for a few hours to scribble and erase, write and edit, until they have a polished product because electronic communication often requires more prompt attention, rendering the dialogue conversational. Importantly, neither are those interfaces intended for those slower composing processes. Furthermore, many users are carrying out several different processes simultaneously during their online time. A 2004 PEW Internet study reports that, of the 53 million Americans using Instant Messaging (IM), 61% are doing something else on their computer at least some of the time while IMing and 32% of those say they multi-task every time they're using IM (Lenhart "How Americans"). The speed of online composition, though a far cry from the composing process many educators encountered in their own schooling experiences, is supportive of the pedagogical theories currently informing teaching practice.

According to Ann E. Berthoff, in "Recognition, Representation, and Revision," the only way to make sense of the mechanical processes of writing—

thinking about what to say, removing unnecessary words, making sure that each sentence relates to the thesis—is to wallow in the actual experience of writing, rather than focusing on the end goal (546). A unique benefit of composition in the electronic environment is that it allows the writer to attend primarily to his experience with the writing, rather than to the correctness of the language in pursuit of the "right" usage. Within many of the electronic interfaces of the Web, composition is not linear, but happens all at once, and the rules-oriented systematization of current-traditional rhetoric and process pedagogy is all but nullified by the attention of users to immediacy and their subsequent creation of new social contracts governing language.

What is so different about online composition that makes it so appealing and widely adopted to this generation? One of the key differences between academic writing and online writing, is that, operating in the conversational context of second orality, online writing incorporates into its language a system of hieroglyphs (emoticons) and text shortcuts (acronyms and "actorisking") to indicate gesture. Lenhart, Lewis and Rainie, in PEW Internet and American Life Project's 2008 report, "Teenage Life Online: The Rise of Instant-Message Generation and the Internet's Impact on Friendships and Family Relationships," identifies these linguistic elements by their functions in text-interpretation and augmentation:

> Among the many striking things about teen's [sic] use of the Internet is the way they have adapted instant messaging technologies to their own purposes. The majority of teenagers have

> embraced instant messaging in a way that adults have not, and many use it as a way to conduct [the] most mundane as well as the most emotionally fraught and important conversations of their daily lives. They have invented a new hieroglyphics of emoticons to add context and meaning to their messages and a growing list of abbreviations to help them speed their way through multiple, simultaneous online conversations. (10)

Sprouting from the intersection of Ong's "second orality" and Berthoff's "allatonceness," it seems like Web composition and the demand for cyberliteracy would have received more attentive efforts from the academic community. While, as will become more apparent in the next chapter, academic attention isn't fixated on these particular rhetorical situations or devices, there has been a resurgence, over the last decade, of academic attention to the gestures that those devices intend to mimic.

Adam Kendon suggests that one of the reasons that there is such an interest is that, beginning in the eighteenth century, scholarship opened up the possibility that language was initially predicated on gesture. Spoken language, some scholars argue, could have leaned primarily on gesture, even wholly consisted of it (7). If, like Lenhart, Lewis, and Rainie suppose, society is in the process of forming a new language around Internet communications, and that language is propped up by gestural elements, then emoticons and texting language could be the underpinnings for important changes in the way we communicate.

Kendon, in *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* describes how language and gesture can be seen as components of the same process. Those components, each necessary to the functionality of the other, are used in accordance toward the enhancement of understanding (3). How naturally—that is, how subconsciously—gestures are performed during a communication varies with each rhetorical situation. Gesture is often manifested in body language, something that is typically thought to be unconscious or unintentional. Kendon describes how gestures, in this context, offer nonverbal clues about ethos:

> [W]henever people are co-present to one another they cannot avoid providing information to one another about their intentions and involvements, about their status as social beings and about their own individual character, and so may be said to 'give off' information, people often engage in action that is regarded as explicitly designed for the provision of information and for which they are normally held responsible. (7)

The deployment of gesture through the use of emoticons and texting language is almost invariably more deliberate than many of the gestures involved in a face-to-face interaction, but the ethical cues are not diminished by that intention. In using an emoticon, for instance, a person has to make the conscious decision to display facial expression to his audience, so there is intention, though the intention may be to add an element of artificial spontaneity or naturalness, thus enhancing ethos. Kendon uses a bit of history to stress the importance of spontaneously *appearing* gesture to rhetorical savvy. Ancient Greeks and

Romans, he says, thought gesture was a pathetically powerful tool that the rhetor had to refine in order to best persuade (17). Aristotle, who accused gesture of clouding “real” meaning, was countered by Cicero’s assertion that gesture is important to communicating the underlying sentiment of the message, though it should be polished in a very different way than theatrical gesture. It should not, he says, replace words but supplement them and should be contained within the thought to which they relate without extending beyond it (19). In the context of cyberliteracy, these restrictions may mean that if, for example, a smiley face isn’t well placed, if it comes after the whole paragraph instead of just after the piece of language it’s intended to modify, it becomes ineffective.

Perhaps the most oft-visited classical authority on gesture is Quintilian who, in *Institutio Oratoria*, describes how voice and movement are two equally important components of delivery, though gesture plays a supportive role to voice. In online composition, the gestural elements of emoticons, acronyms and actorisks (asterisk-bookended gestures, like *shrugs*) may have to account for both. “Gestus” refers not only to body movements, but to the nuances of the face. The “glance” is the most essential of the gestures, drawing meaning with the eyebrows and, according to Quintilian, the nostrils. He distinguishes between “natural gestures” and gestures that are designed to “show” an imaginary object, only crediting the former with importance to oratory (Kendon 19). These “natural” gestures “should be adapted rather to [the orator’s] thought than to his actual words” (Quintilian XI: 89) and should avoid looking contrived, giving the illusion of spontaneity.

Though the obvious and unavoidable intentionality of gesture deployed in online composition may appear to push back against the desirable quality of spontaneity, it doesn't fit as awkwardly into Quintilian's model as one might think. Here's an example: my friend, Maloree, has a habit of guilt-tripping me into adhering strictly to a schedule of Tuesday night dates by replacing "are we hanging out tonight?" with the infinitely more loaded "are we going to be friends tonight?" Her emotional coercion is blatant—we can smell our own—and my impulse is to greet it with sarcasm. Occasionally, when I try to dodge the discomfort—as is my custom—of saying "no," I'll respond with "We're friends? ☺" or something like it, always augmented with a smiley face, pointedly offering the illusion of spontaneous body language. If I were speaking to her in my living room, the immediacy of an actual smile would hopefully take the sting out of the rejection. However, without the presence of two physical bodies, if I want the same kind of reaction, I deliberately account for that facial expression by using an emoticon.

One of the things I've tried to demonstrate, in my communication with Maloree, is the "natural" dual occurrence of two things that do not appear naturally connected: negative speech and positive body language—what adds up to something like sarcasm, joking, or well-meant criticism. To repurpose Berthoff's phrase, I have captured the "allatonceness" of my rhetorical situation. Through this use of a "smiley face," which provides the illusion of spontaneous body language, I have conveyed an entirely different meaning than if I had written something like "We're friends? I'm smiling as I write that," which would

likely be perceived as contrived or insincere. Certainly my meaning is different than if I forewent any indication of lighthearted gesture at all—an unfortunate mistake that would land me, at best, in the dog house for a couple of days and, at worst, without a date for next Tuesday night.

The same presence of intention can be assumed of most instances of emoticon or texting language usage, since it's unlikely that someone would subconsciously use an emoticon or accidentally type "LOL." Physical gestures—that is, gestures made in face-to-face interactions—aren't governed by the same rigid, sequential code as either written or spoken language, which tends to require more conscientiousness as they're deployed (Kendon 2-3). Online, though gesture is more intentional, the social contract under which it operates allows it to act as a spontaneous, organically occurring thing. So, for the purposes of this exploration, though they require more intention than physical gestures, instances of electronic gesture will be regarded as functioning in the same capacity as the "spontaneous" body language of face-to-face communication. Whether these gestural simulacra are used in contrast to or in union with speech will vary with each use.

Where supplementing textual language with electronic gestures has the potential to reduce misunderstanding, the use of the wrong gesture in online communication has the capacity to amplify the misunderstanding that's already such a risk in the electronic environment. Using emoticons effectively is not as easy as it may seem and Gurak's cyberliteracy may not be particularly natural for a speaker to achieve proficiency in, even if the "gesture" is contained within the

thought. It's too simple to assume that, as long as an emoticon doesn't stand alone, as long as it is qualified with a statement, it serves a rhetorically effective function as gesture. A poorly placed emoticon can create such ambiguity as to completely lose an audience. Comedian Mitch Marzoni offers an example:

> I was talking to a friend via text the other day and she was having boy problems. I offered an ear (err, eye, as the case may be) and small bits of advice […] and at the end, she thanked me for listening […] and I said "Hey, I'm here to help ;)." I put the ";)" in bold so it would be obvious. That's a wink. Not a smile. I meant to smile. As in "Hey! Be happy," but instead…a wink. Which says "I'm here to help…(or failing to do that, to grope you inappropriately)."

If gestures are best intended to represent the thought process that isn't being represented by the actual language (Quintilian XI: 89), and the gesture used alongside the language seems to contradict that language, then the resulting ambiguity can be disturbingly confusing: Marzoni's supportive "I'm here to help," in combination with a suggestive winky face creates a seemingly predatory rhetorical situation.

Failures like Marzoni's can be humorous, but other erroneous uses or misplacements of emoticons can have more damaging impacts. Certainly, a part of "cyberliteracy" is being able to identify the proper environments for gestural simulacra. It would not be appropriate to use an emoticon, which is intended to establish an attitude or emotion, in a professional, pure-data-based scenario. In fact, emoticon usage has become a quick screening process for disqualifying

applications (Walia) and is understandably unwelcome in an academic setting where educators who grew up without the presence of emoticons in composition are struggling to simply figure out what to do with those newer linguistic elements.

It seems unusual that, in the electronic environment, where physical bodies aren't observably present, gesture would have such a central role in the communication process. Yet, the *lingua franca* of the Internet inarguably embraces gesture symbols like emoticons and acronyms. But why? One reason may be that, as Kendon posits, gesture has been tossed around by scholarship as the discursive element with the least regional restrictions and variation. "There are grounds," says Kendon, "[for] thinking there are aspects of gestural communication that are universal" (327). Though cultures vary to some degree in their use of gesture, many of those variances are likely due to the differences between the linguistics on which they're based (Kendon 326-48); but many gestures, "natural gestures" like the facial expression denoted by an emoticon or the gesticulation symbols of an actorisk are more "universal" (327).

A more biased speculation as to why gesture symbols have such a prominent role in online composition is that, with scholarly focus on invention and arrangement, writers left to tinker, unguided, with the idea of delivery have now had enough time to create their own theory and practice of delivery, though they may be unaware of it. It's possible that—since delivery is often either separated from invention by the division of Communications and English courses or marginalized by the greater attention of these courses to language—society has

naturally found a way to reconcile delivery with the other four canons by re-marrying gesture to language. If that is true, then the fact that the Internet is the yet uncultivated sanctuary where this marriage took place has important implications for composition instruction and the institution of education. Assuming that educators don't address this need for examining language and gesture in tandem, they run the risk of driving composition further from the classroom and deeper into the wilds of the Internet, where the proverbial People seem to be turning for new authority.

In order to best adapt to social demands, composition studies should be asking what exactly this new literacy is, how it functions to create social relationships, what it says about changing values, and how it can best be used to help students refine the rhetorical skills that will empower them. For that exploration to occur, the second orality of online composition must be examined to see where the components of print literacy and oral literacy intersect and where they diverge—logically, beginning with the gesture (and, by proxy, the reverence for delivery) represented by emoticons and texting language.

CHAPTER TWO: LIBERATING COMPOSITION

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember sometimes that nothing worth knowing can be taught.

—Oscar Wilde

A benefit of face-to-face communication is that physical cues, particularly when used in tandem with verbal language, add meaning to the messages people convey. Body language allows people to read between the proverbial lines; a speaker's control over those nonverbal signals has tremendous potential to act as the effective mortar that glues together any structurally sound communication. While the psychological processes behind an emotion are not observable to an audience, studies of facial expression within psychology contend that the face is the most authoritative physical indicator of those processes (Carerra, Casado, and Fernandez-Dolz 122-24). While words aren't always as transparent as we'd like, the expression on a speaker's face—the movements of their eyebrows, lips and eyes, within or between their verbal cues—tends to reveal sentiment, even belie sentiment, especially where it contradicts spoken words. The act of processing these facial expressions affords the listener a sort of communicative metal-detector that allows him access to information below the surface, particularly when (as is often the case) the expressions are not consciously made by the speaker. As a tool for the speaker, intentional facial expressions can act as pathetic appeals, giving the listener a controlled glimpse into the emotions behind the speech. That rhetorical move is

particularly valuable because, since so many facial expressions are unintentional, the listener may be inclined to assume that the expressions deliberately made are actually unintentional and therefore more legitimate. “Each basic emotion is a coherent pattern of facial behavior, experience, physiology and instrumental actions” (125). If the facial patterns which are inherent to emotion make the listener feel a certain way, the speaker has succeeded in making a pathetic appeal. If those facial expressions are received by a listener as unintentional *and* the pathetic appeal has already been made, then the speaker has succeeded in further building his ethos.

Andersen cites Psychologist Albert Mehrabian’s suggestion that no more than seven percent of communication occurs through the words people use. Rather, the bulk of any particular message is received through the paralinguistic cues—body language and tone of voice—observed of the speaker by the listener (43). Within this theory, communicative “tells” like physical gestures and the sound of the speaker’s voice become rhetorical must-haves. If Mehrabian is correct and 93 percent of communication takes place somewhere between the words, then what is to be done with a medium like the Internet that seems to hinge entirely on written word? If facial expressions, body language, and tone account for so much of a rhetorical appeal, how can they be reborn into an electronic environment?

It would be difficult to argue that social presence is not somehow affected by the insertion of a machine between two communicating bodies. However, whether these nonverbal cues are diminished by an electronic medium is

debatable. In Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), things—like physical space, bodily gestures, and underlying sentiment (like sarcasm)—that are conveyed through tone tend to be marginalized by an environment that privileges written language over spoken language. D'Addario and Walthers quote Godin, who describes the failure of CMC, pre-emoticon, to convey the subtleties of conversation: "until the advent of the smiley, otherwise known as the emoticon, individuals using electronic communication had no way to indicate the subtle mood changes. They couldn't tell jokes, use irony, slip in a pun or become bitingly sarcastic" (326). Godin's supposition is certainly a big generalization but he's correct in noting that many of the nuances of verbal communication are easily lost in an electronic environment, nonetheless.

Delivery concerns itself with the extralingual elements of communication described by Mehrabian, Carerra et al., and D'Addario et al.—particularly with gesture (Sonkowsky 256-57). That particular canon, unlike its more popular cousin invention, deals in *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said and it does this by employing the rhetorical appeal of pathos since, as Sonkowsky points out, "Aristotle fixed delivery as an aspect of rhetoric which is directly linked to emotions" (266).

Emoticons, in mimicking facial expression, act as gestures in online communication, as do texting language by mimicking physical body language and, often times, tone. Therefore their function is most appropriately located in the rhetorical canon of delivery as rhetorical tools for pathetic appeal. The integration of emoticons, along with other gesture signifiers, is a needed step in

the evolution of writing: within the anonymity of the electronic environment, emoticons may be a remedy to ensuing misunderstanding (Fogg 7-9). The kinds of expression represented by these gestural representations primarily reflect the kinds of instantaneous, seemingly organic facial expressions that Quintilian suggested should be "adapted to [a speaker's] thought" (XI: 89). Like gesture, the rhetorical worth of emoticons is primarily pathetic. These symbols modify written language by demonstrating emotion, physical movement or contact, and tone, allowing the reader to garner a deeper understanding of the sentiment behind a message. The ability of emoticons to ameliorate ambiguously written language is particularly valuable in places, like CMC, where social presence is diminished or elbowed out entirely. By mimicking facial expression, users can clarify intention without bumbling around, attempting to qualify their written language with more written language. If Ong's "second orality," as we saw in the previous chapter, dominates the electronic environment, combining the most distinctive characteristics of oral literacy with those of print literacy, then emoticons and texting language seem to be the poster children for Team Orality. Unfortunately, though, if these symbols have arisen naturally to meet the needs of "cyberliteracy," they may have done so without instruction or even involvement from academia, where delivery is near the bottom of a seemingly arbitrary ranking of the rhetorical canons. According to Ong,

> Rhetoric itself gradually but inevitably migrated from the oral to the chirographic world. From classic antiquity, the verbal skills learned in rhetoric were put to use not only in oratory, but also in writing. By

> the sixteenth century, rhetoric textbooks were commonly omitting from the traditional five parts of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) the fourth part, memory, which was not applicable to writing. They were also minimizing the last part, delivery. By and large, they made these changes with specious explanations or no explanations at all. Today, when curricula list rhetoric as a subject, it simply means the study of how to write effectively. (113)

The study of oratory was carried by universities through the middle ages and into 19th century liberal arts colleges; it was considered a prestigious, "lawyerly" skill that was necessary to success, particularly if the learner wanted to pursue a role in higher society (Ostrander 104). Participation in public discourse—obtaining a role in the decision-making culture—hinged on the ability to command an audience. "Politicking" wasn't limited to composition—though newsprint was still a popular means of persuasion—and anyone from a preacher to a potential sheriff knew the centrality of delivery in their campaign.

In the late nineteenth-century, as a perceived literacy crisis sparked assessment practices that could be more consistently reviewed, oration became all but obsolete in English classrooms where instructors felt compelled to locate rhetorical studies in the examination and production of print texts. As oration was sidelined by attention to print literacy, delivery, which primarily deals with the extralinguistic elements of oration rather than in words, became less prominent in the English departments of universities. Perhaps because of the

compartmentalization of English and communications studies, or perhaps because of the sociolinguistic shift from oral to print literacy, delivery, along with memory, has been marginalized by a tradition of attention to the other three rhetorical canons. Winifred Bryan Horner discusses, in his introduction to Fred Reynolds' *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, the tendency of rhetoric to lend itself to confinement by one or two parts of the rhetorical canon:

> For example, Renaissance rhetoric limited itself largely to figures of speech, and eighteenth-century rhetoric was concerned with the last canon in its emphasis on elocution, where style became delivery. In the nineteenth century, rhetoric became the study of English literature, largely confined to the study of style. In spite of these truncations, the classical canons have persisted over the years, enlarging or diminishing to accommodate the latest fads. (ix)

The current-traditional rhetoric of the earlier twentieth-century has largely been denounced by the academic community for its lack of consideration for invention, but the process and post-process pedagogies of many of today's composition classrooms (though holding invention in adequate reverence) still echoes the same historical exclusions of parts of the canon. Today's focus on invention allows English teachers and composition textbooks to all but skirt the issues of memory and delivery. The most oft-used excuse for this mistreatment of delivery, according to Fred Reynolds, is society's transition from oral literacy to print literacy (4).

Unfortunately, this exclusion allows English studies to miss the rhetorical boat by not allowing room for the back-and-forth of debate or practice with the timing (*kairos*) that is so essential to effective rhetoric and, more basely, rich communication. The ability to respond with speed and accuracy to an immediate stimulus, to "observe, in any given situation, the available means of persuasion," is what rhetorical studies were founded on. Spontaneity has a tremendous ability to override any systematic reasoning about the process of communication; composition can never be anything but flat if it isn't informed by practice with the unpredictable timing of real-world rhetorical situations.

I suspect that while this issue of the "problem canons" (Reynolds 4) is not at the forefront of the collective mind, somewhere, among the tweeting, trolling, status-updating members of what's been dubbed the "instant messaging generation" ("Rise of the Instant-Messaging Generation"), lingers a compulsion to rescue delivery from the shadows. As Laura Gurak discusses in *Cyberliteracy*, the speed and intensity with which many online conversations take place mimics the immediacy of face-to-face interactions, sharing as many, if not more, characteristics with orality as with print literacy. That text messaging and emailing are so quickly surpassing face-to-face communication, particularly among the 73 percent of American teenagers "wired-in" ("Rise of the Instant-Message-Generation"), suggests that high-school and college-aged students are taking their conversations to a more oral and more public forum, where print literacy only constitutes half of the criteria for communication.

> Homeric and pre-Homeric Greeks, like oral peoples generally, practiced public speaking with great skill long before their skills were reduced to an [art], that is, to a body of sequentially organized, scientific principles which explained and abetted what verbal persuasion consisted in. (Ong 106-107)

It appears that, rather than looking to formal education for instruction in orality, people are turning to their online peers for authority, in a space where they are free to contract new linguistic codes, forming themselves in accordance with the demands of technology.

The space in which the sociopolitical dialogue is allowed to take place is dictated by culture codes. Michel Foucault described these culturally-determined spaces as elements of what he calls “discursive formations”: the socially contracted rules that establish who can contribute to the dialogue, what they can talk about, and how they can speak. Traditionally, education in the arts and letters has been located in the academy, where the rhetorical focus has been generally reduced, over time, to all but exclude memory and delivery from English studies. However, the move toward post modernism in the twentieth century has led to a more collective creation of these discursive spaces. In *The Electronic Word*, Richard Lanham describes the social, technological and theoretical pressures that have caused a reevaluation of the “core curriculum” of universities. Where education once attempted to “democratize access to higher education by raising admissions standards” (102), the extension of enrollment opportunities to women and minorities, and the resulting need for bilingualism

has altered the way that people do and should approach composition. Technology facilitates this process by allowing people to simultaneously create and absorb. In his lecture, “Laws That Choke Creativity,” Lawrence Lessig similarly points out a move from what he calls a “read-only” method of developing culture to a “read-write” method that allows citizen participation and competition by breaking up the “legal cartel over access to [art]” (7:15). Like Lanham, Lessig views the communication and content production of these online discursive spaces as a collective attempt to dispense with the “arbitrary” (Lanham *Electronic Word* 15) separation—by some form of institution, be it of education or government—between what is “good” and what is “popular.”

Average citizens have relocated composition in the online world, where the greater emphasis is not so limited to invention and arrangement but, as Ong and Gurak point out, extends to offer delivery a more prominent role. Nancy Welch, in *Living Room: Teaching Public Education in a Privatized World*, discusses how the narrow elitism and “neoliberal privatization” of education, over the past few decades, has allowed so many voices to get left squeaking from the sidelines. This, she says, has necessitated the creation of outside spaces, by those marginalized voices, in which they can be heard—a process that demands the attention of scholarship:

> [S]cholars have also broadened the study of delivery to include eighteenth-century pulpits and twenty-first-century blogs--predominantly middle-class forums spotlighting individual rhetors

> that nevertheless can be further expanded to include the working-class rhetorical arts of the soapbox, picket, sit-down and strike. (5)

From these newly-formed spaces, a few questions arise: what values hold the participants of those dialogues together, what linguistic or rhetorical guidance are they receiving (if they *need* guidance), what does a diminished notion of ownership do to authority and what happens when all of those voices are trying to be heard at once? The rampant production of web-texts and collective information archives has certainly aroused fear in Silicon Valley. The greatest concern seems to be that, when there are so many people speaking in the same space and when there aren't restrictions on the creation and dissemination of information, the dialogue is reduced to the lowest common denominator. This phenomenological hive-mind has caused a severe reduction in the credibility of content (Lanier 61, 70, 120). Jaron Lanier, for instance, describes the online crowd-wisdom—a dulled dialogue resulting from the presence of too many collaborators—as "the oracle illusion" (138-42). The oracle illusion describes the tendency of web-users to assume that the information they access is legitimate, thus failing to critically evaluate content which may or may not have an attributable author.

There is also concern that this kind of digital collectivism neglects the authority of "experts." Certainly granting sole authority to the academic elite is dehumanizing in more ways than one, but something potentially dangerous occurs under the assumption that everyone is equally qualified to speak on a subject. Andrew Keen, in *Cult of the Amateur*, describes this loose circulation of

information on the web as a kind of abandonment of propriety that undermines the innovation of professionals who have educations, experience, editors and fact-checkers (23, 35, 55). At its most extreme, this elitism is precisely the mentality that prodded those benched voices to create the discursive spaces of the Web. However, people with education and experience have a tendency to produce more reliable information than those who do not, and attempting to ignore that gap in the quality of content could be damaging.

An even more terrifying prospect is that even a scholarly textual artifact, or otherwise “expertly” mediated piece of information, is vulnerable to tampering, left to the “spin” someone may put on it, by its exposure to the electronic environment. Most web users have probably had the humiliating experience of referencing a tendentiously excerpted rendition of a whole cloth text, only to be corrected by someone who looked a little harder to find the original text in its context. If one credible piece of content is allowed to be handled and subsequently bastardized, bowdlerized, or otherwise manipulated by the average Internet user, the result is that the most accessible or most popular version of that original content will have been shaped by crowd-wisdom (Keen 83) and will subsequently become the nucleus of Lanier’s oracle illusion.

So, what do all of these fears have to do with education? If an aim of rhetoric is to assess degrees of credibility (Booth 157) and if the online spaces where the conversations are taking place (Welch 5) are exposed to corrupted information (Lanier 177), then there is a need for guidance in critical evaluation of information. If that guidance isn’t coming from within those online spaces, where

expertise is questionable, and reliable leaders of the conversations are few and far between (Keen 35, 55), then guidance must come from outside of those spaces and the most logical place to locate that instruction is in the academy. The people that are forming their sociopolitical identities with information gleaned from status updates and tweets are not likely looking to Jaron Lanier and Andrew Keen for advice on how to read and write on the Web. In order for cyberliteracy—proficiency with producing and evaluating content online—to spread, the conversations of Silicon Valley must be repositioned so that they are conspicuously located in the institutions of education.

The problem, according to many theorists, is that many academics appear to be inherently disinclined to refocus the dialogue on technology. In "Technology and Literacy: A Story About the Perils of Not Paying Attention," Cynthia L. Selfe discusses the scholarly aversion to the technology conversation:

> [T]he one topic serving as a focus for my own professional involvement—that of computer technology and its use in teaching composition—seems to be the single subject best guaranteed to inspire glazed eyes and indifference in that portion of the CCCC membership which does not immediately sink into snooze mode (qtd. In Miller 1163-64).

Selfe offers that while there are indeed "pockets of technology scholars and teachers here and there," academics "as a group, [tend] to hold in common a general distrust of the machine" (Miller 1164) that allows them to justify turning their backs on the conversation of technology and composition. That distrust runs

parallel to a familiarity with the traditional technologies—print—that those academics likely relied on for their own educations and therefore implicitly trust (1165). In allowing those attitudes to continue, academics are not just pushing technology out of the dialogue but are necessarily pushing delivery out of it. By privileging traditional literacies—reading and writing—over others (in this case, the orality of online composition), academics not only devalue certain abilities (Gurak 12), but do themselves a disservice by not recognizing that, by 2012, *life* is mediated by the Internet. Continuing to hold cyberliteracy as secondary, at best, or altogether unimportant, at worst, is the surest way to confine academia to a vacuum. In that instance, education's best hope would be that people will continue to check in, from time to time, to make sure their cover-letters are formatted properly and their participles aren't left dangling.

Undoubtedly, things like emoticons and texting language fit cumbersomely into current academic approaches to online composition, but their use and implications still must be addressed. Here's why: the Internet functions as a kind of modern-day Assembly of the Plebs. Oration was once central to preserving the Republic; it maintained values and gave voice to the People. While those who held a magistracy were responsible for the last stages of decision-making, elections and legislation were ultimately dominated by the Assembly of the Plebs (May and Wisse 4-5). The Senate's job was to persuade those people how to vote, but including "commoners" in the dialogue was a way to keep average citizens active in the political sphere. When Cicero wrote *De Oratore*, it was to teach people how to change the system. At the time, Marcus Crassus, Caesar

and General Pompeii had just formed the First Triumvirate in an attempt to centralize power by diminishing the role of Senate and therefore the People (9). Cicero points out the centrality of oration to Roman culture and the emphasis rejects the systematic approaches taken by popular models of rhetoric (10). He encourages people to use the "weapons always within [their] grasp"(I: 32) to not only adapt to a specific situation, but to keep those privileged few from exerting too much control over citizens' social realities. The beauty of eloquence in speaking is that people are always glad to see one of their own rise up and move a listless nation (I: 225-26, II: 35) because it represents the ability of the community to become informed and communicate—the biggest possible threat to the establishment.

To a degree, the Internet serves in the same capacity as the Assembly of the Plebs, allowing average citizens to maintain an amount of power that they wouldn't otherwise have, in a discursive space where, according to theorists like Richard Lanham, the line between low and high culture is decidedly blurred (*Electronic Word* 14). For instance, politically, the buzz of information on the web keeps questionable government officials from becoming too high handed. It's probably no coincidence that the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Protect IP Act (PIPA) went up for congressional vote so soon after the Occupy Wallstreet Movement (which eventually included pepper-spray, teargas, and Molotov-cocktails) proved how quickly it could mobilize support online. As Google and Wikipedia (as well as thousands of other search engines, social networks, and information collectives) blacked out their websites, replacing usual content with

petitions against SOPA/PIPA, the bill was dropped before it ever made it to the vote. In this instance, it's easy to see how the web acts as a vehicle for the reclamation of power by the People. When an establishment told them "no," the People, armed with the Internet, made a pretty grand display of how much *bigger* they are than that establishment. Luckily the establishment changed its decree to "yes;" imagine the consequences if the institution of government had failed to revise their position. Imagine the consequences if the institution of education says "no" to the millions of people who have already proved that they are willing to strike down oppression wielding these new social contracts that make up the Internet. For better or worse, new norms are being created from the bits and bytes of technology and those norms will be privileged by the People, over all the ideals and regulations that are put upon them by an establishment, every time.

CHAPTER THREE: THE USE OF EMOTICONS IN CONCEPTUALIZATION

It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot irreverence to their studies; they are not there to worship what is known, but to question it.

—Jacob Bronowski

The rise of computer technology has necessitated a reevaluation of traditional composition processes and has begun to distance composition from the university. The widespread use of emoticons indicates that, not only is delivery becoming a focal point of composition outside of the classroom, but that the pathetic appeals made by stylistic elements like emoticons are surpassing the academic demand for logical appeal. Emoticons are only one subset of a deeply rhetorical and visual-inclusive *lingua franca* of the Internet which suggests that rhetoric is becoming privileged, by average citizens, over philosophy. Richard Lanham, in *The Electronic Word,* offers that the recently reanimated classical debate between philosophers and rhetoricians pits print (what he describes as a philosophical medium) against technology (a rhetorical medium) and that technology appears to be winning out (xii). Electronic writing, which consists of near-equal parts print literacy and oral literacy, seems to be a collective means of helping rhetoric get back to its roots which, according to Walter Ong, are in public speaking:

> The Greek *rhetor* is from the same root as the Latin *orator* and means a public speaker…it would appear obvious that in a very deep sense the rhetorical tradition represented the old oral world

> and the philosophic tradition the new chirographic structures of thought (106).

Lanham looks at the contrast between print texts and electronic texts as representative of the classical argument between philosophy and rhetoric. “What Plato wanted above all to exile from his utopia, like Thomas More after him, was *style,* the unabridged range of ornament, of purposeless play” (57). Where Plato advocated for clarity and authority, characteristics that Lanham claims are embodied by print texts, the Sophists found value in the fluidity and versatility of language, characteristics that are embodied by the orality and style of Web content and the ability of electronic texts to blend words with sounds and images (31-34, 200-203). The collective pull toward technology allows us to view online communication and composition, as Lanham suggests, as a development “following the main ‘operating system’ disagreement of our time, not driving it” (xii). Because it’s within the academy’s purview to enable students’ maximal effectiveness in their composition, scholarship has a duty to look at the elements of online composition—including emoticons and texting language—to determine their uses, as well as the social relationships and culture codes that brought about their formation, in order to determine if and how to address their use in the academy.

As with face-to-face communication, online communication consists of interpreting a mixture of words and nonverbal cues. Visual nonverbal cues—like facial expressions, body language, and gestures—are accounted for online, in part, by the use of emoticons and texting language. For instance, a user can

indicate sadness ☹ or cheer ☺. By “winking” at one user **;)** another user is able to indicate cheek or mischievousness or can simply use a regular type pad to create any emotionally-representative visual cue he likes to accompany his written text as—for instance anger **>:((** or kissing **;-x** icons. One could recreate the image of sticking the tongue between the lips and blowing by using an icon like **:PPP** or type **:))** to display a toothy grin. Similarly, acronyms like ROFL (Rolling On the Floor Laughing) or SMH (Shaking My Head) can indicate physical gestures that might pop up in a face to face interaction and actorisks like *gazes wistfully into nothing* or *shakes fists at heavens* can add “extra-alphabetical” (here, meaning gestural albeit written) cues to a textually-based message. Though these gesture-symbols are necessarily keyed-in and, such is the case with actorisks, sometimes written-out, they represent the extra-alphabetical cues that one would be able to observe in a face to face interaction. A small but weighty difference between “real life” gestures and electronic gestures—beyond the obvious aesthetics—is that one can almost invariably assume that electronic gestures are intentional, whereas “real life” gestures are sometimes unconscious. It may seem that this requirement for intention somehow diminishes the sincerity or validity of a gesture since it can hardly be unconscious, but there is evidence to suggest that employing an electronic gesture can be a tremendously effective rhetorical tool. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these electronic gestures can act as a tool for pathos, the mode of persuasion with which the rhetorical canon of delivery is primarily concerned.

In examining how gestures are used in tandem with utterances, Adam Kendon finds that the gesture, in a face-to-face interaction, is generally deployed first. That is, the actual, physical gesture begins before the particular word or word phrase that it is intended to modify, and therefore requires an amount of planning (127). What Kendon describes as the “nucleus” of the gesture generally lands on the specific word that requires modification (124). That such forethought is required signifies that, in using a gesture for clarification, a person must anticipate misunderstanding. In CMC, the interface plays two conflicting roles in the transmission of messages containing both written language and gesture symbols.

On the one hand, CMC offers a more open invitation to premeditated gesture. There is more room for misinterpretation in a computer mediated scenario than in a face-to-face scenario. I.A. Richards suggests rhetoric should be the “study of misunderstanding and its remedies” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 31). In CMC, where misunderstanding is imminent, emoticons are the cure for what ails you. In the electronic environment, the absence of a visible human body inherently dulls paralinguistic cues like tone and body language and necessitates some kind of substitution, a “replacement gesture,” for those cues. Where gestures may manifest at a more subconscious level in a face-to-face interaction, Internet communication requires that the speaker be conscious enough of his audience to preemptively leverage gesture, as a pathetic clarifier, against possible misunderstanding. In this respect, the replacement gestures required by

online communication are a more rhetorically effective form of gesture than their physical counterparts.

On the other hand, Kendon's observation—that a gesture, from inception to fruition, extends beyond the linguistic unit it modifies—is made moot by an interface which only allots one space to a gesture. In a face-to-face interaction, a person presenting a questionable idea may shrug to show humility: as they say "maybe we *should* privatize education," the shoulders may begin to move upward from resting on the word "should" and not return to resting until the end of the sentence. In a print environment, however, the gesture symbol may only be an actorisk punctuating the sentence: In the line, "Maybe we *should* privatize education *shrugs*" the gesture appears more fleeting. The brevity of the gesture, in the computer-mediated scenario, likely affects the meaning of the message differently than the more long-lived gesture of the face-to-face scenario, though the physical gesture and the actorisk act similarly to reflect the internal modesty of the speaker which is not conveyed verbally. In addition, the "nucleus" of the replacement gesture does not coincide with the word it intends to modify. To achieve an effect similar to the face-to-face scenario, the reader must assume, from prior interactions, that *shrugs* runs naturally parallel to "should" or the speaker must compensate by highlighting the import of the stressed word, for instance, by italicizing it. So, the interface necessitates audience-conscious replacement gestures that can tackle misunderstanding on a deeper level than words alone.

Gurak's studies of the debates around two privacy issues—an encryption standard proposed under the Clinton administration, called the "clipper chip," and the information sharing made possible by Lotus Marketplace in the early 1990's—showed that emoticons played a quantifiable role in controlling the climate of communication. The clipper chip, an algorithm developed by the National Security Agency, caused public outcry because of its capacity to subject citizens to what, prior to the Patriot Act, was considered illegal government surveillance. The debates Gurak examined took place in an online forum where people discussed the privacy issues associated with the clipper chip and with Lotus Marketplace, a searchable database program that contained personal information (including purchasing habits) of 80 million American households. Naturally, those conversations were subject to strong sentiment and, at times, incivility. The most forceful of comments, including those left by "flamers," included only text and used language that favored the principle of agency over the principle of communion (*Persuasion and Privacy* 108-12). Interestingly emoticon use was, in this case, singular to female conversation, "used to deflect the tension of a situation and provide a bit of comfort to the reader." Similarly, another 1997 study by Witmer and Katzman looked at 3,000 computer-mediated messages and found that women were nearly twice as likely to augment their written messages with emoticons or texting language (D'Addario and Walthers 327). In 2000, Wolf performed a similar study, in a mixed gender group, and found that men were more likely to adopt the communicative habits—specifically

the use of emoticons as modifiers—of the women in the group, than the women were to drop these modifiers in favor of text-only communication (327).

Within Gurak's observations about gender and language, some of the less combative contributors, who augmented their comments with emoticons, appear soft by comparison: "Her smiley […] is a device found rarely, if at all, among male participants in the clipper chip case, who, instead of attenuating any of their assertions, asserted their opinions strongly" (*Persuasion and Privacy* 112). That the persuasive power of a smile is grounded in submissiveness or passivity is relatively established idea. Richard Conniff writes:

> Smiling is our oldest and most natural expression, and like other facial expressions, it evolved for a function as a means of responding to people around us and influencing their behavior. Primatologists connect our smile to the "fear grin" in monkeys and date its evolution back at least thirty million years. In a group of Macaques, for example, the approach of the alpha may cause a subordinate to cringe and nervously pull back the corners of the mouth, exposing clenched teeth. It's a signal meaning "I'm no threat." For humans, too […] this sort of smile is a way to disarm and reassure those around us, particularly our social superiors. (1)

In the Lotus study, the arguments modified by this apparently yielding use of emoticons as an act of submission or humility seemed to be not only well informed, but particularly adversarial, suggesting that the smiley face was applied in the manner Conniff describes, to reduce what could otherwise be perceived as

menacing. With the separation of physical bodies by a computer and the indefinitely large space it represents, emoticons can serve as an effective rhetorical tool in much the same way as the facial expressions of a speaker in a face-to-face situation. With the many variations of a smile, wink, frown or smirk, it may be easy for a listener to read more into a physical facial expression than the speaker actually intended. Our readings of other people's nonverbal cues are certainly informed by prior interactions with human beings, but with less variation in the expressions (there are a limited number of smiley faces online, compared to the millions of variations found on human faces) the audience has to participate more actively in determining what those expressions mean.

One of the strengths of the emoticon use in the protests about the clipper chip was that, by contrasting the nature of their written language with a gestural symbol, the contributors were embodying Quintilian's theory that the more powerful gestures reflect the orator's thoughts, rather than his words. While statements in forums like the Lotus Marketplace protests have been inflammatory, altercations were avoided and the statement clarified or made richer by the addition of a well-meaning gesture. Like Quintilian and Cicero both counsel, the gestures were contained within the statement, and did not extend beyond it (Kendon 19) and like Ong, cited by Gurak, suggests, this usage hits a midway point between spoken and written language that requires of the speaker proficiency in both realms (*Cyberliteracy* 14).

There are scenarios in which emoticons play a critical artistic and potentially pedagogical role and which point at means that may be used to

rescue gesture from the trash bin of composition studies. While emoticons are primarily used to augment textual messages—as in the cases of Gurak's clipper chip study, my email with Maloree, and Mitch Marzoni's tragically-executed text message—there are a few new composition formats evolving that exemplify Ong's second orality by placing emoticons at the visual center of electronic communication, where words would otherwise be. For instance, the remix, hailed by scholars like Lawrence Lessig as the kind of collective creativity that will salvage our culture ("Reexaming the Remix"), is beginning to welcome emoticons into its folds. Sites like YouTube have begun to see an influx of what are being dubbed "emoticoncerts." Emoticoncerts are effectively music videos—visual stories set to the backdrop of popular music—which use emoticons to punctuate the emotional appeals of the lyrics. For example, this 2006 emoticoncert, carried out to the Gary Jules version of "Mad World," highlights what are, for this particular user, the most valuable parts of the song:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJvA5S76ywo

The visuals are sparse and crude, but the light application of them, here, could mean an even more meaningful experience for the viewer than would be the original video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYY-a0_Bb9Y

The lyrics of the song and the title itself, "Mad World," indicate a kind of nonsensical surrealism that can't be fully captured by images of a "real world." Though the director of the original music video found a way to mimic this detachment by emphasizing the social whole and depersonalizing the individuals

on the street, the performance is still very human and visceral compared to the denotations of the lyrics. The beginning lines of the song describe the sea “worn out faces” with “no expression” in which the author is drowning (1:04). Relative to that theme, the emoticoncert achieves something different than did the original video: it places the focus—like the lyrics—on the sentiment itself, rather than the individual, by allowing emotions to be expressed by a body which lacks identity, a body with no unique standing among its fellows: it’s just the same yellow face with a wealth of different feelings. This combination of text and visual imparts understanding beyond that which listening to the song, watching the original music video, or even reading the lyrics does, by spotlighting the emotional appeals of the song with visuals that are *purely* referential to those emotions. The lyrics of “Mad World” describe the outlooks of an author who feels he lacks legitimacy, agency, and the means to identify with the people around him. They paint a picture of a world that makes no sense, to which he is incapable of applying logic. With ethos and logos stripped away, his argument must rest on pathos, and the creator of this emoticoncert has captured this theme exactly.

Furthermore, the creation of this emoticoncert demonstrates an incredibly deep and unique understanding of the original song. None of the emoticons appear haphazardly selected and those chosen by the creator indicate a rich reading of the lyrics. For instance, he uses an “angelic” emoticon to punctuate “feel the way that every child should” (2:04) and a “bewildered” emoticon, which appears simultaneously absorbent and thoughtless, to punctuate the following lines, repeated twice over “sit and listen” (2:10). The song describes the

anonymity of public education with the lines “Went to school and I was very nervous/no one knew me,” which the author of the emoticoncert chose to supplement with a down-trodden emoticon holding its fingers in an “L” at its forehead, the pop culture symbol for “loser.” By the time “Teacher, tell me what’s my lesson/look right through me,” rolls around, the emoticon has turned into an apathetic one which gazes off into the distance (2:20). Those selections indicate that the creator of the emoticoncert not only understands the complexity of what’s expected of children in education and society, but the effect that those expectations have on the individual. The song itself does not directly equate happy children with angels, anonymity with low self-esteem or neglect with apathy—those connections were established by the author of the emoticoncert through his intimacy with the original material. It’s perhaps too hopeful to assume that creating an emoticoncert would ever be widely used by educators to assess a student’s understanding of a piece of content, but it’s evident, through this creation, that the author has gone far beneath the surface of the song. He has not merely listened to the song or read the lyrics, but has married them with his personal experiences in order to create an artifact that reflects his own meaningful interaction with them. Incidentally, the creator of this emoticoncert claims, in his posting of it on Youtube, that his intended effect (winning the affections of a girl) was achieved by manipulating the more pathetic cues of this song to “impress [her with his] naturally hidden male sensitivity” (JegStuffoInfo).

Emoticons are also being used for artistic mediums that are, to my knowledge, not yet categorized. If innovation is being squelched by the influx of

meme-saturated texting language, as Keen and Lanier suggest, then the use of emoticons in creating and remixing content seems to be one practice that's keeping that innovation afloat. Take for instance, this story "of mixed emoticons," created by poet and star of "Iconic Iconic America," Rives. He offers a visual presentation consisting entirely of emoticons and acronyms, while narrating (off-screen) the story of a boy who becomes infatuated with a stranger.

http://www.ted.com/talks/rives_tells_a_story_of_mixed_emoticons.html

The artistic and literary worth of this piece of content is certainly multi-faceted, a product of the first wave of what could eventually be a rich and entirely new school of creativity. The "boy meets girl" story has been remediated in more ways than could be counted, but this rendition is unique. The poem's most apparent value lies in its ability to speak to those audiences which find comfort in the texting language of electronic communication. If the Internet is where we now locate our discourse, then Rives shows us that computer-mediated communication has found a new artistic commodity (emoticon manipulation) capable of incentivizing the endangered cultural tradition of oral storytelling.

By the time Rives created this piece, emoticons had not yet (and still have not) expanded to include those nouns and prepositions that allow a thought to be fully articulated. The visuals could not stand independently of the words he's actually speaking. Though Rives' emoticons were self-created, there simply were not enough of them to accurately tell a story with only pictographs and, if the sound were turned off on this video, it would be hard to extrapolate meaning

from this particular string of images. The fact remains, though, that a critic would be hard-pressed to deny the special kind of innovation that it required for this pioneering poet to take these elements of new media and create with them an entirely new spin on an age-old tale.

Unlike the forum comments in Gurak's study or the visuals punctuating "Mad World" in the emoticoncert, Rives' poem puts the visual rhetoric at the forefront. It rather seems that, at best the verbal and visual were born simultaneously or, more likely, the emoticons were conceived of first and the words were formed around it. As the symbol **O}-<** appears on the screen, Rives reads "that means guy," followed by **Q<=** "and this is a ponytail on a passerby" (0:32). This visual-first creation process eventually leads to some characterizations of unrequited love that are anything but cliché and includes the painting of his heart's desire on a coffee mug (1:20), the pegging of his heartbeat as "the morse code for inappropriate" (1:53) and the expansion of the acronym YLLAM (You Look Like A Mermaid) into YLLAMBYWLAW (You Look Like A Mermaid But You Walk Like A Waltz) (1:38). Perhaps the most artful description is of himself, compared to "a monkey blowing kisses at a butterfly" (2:12). None of these completely original contributions to the "boy meets girl" repertoire would have been possible—or, at least, made much sense—without a visual to lead them in.

The poem, like the emoticoncert, locates emoticons at the *visual* center of composition, but still upholds the Ciceronian principle of supplementing words, rather than replacing them (Kendon 19), since neither the poem nor the

emoticoncert could function without the use of spoken word. There are other types of compositions currently floating around the web which attempt to do just the opposite. The literary value of these compositions hinges on a reader's basic knowledge of a pre-existing text but there is certainly an implication that this demonstration of the relationship between language and gesture represents a complex engagement with an original piece of content. The following is Jane Austen's most famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, revisioned in emoticons:

http://bookshop.livejournal.com/1010612.html

The entire piece of content is a succession of emoticons that are intended to represent the most emotionally salient moments of the novel. Save for the part where Mr. Darcy appears to be murdering Elizabeth Bennet with a pick-axe, it's a relatively emotionally-accurate portrayal of the story's climate. As mentioned earlier, it would be impossible for a reader to parse "Pride and Prejudice in Emoticons" if she did not already have knowledge of the basic plot of the original book and, perhaps because of that requirement, emoticon-only artifacts are much rarer than those which use emoticons in combination with written word. It may seem that the artistic worth of a creation like this is slight but it could be argued that if it encourages even one of its viewers to engage with a classic literature, it's a good thing. While it may seem like mere novelty, the very creation of this piece of content shows a deep understanding of the emotional appeals of a story and the value of this particular story hinges on the reader's ability to parse the emotionally complex relationships between the characters. Certainly, "Pride and Prejudice in Emoticons" couldn't relay those complexities or a

comprehensive plot-line to someone who is unfamiliar with the reading, but its worth lies in the merging of the “good” and “popular”—those things Lanham describes as arbitrarily separated by scholarship (*Electronic Word* 15)—to demonstrate engagement with the text. The creator of this piece of art has brought something that exists primarily in literary culture to Amanda Lenhart’s “Instant Messaging Generation.” Richard Lanham writes on the significance of digitized rhetoric to this blending of cultures:

> This rhetoric will make no individuous [sic] distinctions between high and low culture, commercial and pure usage, talented or chance creation, visual or auditory stimulus, iconic or alphabetic information. (*Electronic Word* 14)

Walter Ong separates linguistic codes into “restricted” and “elaborated” (103). The restricted linguistic code describes the public, common language of low culture and the elaborated linguistic code describes the more private language of high culture. The creator of an electronic text, in binding low culture with high culture, good with popular, creates a bridge between these two worlds, just as Lanham prophesied. He offers one side passage to the other by using elements beloved by both cultures, helping foster a deeper connection between the two. Within his creation, neither side is as foreign to the other as it might have once been and the creator has inadvertently supplied educators with a new tool for assessment that can bring the rich literature of academia into the electronic world of visuals, icons, and novelty that is so much a part of student’s lives.

All of these innovative uses of emoticons—which seamlessly blend the visual with the textual, the conversational with the written, and which bridge that separation between cultures—possess the capacity to function as learning tools for educators who fear a loss of their students to the novelties of electronic communication. Lanham's prediction that the Internet would muddy the line between low and high culture has come true, and that's not necessarily an unhappy thing. These forms, which are only the tip of the visual-textual iceberg, have the ability to marry what students actually want with what teachers want them to want. They are accessible. As a means to intellectual discovery, the worth of those formats—a term I use without any supposition that they are "fixed"—is unparalleled by anything *less* open to those elements of online communication to which educators still seem so averse. Perhaps, then, it's time for academics to reevaluate what may be combative approaches to the emoticons and texting language of the Internet and, instead, use those elements to bind what students need with what students love. There is a new need for the academy to prepare students for the rhetorical demands of this changing world—to legitimize their language, to offer them direction, and to equip them with the skills to survive in the information economy.

CHAPTER FOUR: SURVIVING THE INFORMATION ECONOMY

The only justification for repressive institutions is material and cultural deficit. But such institutions, at certain stages in history, produce and perpetuate such deficit, and even threaten human survival.

—Noam Chomsky

In our "information economy," the most valuable asset we have is the ability to control human attention through rhetoric—a process which Richard Lanham calls "the economics of attention" (7). As I'll discuss further on in the chapter, Lanham's theory is predicated on the notion that, with the endless tides of content consistently flowing into and out of user perception, attention is needed to parse all of that information in order for people to share ideas in ways that can be understood. Like any economy, the attention economy is driven by resources, labor, and capital. Within this economy, emoticons exemplify a conceptual transformation of the labor and skills that are required to survive in today's society. Certainly, listing "can effectively use emoticons" on a resume is probably not going to aid much in finding gainful employment. However, the functions of emoticons—as visual rhetoric, as gesture, as pathetic and ethical appeals to better approach misunderstanding—indicate that their use constitutes a recognition, by web users, of those communicative needs, as well as the desire to meet them.

In his 2009 address to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, President Obama said “the future belongs to the nation that best educates it’s citizens” and that “education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success [but] a prerequisite” (Goldman). Education and economy have a symbiotic relationship. Eric Hanushek and Ludger Wossmann of The World Bank say that “for an economy, education can increase the human capital in the labor force, which increases labor productivity and thus leads to a higher equilibrium level of output,” and furthermore, that the quality of education correlates positively with economic growth (3-9). In this respect, the economy depends on education for stability. Conversely, education depends on the economy because the economy informs the teaching goals and therefore affects the success rate that helps education maintain a valuable status in society. The continuance of at least the social order and, at the most extreme, civilization is contingent on the obligate mutualism between economy and education. A community’s survival depends on its ability to adapt to the economic circumstances of the environment and it looks for survival skills in the academy. As the country tries to account for the economic shift toward information and attention, education is, in part, responsible for fostering those abilities in individual citizens.

“Information economy” is an interdisciplinary phrase used to describe the current system of resource, labor, and capital. The idea behind the terminology is that the American economic focus is now on information and the information industry. Capital, resources, and labor are equally important to creating an economy, and the individual navigates this economy (thus determining his quality

of life within it) by directing the only component over which it is possible for him to have control: labor.

If we are operating within an information economy, as Richard Lanham discusses in *The Economics of Attention*, then it seems natural to assume information is the scarce resource of that economy. However, anyone who has checked their email, logged onto a website, or read an article online this week can tell you how much information—much of which is unsolicited—can barrel down on top of a user as soon as they open their browser. Online, a Google search can produce hundreds of different and conflicting answers to the same question, fake news reports go viral via Facebook, and sensationalism and hype run amok. On the Web, where so much of life is now taking place, information is less like a scarce resource and more like a constantly-shifting labyrinth of content. Richard Lanham, then, suggests that it is not information, but the "human attention needed to make sense of information," that is the most valuable resource in this particular economy (*Economics* 6-7). In the framework of the information economy, the trusses, joists, and rafters are "attention structures" that allocate human attention (*Electronic Word* 240). Marketable skill therefore lies in being able to command the attention of the average American as they're stricken by a daily bombardment of information made possible by an ever-expanding media rhizome.

Commanding attention in an electronic environment—where all voices are theoretically equal (or at least have an equal chance of being heard)—can't simply be a matter of being louder, flashier or more reasonable. Foucault's

discursive formations have been, for decades, a nigh foolproof way to make sense of the distribution of attention. There are socially specific ways to identify what can be said, who can say it and how that idea or information can be presented to a particular audience. However, the seeming boundlessness of the Internet seems to be actualizing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's idea of universal audience by allowing people to create and display content that is made available to far more than just one specific audience, indeed to anyone, from any demographic, who happens to stumble upon it. This expansion of audience, which necessarily affects the accountability of the speaker, has brought into question the idea of authority and has altered the forms in which information is presented. In a place where countless audiences access countless digital artifacts, he who has the attention has the authority.

Lanham describes his "economics of attention" as synonymous with "rhetoric." Within this economy, he says, style and substance have traded places; since style attracts attention and attention is the hottest commodity, style has taken on a more prominent role, and the styles of electronic writing, compared to that of print text, have opened up new possibilities for attracting attention (xii). By filtering out any visual or audio distractions, by being "fixed and invisible" (80) print text creates an "economy of sensory denial" where the reader is forced to look *through* the text, rather than *at* it, in order to focus on the concepts of the work rather than the actual symbols of which is consists (46). Lanham points at "attention artists" like pop artist Andy Warhol who made their name by encouraging the public to look at the surface, rather than through it. He describes

Warhol's famous soup can that won the attention of millions because "the surface was the meaning" (50). His success came from an ability to build art that attended to audience needs, rather than to his own introspection:

> We can see, too, that he understood the paradox of stuff. The stuff you dig out of the earth's crust becomes, in an information economy, less important than the information that informs it, what you think about the stuff. Yet the more you ponder that information, the more you understand about that stuff, the more real the stuff becomes. To put it in terms of the art world Andy lived in, the more you see that style matters more than substance, the more you see the vital role, the vitality, of substance. So, like Andy, you pursue your twin hungers: for the spotlight and for collecting stuff, knowing that each needs the other to make it real. (53)

When style is spotlighted, when human attention is drawn to the surface of a thing, people make meaning by oscillating between looking at and through. When an artist—a writer—purposefully highlights the veneer rather than what's beneath it, he gives the audience permission to define their own concepts. This process is exemplified by "shape poetry," the forming of words into an actual image that alters the audience's reading process; rather than reading from left to right margin, from the top of the page to the bottom, the reading process takes on the shape of the image. Lanham describes the need for this combination of image and word:

> Why combine an abstract alphabetical symbol with a visual image? Why did people continue to find it of interest for two and a half millennia? Because we want to heal the pains of abstraction. We want to insert the text into the three-dimensional physical world of stuff, just as we do with tombstones and public monuments. We want to bring the world of literacy, and all that literacy carries with it, into the world of objects and oral conversation. We want to breach the gulf between letters and the world of objects: our old friends, stuff and fluff. An utterance like this makes us toggle between the text, an abstract world, and a familiar three-dimensional object from our everyday world. (*Economics* 84)

This theory, applied to electronic communication, paints a digestible picture of the human desire to incorporate images like emoticons into our online lexicon. Emoticons are a part of what Lanham describes as an "alphabet that thinks," that causes the reader—who has been conditioned since grade school to look beyond the symbols to the meaning beneath—to look at the visual content of the symbols themselves (115). Text that "moves" (ie: shape art, websites, powerpoints, word art) is more desirable because the reader is allowed to linger at the surface, moving back and forth (like the text) between one-dimensional alphabetical and the three-dimensional behavior. The reading process becomes gestural. Emoticons, more than many elements of electronic writing, are "moving text" because they represent actual, physical kinesthesis. According to Lanham, the pedagogical emphasis on compositional elements like rhythm and imagery,

which show movement, attempts to recreate “in the printed text a pale simulacrum of gesture” (107). However, if the academy really wishes to equip students with the rhetorical tools to come by the attention of their audience and survive in the information economy, the academic treatment of “gesture” in writing must be readjusted.

Arts and Letters are also at the center of the information economy, as Lanham describes, because those disciplines deal specifically with how people focus their attention (xii). Incidentally, this argues, in turn, that greater effort (and money) be spent on disciplines that have lagged behind the “hard” sciences in the level of support they command. This economy—which commoditizes human regard, deliberation, and responsiveness—requires a more style-oriented skill set which reevaluates the logocentrism of academia. Visual elements, like the emoticons discussed in the previous chapter, are decidedly more potent in this respect because of their capacity for presence. It’s no new news that people side with whomever they most closely identify (Burke 26-28, 44-45). The speaker accomplishes audience-adherence to an idea by making points of commonality stand out to an audience and, according to Charles Hill the best way to do that is with visuals:

> *Presence* as the term is used by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, refers to the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of audience members. Skillful rhetors attempt to increase the presence of elements in the rhetorical situation that are favorable to their claim because they know that elements with

> enhanced presence will have a greater influence over the audience's attitudes and beliefs. (Hill and Helmers 28-29)

Rhetorical elements, like visuals, that facilitate presence are more effective because they allow other rhetorical elements to persuade by identification. A concept, says Hill, is most accessible when it is something that can be immediately, directly observed (29). We humans have a tendency to prefer instant gratification over time-consuming analysis because, simply put, we have a pretty severe inclination toward ease. People identify with visuals because they are more vivid (33). More vivid information elicits more of an emotional response, is more memorable, and creates more persuasive rhetoric (30-31). So, a painting is more persuasive than a narrative, which is more persuasive than statistics. Naturally, this is limited to relevant visuals that are intended to enhance meaning. People see something vivid enough that it fills their "entire field of consciousness" and that process acts as a sort of persuasive lubricant; in short, the audience is hopefully so taken with the saliency of rhetorical images that they won't stop too long to consider its relevance or the validity of the argument to which it is purportedly relevant (29).

As Anthony Blair discusses in Hill and Helmers' *Defining Visual Rhetorics,* arguments against the effectiveness of the visual rhetoric (to which something like emoticons will belong) includes objections against their tendency to be vague (46). This is especially true in the case of emoticons which, unlike photographs, do not have a unique referent with a singular identity; instead, they refer to an abstract concept (happiness, anger, or love) and the expressions which *many*

people *tend* to make in response to those concepts, but which appear different on every face. By not accounting for those variations in expressions, emoticons are certainly vague, but as scholars like Anthony Blaire, on the backs of greats like Richards and Burke, point out "the presence of ambiguity and vagueness in verbal arguments is very far from always being objectionable," and precision is entirely necessity-based (47). The use of emoticons as text modifiers—as opposed to wordless visual argument only—does not require that they be precise, only that they serve to enhance the meaning of the argument. Emoticons are validated by their ability to make an argument more "real," more "first-hand," because they can be observed quickly and easily (51).

The meaning of the emoticon's emotional referent, or the speaker's definition, isn't just based on the reader's own cultural norms but on his or her experiences with facial expression as an emotional response. If visuals make things more permanent and visceral and if emoticons represent not just a physical face, but an abstract emotion, then they do something different than words alone: they give the audience control. A visual that is representative of an emotion affords the audience their own mental image of their own unique definition of an emotion, rather than having forced upon them the speaker's vision of that emotion. If a speaker were to wordily describe a moment of, say, disappointment, she diminishes the audience's ability to use their own experiences, beliefs, and connections to inform their understanding of "disappointment," because she has already defined it for them. By using an image, the speaker gives her audience agency, license to actively participate in

the creation of meaning, as she addresses them. Online, if a speaker were to insert a smiley face into an email, following a snide comment, the receiver may see it and imagine a wry smile on the face of the friend who wrote it. But, if the speaker were to follow the comment with “just kidding,” she has deprived the listener of his own unique (and therefore favored) vision of sarcasm. Allowing the reader this kind of control makes the rhetoric more approachable and memorable. By using an emoticon, an author not only draws audience attention to the value of the symbols themselves, to the surface—like Warhol’s 32 Campbell’s Soup Cans—but uses images that permit the audience to define abstract concepts for themselves; that transfer of authority gives the audience an active rhetorical role.

In an economy where getting, focusing, and keeping attention is the most valuable asset—where style is at the forefront of argument—using visuals to enhance communication is a nonfungible skill. This is not to say that, in order for students to leave school able to feed themselves, instructors must train them in the art of emoticon-deployment. It is only to say that, given the rise of emoticon use in the electronic environment, it would seem that the millions of web users who are using emoticons have already caught on to the importance of visuals to effective communication. Indeed, these elements are a component of a new survival skill, and in more ways than one.

Earlier, I discussed how emoticons function as gesture in online communication. Though deployed more intentionally than some physical gestures, emoticons act as physical gestures in an environment which lacks two

human bodies and therefore body language. If rhetoric, like Richards says, should be a "study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (qtd. in Foss, Foss, and Trapp 31), then gesture should have, at the very least, a supporting role in rhetorical studies.

In the late 90s Beverly Sauer undertook a study, synthesized in *The Rhetoric of Risk*, of the rhetoric associated with hazardous material environments. A part of her study included a 1999 interview with Libby, a female miner, who explained on video the process of roof bolting. During the interview, Libby employed both mimetic gesture (gesture which demonstrates an act or points something out) and analytic gesture (gesture which comments on the thing or concept being articulated) to describe these roof bolting practices (228-30, 260). Sauer then showed the video, sans-audio, to several other miners (258, 272-73). When the miners were asked to describe what they thought Libby was describing on the video, they incorporated similar gestures, demonstrating a process which Sauer (summarizing Martha Alibali) calls "communicative uptake."

> Alibali used the example of a triangle to explain the notion of uptake. In a math class, for example, a teacher may depict a triangle with her two index fingers and thumbs. When students respond, they may trace a small triangle with their index fingers. In this transformation, students reproduce the teacher's original idea in a new form. The new variant is smaller and incorporates motion. These changes in size and motion provide an image of the students' conception of a triangle. The gestures help them

> understand a new concept in their own terms—as speakers might elaborate the meaning of an obscure or difficult sentence in their own words. (273)

This gestural exemplification of absorption and understanding, this communicative uptake, demonstrates a quicker and more meaningful comprehension of content, via extralingual elements. Gesture can be used by a speaker to better approach miscommunication and build meaning *with* the hearer. Sauer writes that "the speaker's viewpoint [works] rhetorically to shape the audience's rhetorical attention toward the speaker as a rhetorical agent who demonstrates how good speakers reenact, reframe, analyze, and reflect upon their own practice" (261). The speaker creates understanding through gesticulation. He collaborates with the hearer(s) to define abstract or weighted concepts, thereby binding his ethos to that of his audience. With this knowledge, things like actorisks (*fist pump*) seem slightly more legitimized. This process of understanding is similar to the immediate and steadfast conceptual adherence, described earlier by Blair and Hill, which is facilitated by the use of a visual. Something like emoticons, then, which combines the powerful rhetorical tools of gesture and image, is exceedingly capable of persuasion of allocating attention. That's perhaps all the reason that the participants in this information economy are so increasingly keen to wildly deploy them. Incidentally, the upsurge of texting language that brought the question of this study to light is hardly singular to that problematic demographic of high-school and college-aged students dubbed the "Instant Message Generation."

In 2004, PEW Internet and American Life Project conducted a study that suggested around 53 million American adults use IM—a 29% increase since 2002 and, further, that 11 million used IM in the workplace reporting that it was a quicker, more efficient form of communication (Lenhart “How Americans”). Younger internet users use IM with more frequency and “more ardently,” and the majority say they multi-task, IMing while browsing the Web, talking on the phone, or conducting other daily business. The trend suggests these numbers will “eventually lead to an influx of corporate IMers” (Greenspan) and, where there is IM, there will be texting language.

That texting language is a happy sign that web users are tuned-in to the discursive shifts caused by the Internet. Whether or not they know the reasons, it seems people are becoming increasingly aware of the need for gesture and visual rhetoric in creating speaker presence for online argument. Can emoticons enhance your scholarly article for peer-review? Probably not. However, as Gurak and Ong before her point out, literacy does not belong exclusively to academia or print text, but includes simply being able to communicate effectively in various environments where writing and oral speech are of equal import. As the articulation of opinions online becomes more fragmented and their textual manifestations begin to move further from traditional concepts of “form,” in discursive arenas like the blogosphere, people will begin to transfer these habits to other writing environments. In light of that expansion, education—the institution to which society has turned over the centuries for literacy and life

skills—should take note of its role in the information economy and turn its attention to, well, attention.

CONCLUSION

The reason for the slow progress of the world seems to lie in a single fact. Every man is born under the yoke, and grows up beneath the oppression of his age. He can only get a vision of the unselfish forces in the world by appealing to them, and every appeal is a call to arms. If he fights he must fight, not one man, but a conspiracy. He is always at war with civilization. On his side is proverbial philosophy, a galaxy of saints and sages, and the half-developed consciousness of professions and everybody. Against him is the world, and every selfish passion in his own heart.

—John Jay Chapman

Educators understandably have little reverence for the emoticons and texting language of the internet. Slowly but surely, handfuls of scholars are warming up to the infiltration of traditional composition studies by electronic communication. While writing for the electronic environment is being welcomed into the folds of many curricula, the novelties of online writing outside of the institution—like emoticons and texting language—continue to be barred from the classroom at all costs, with seemingly little investigation into why students are so keen to employ them. But educators have a responsibility to address the social and rhetorical implications of emoticons and the social contracts of electronic communication that inform their use.

Electronic communication, as Ong tells us, is more immediate, more loosely-structured, and more conversational. Online writing contains elements of both print and oral literacy and embraces the natural chaos of writing, the "allatonceness" of composition. In that chaos, where attention is so easily

diverted and slowing down to assess information becomes more challenging, the need for critical evaluation of content becomes amplified. Cyberliteracy is a combination of oral and print literacy that attempts to respond to the demands of the electronic environment. Traditionally, society has looked toward academia to help meet those literacy demands, and this case should be no different.

In combining orality and print, electronic communication reorders the rhetorical canons to put delivery at the front of the line, reviving the classical interest in gesture. Through most online interfaces where the physical body of the speaker and hearer are not visible, emoticons function as gesture, particularly facial expression. By their use in augmenting alphabetical language, emoticons draw visual meaning by reflecting, as Quintilian says is so important to delivery, the speaker's thought. These "gestures" are unavoidably more intentional than many "real life" gestures and therefore make the person deploying them more accountable for them, necessitating that gesture-proficiency be an aim of cyberliteracy.

Language on the internet, like language everywhere else, is a social construct, an implicit social agreement that informs our online *modus operandi*. As a result, users will call on each other for guidance in composition and rhetoric. Whether they look to education or to the internet itself will depend largely on how willing educators are to address these new linguistic codes and elements. If the institution of education wants to have a valuable role in this growing business of online writing, it will have to reevaluate—as the millions of wired-in Americans

around them appear to have done already—the import of delivery and, specifically, gesture to rhetorical studies.

Delivery—the canon that addresses *how* something is said—allows that gesture has a special capability for affecting human emotion. As a representation of gesture, an emoticon attends primarily to pathos, arguably the most powerful and immediate means of persuasion. Furthermore, the ability of emoticons to signify speaker presence makes them a powerful tool for establishing ethos. These elements of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), along with much of the texting language of the Web, belong to the delivery that has been so terribly mistreated and neglected over the years, before finally being placed on the doorstep of communications studies in the early-mid twentieth century. In Composition and Rhetoric programs, delivery (which deals far more with oration than composition) ranks appallingly low on the departmental list of rhetorical priorities. Prior to the relative confinement of English studies to the examination of literature and production of print texts, orality was assumed to be an crucial component of rhetoric, as if not more important than writing. In its inception, rhetoric was essentially an art and study of public speaking and, in the public spaces of the Internet, people seem to be consistently rejecting Education's impertinent treatment of rhetoric's natural orality.

This academic abandonment of delivery has been excused away by the demand for more reviewable educational assessments—written assessments—and the social shift toward print literacy that accompanied it (Berlin, 182-83, Ong 113, Reynolds 4). Today, however, those demands for print literacy are wholly

trumped by the second orality of CMC and the significance of delivery to effective communication. By not recognizing these centralities of online communication, academics devalue what millions of Americans hold dear, thus reducing their dependency on the academy and their inclination to seek guidance there. Put simply, people have grown restless under the fixed and increasingly immaterial literacy structures of English studies and are becoming less and less willing to allow the institution of education to exercise control over their social realities. The authority of educators will become more diminished with every day that passes, unless they readjust their instruction to meet these new needs of composition.

For educators, the best practice in this regard may be to not only address the aspects of delivery that are resuscitated by electronic writing in the form of emoticons and texting language, but to use those elements as a pedagogical tool. The examples from Chapter 3 all provide some starting ground for assessments that would give students opportunities to demonstrate understanding of an engagement with a text or concept, and allow them to do it in their own language. Invariably, authentic assessment relies on the personal, real-world relevance of assignments that respond to students' needs. For meaningful learning to occur, students must be allowed to bring their experiences, abilities, and loves into the learning process and today those experiences, abilities, and loves are located in the online writing that, despite all the academic groans, include emoticons and texting language.

As demonstrated by the profundity of the emoticoncert and the innovation of the Rives poem, these kinds of compositions could be used to evaluate a

student's understanding of a text without necessarily sidelining verbal proficiency or critical engagement. Certainly new skill does not have to come at the expense of old skill. Even the acute attention to emotional appeal shown in "Pride and Prejudice in Emoticons" has value for classroom activities. By addressing the larger conceptual demands of online composition (attention to gesture and delivery) and their more local manifestations (emoticons and texting language), educators can provide an outlet for "text-speak" without overturning their mandate for linguistic excellence. That kind of attention doesn't just improve quality of education by legitimizing student abilities, but by taking an active role in preparing students for survival in the information economy.

In the information economy the most marketable skills are attention-control and critical evaluation of content. In the world of Internet communication, information is overabundant to the point of distraction, and the valuable commodity is the human attention needed to parse that information. As discussed in Chapter 4, commanding attention requires an ability to direct audience focus to the surface—to the symbols of the writing itself, rather than to the concepts beneath—so that the reader has permission to call on his own definitions and take an active rhetorical role in the formation of meaning. This is best accomplished, as Hill, Blair, and Lanham point out, through the use of images (images like emoticons) and, as Sauer and Kendon suggest, gesture (like the gesture represented by texting language). Once again, it seems the general public is one step ahead of academia in responding to the demands of online writing and, in this instance, to the requirements of the information economy.

A society's survival is wholly dependent on its ability to adapt to economic circumstances and it is education that is responsible, in part, for fostering those adaptation skills in citizens. It could surely be argued that this separation occurring between the People and the institution is a happy thing. As an instructor pointed out, "this is a refreshing democratization…perhaps it's good that academia is behind the curve on that one." I would never claim to have a monopoly on the "truth" of that dependency. My argument, here, is certainly not say that English instruction *should* be the definitive voice in all matters linguistic, only that if educators want to enjoy participation in the formation of these new social contracts regarding composition and rhetoric, they'll have to make adjustments to their pedagogy that account for those social changes. Despite all the academic hesitance to dive into the unfamiliar waters of electronic communication, the way that we interact with each other—particularly through composition—is changing and those institutions that wish to find themselves in a position of import and authority may well be better served by working toward progress, with the masses, rather than against it.

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