On the Formation of Democratic Citizens:*

Rethinking the Rhetorical Tradition in a Digital Age

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In his final work James Berlin signaled his movement away from rhetoric and towards cultural studies. Berlin maintained that cultural studies offers a better theoretical perspective than the rhetoric that has become predominant in American Higher Education for achieving the educational goal he thought English as a discipline should embrace: to form citizens capable of sustaining a democracy. On his analysis, rhetoric is ill-equipped for forwarding this goal because it lacks (1) an ability to locate, name, analyze and ultimately influence the relations of power that make up our society; (2) an ability to adopt a view of social formations as historical enterprises; (3) an ability to call attention to and influence circumstances that have led to the empowerment of some groups and the oppression of others through a network of discursive relations. Some critics of rhetoric might go farther and argue that rhetoric as a discipline has been complicit in sustaining an oligarchic society. Quintilian's "citizen orator" on this view is a mystifier who cloaks the actualities of power in a fog of fine verbiage.

Berlin's argument, grounded in a historicized understanding of rhetoric in the English Studies tradition, tends to render both rhetoric and cultural studies as *a priori* systems. The first is deficient, the second preferable in virtue of a specific set of intellectual tools it ought to bring to the analysis of symbolic action. There's nothing

particularly unusual in this way of thinking. Belletrism, for example, is dismissed by many historians of rhetoric because it lacks tools for thinking about invention, emphasizing instead a meticulous attention to niceties of style. (One of us can recall a conference discussion at which the Nietzschean question of what might be "forgotten" in the rhetorical tradition was raised. After a brief silence someone suggested, "Blair, Campbell, and Whately." No one rose to defend them.) Berlin simply brings this line of thinking to a higher level of generality, indicting not some particular rhetoric(s) but rather the entire tradition of rhetorical studies for its failure to direct our attention *a priori* to questions about how discourse inscribes historically contingent power hierarchies. Cultural studies in Berlin's view is a stronger theoretical framework because it gives us the missing tools.

  We don't disagree with Berlin's critique of the rhetorical tradition, though we do point out that he never meant this to be his last word on the matter. What turned out to be his final statement should have been one leg of a longer journey. We do wish to make two points at the outset. First, the rhetorical tradition need not be understood as an *a priori* set of analytic tools. Gerard Hauser, for one, insists on what he calls an "empirical attitude" that he identifies with a "Ciceronian sense" of rhetoric, an attitude that "draws its inferences … from actual social practices of discourse" rather than from "a priori assumptions about what is real or true" (275). Hauser's Ciceronian or "vernacular" rhetoric is a complex and messy business, extending beyond "the podium, printed page, legislative chamber, or executive office" and including "the everyday dialogue of symbolic interactions" in which active citizens "share and contest attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions" (12, 14, 36, 67). Our second point, and one that we think Berlin

would agree with given the thrust of the latter chapters of *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures,* is that rhetoric and cultural studies need not be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives among which one must choose one and only one. We prefer to see them as simultaneously competing and complementary intellectual frameworks. Here too Hauser can serve as a useful example. His study of publics and public spheres draws heavily on Habermas while rejecting both Habermas's idealization of the discourse situation and his concomitant antipathy toward rhetoric.

For Hauser, the rhetorical situation "is marked by elements of novelty and possibility for refiguring the meaning of experience and human relations" (115). Such a rhetorical situation is populated not by isolated individual agents but by interdependent and competing social actors whose experience is shaped in an "ongoing *struggle* between permanence and change, tradition and transformation," against the backdrop of history and cultural memory (112). According to Hauser, this struggle is a "self-structuring activity" through which our "publicness" is formed in a seemingly endless process of negotiation (113). This self-structuring activity "inevitably encounters competing interpretations that must be negotiated, so that inventing publicness invariably poses the problem of integrating conflicts" (113). In this context, society's discourses—its stories, its memorials, its rituals—are complex negotiations by which society makes and remakes its political and social relations—"which is to say that rhetoric is among the social practices by which society constitutes itself" (114-15). Though we are, as Hauser insists, active and self-reflective social agents, our stories are never just about ourselves but always encompass the other and are thus, necessarily, rhetorical achievements (115, 117). We agree, and we conclude that the rhetorical tradition is vital not as an *a priori* set of

hermeneutic and inventive principles for application today, but as a record of social practices by which societies have constituted themselves throughout history, a record that can assist us in understanding and shaping the social practices by which our own society constitutes itself.

Hauser's vernacular rhetoric emerges from multiple arenas of public discourse, and his analyses range from the contrasting narratives of hope and despair in post-communist Poland and Yugoslavia, to the Meese Commission's report on pornography, to the technological production of public opinion that shaped the Carter administration's rhetorical choices during the Iran hostage crisis, and to Franklin D. Roosevelt's vernacular exchanges with his publics through letters, speeches, and radio addresses at the time of his bid for a third term as President of the United States. We believe, however, that this vernacular rhetoric also emerges from small, local arenas of public discourse, arenas that are becoming ever more important as local communities appear to dissolve into the vast and growing electronic web of disparate and competing discourses. As illustration of the vitality of these local vernacular rhetorics, we offer—at the end of this essay—the example of our own experience with a community information system, a database of youth-services resources and multimedia content that we are developing for our own local community of Troy, New York.

It is our view that the purpose of *rhetorica docens* has always been the formation of citizens, that is, of participants in human collectives. For Aristotle and Isocrates, rhetoric formed participants in the Greek polis. For Hugh Blair and Adam Smith, rhetoric formed participants in the provincial cities and towns of North Britain. For John Witherspoon and John Quincy Adams, rhetoric formed participants in a new democratic

republic struggling to become something other than West Britain. When read from the empirical perspective that Hauser counsels, the works of these and others in the traditional canon have much to tell us about the discursive construction of the Greek polis, the cities and towns of eighteenth-century Scotland, the emerging political culture of the United States, which is to say that they have much to tell us about how discourse has operated to inscribe the historically contingent power hierarchies about which Berlin was concerned. It is *not* to say that these works offer explicit analyses of these matters, any more than the letters analyzed by Hauser in Chapter eight of *Vernacular Voices* develop an explicit theory of the class tensions to which they speak.

Berlin's critique of the rhetorical tradition and his recommendation of a cultural turn as the means for reinvigorating that tradition flowed from his belief that the *telos* of a rhetorical education should be the formation of a <u>postmodern</u> democracy. He saw that to simply appropriate the texts of Aristotle, Blair, et al. as if their pedagogical prescriptions could work in the late twentieth century would be a futile attempt to reinscribe the polities of ancient Athens or eighteenth-century Edinburgh.

Berlin understood democracy as an articulation of cultural practices that exists and subsists in the social structures we build to encourage and perpetuate it. Influenced by Iris Marion Young's critique of distributive justice, or the impulse to model the distribution of responsibility and social "goods" among the members of society after the distribution of commodity goods, Berlin argues for a view of democracy that recognizes abstract social benefits as products of social relationships, and not vice versa. This view, according to Berlin, urges us to rethink what a social benefit like "democracy" might look like:

The postmodern conception of justice leads to a definition of democracy based on the recognition of difference…democracy requires 'real participatory structures in which actual people, with their geographical, ethnic, gender, and occupational differences, assert their perspectives on social issues within institutions that encourage the representation of their distinct voices' (Young, 116). Traditional notions of civic discourse have constructed fictional political agents who leave behind their differences to assume a persona that is rational and universal in thought and language. In a postmodern world, no such subject exists (99).

Berlin's view is consonant with Hauser's. Both call upon us as scholars and teachers to ground our understanding of civic discourse in the material conditions within which discourse arises. What stands out in Berlin's definition is the attention to participation in these concrete discourses as the foundation of democratic practice. This focus begs the question: by what means does participation occur, and by what means is it ensured? The answer lies in a certain perspective on rhetorical and poetic discourse. Berlin asserts that "rhetorics and poetics and rhetorical and poetical texts can be regarded as a technology [sic] for producing consciousness, social and material conditions, and discourse activities that will ensure their continuance" (111). But can we find examples of these "technologies" and social structures that Berlin alludes to in the world? Can we locate Democracy by observing discursive practices at work building and maintaining the kinds of technologies and institutions that embody and enable participation?

Little Democracies: Participatory design and the role of discursive relations in developing institutions and technologies

We believe that it's possible to see the rhetorical tradition at work, either in the past or in the present historical moment, at points where institutions and technologies are in process of being shaped. Both institutions and technologies are social structures that discursively position those who inhabit or use them, enabling and constraining people as they move into specific subject positions to participate in those social structures in specific ways. Both institutions and technologies tend to establish concrete presence in the world–social structures become bureaucracies housed in buildings, discursive relationships become physical connections via phone and data lines, work processes become software applications and network routing protocols. And both institutions and technologies exist and are observable, at bottom, as discursive exchanges.

The pivotal role of rhetoric in making both institutions and technologies has been recognized, at times with trepidation and at others with exuberance, by scholars ancient and contemporary. The more positive depictions tend to heap praise on rhetoric's role in establishing institutions. Cicero gives us just this sort of endorsement of rhetoric's power in the words of Crassus, whose appeal to the power of rhetoric to build nations ignites the debate on the character of the orator in *De Oratore*:

> "…what other power [oratory] could either have assembled mankind, when dispersed, in to one place, or have brought them from wild and savage life to the present human and civilized state of society; or, when cities were established have described for them laws, judicial institutions, and rights? And that I may not mention more examples, which are almost without number, I will conclude the subject in one short sentence; for I consider, that by the judgment and wisdom of the perfect orator, not only his own honor, but that of many other individuals, and

the welfare of the whole state are principally upheld. Go on, therefore, as you are doing young men, and apply earnestly to the study in which you are engaged, that you may be an honor to yourselves, and advantage to your friends, and a benefit to the republic" (C. VII., p. 14).

Cicero's Crassus was updating to his own cultural moment a commonplace about the institution-making power of rhetoric that went back at least as far as Isocrates (*Nicocles* 5-9). Looking to our own time, Porter, et al. propose that we remember the stuff of which institutions are made, arguing that "though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable" (611).

Porter, et. al.'s purpose in arguing for the mutability of institutions follows from a democratic aim in Berlin's sense of rhetoric, namely "to change the practices of institutional representatives and to improve the conditions of those affected by and served by institutions" (611). This view of institutions, moreover, makes clear that change is possible via participation in the rhetorical (re)construction that brings institutions into being and keeps them going.

The role of rhetoric in democratic institution-building coincides in the information age with its role in creating technologies that foster participation. While both Hauser and Berlin express some support for a model of institutions as the products of rhetoric, neither seems enthusiastic about the prospect of technology as an outlet for or a product of public discourse. Both Berlin and Hauser tend to cast technology as a cultural force descendent from an Enlightenment project which famously diminished the value of rhetoric in favor of

science, even in matters formerly recognized as squarely within the province of rhetoric. Hauser attacks the effort to "technologize public opinion" in the practice of opinion polling, which he sees as antithetical to the organic development of public consensus as a product of deliberation (197). Berlin levels a similar attack against the tradition of current-traditional rhetoric as a mode of writing instruction, characterizing it as a kind of technologizing of the rhetorical tradition for the purposes of "text production for the new scientific meritocracy" (28). Both opinion polling and the practices of current-traditional rhetoric share an assumption that truth emerges from the correct application of scientific methods of inquiry, rendering both the natural and social world susceptible to what Hauser calls "instrumental rationality" (195). For both Berlin and Hauser, technology is the means by which instrumental rationality becomes concrete in the form of tools and techniques that, all too often, have been used to curtail public discourse by limiting access to deliberation, and most significantly, by concentrating power in the hands of an elite class of the technologically-gifted (Berlin, 30; Hauser 196).

But as the title of our essay suggests, we believe that while there is merit in these critiques, technology is both inevitable and redeemable. The printing press was a profound technologizing of the word, and like the rhetorical *techne* invented by Aristotle it could be and has been used for both democratic and totalitarian purposes. Practices of technology development are discursive, and the products that these practices develop are themselves locations for discursive interaction. A nagging problem with so-called "high" technologies is to achieve democratic participation in those processes.

In *Rhetorical Ethics and Internetworked Writing*, Porter emphasizes that today, rhetorical work is increasingly work at the "interface," the place where people and

technologies intersect and interact with one another. He further makes clear that interfaces are not merely technical products, but social spaces: "by interface I am not talking about screen design elements only (trash cans and such), but rather larger spaces (what Foucault, 1986, might call a heterotopia) in which the screen intersects with situated uses of the technology in the classroom, community, and workplace—a contextualized interface, in other words" (146).

This view of the "architectonic" function of rhetoric is not merely a product of the coming-of-age of "cyberspace" as social reality. In 1970, for example, *The Report of the Committee on Rhetorical Invention* included the following discussion of rhetoric's emerging role in a technologized world:

> We begin with the assumption that a vital aspect of man's [sic] experience is rhetorical. By this we mean that every man will find himself in circumstances in which he cannot act alone, in which he must seek to act cooperatively with others, or in which others will seek to make him act cooperatively. From his interactions with others, man finds that his ability to share symbols gives him the power to meet his rhetorical needs with rhetorical materials. Because of compelling social realities man's consciousness of his rhetorical environment is expanding. The technological revolution in media and in traditional forms of persuasion have significantly extended man's inventive needs and potentialities. These changes are critical to his ability to share and perceive symbols (105).

The roots of this discussion lie in an ancient debate about the nature of rhetoric as a practical or productive art [cf. Aristotle*, Nichomachean Ethics* 6.4.; Quintillian I, Book II. XVIII 1-5). The underlying questions in this ancient debate are germane today: is

rhetoric a way of acting, a way of making? Might it be a way of "making ways of acting" that are then inscribed and normalized in the technologies we employ? Is the development of technology a "rhetorical project" in the sense that it builds concrete tools out of fundamentally discursive relations? Political scientist Langdon Winner argues precisely this point in an article whose title, "Citizen Virtues in a Technological Order," implies his thesis that technologies are enactments of a prevailing social order, much as our public institutions are. But Winner reminds us that individuals typically do not enjoy rights as "citizens" to shape technology design or policy, despite our belief that a similar level of participation in the shaping of our public institutions is vital to our democratic goals as a society.

A major obstacle to a truly democratic ideal of citizen participation is the apparent ineffability of technology, its presumed origin in esoteric and logocentric arenas in which average citizens are neither prepared nor particularly interested to participate. In insisting that the development of technology is a rhetorical project, we seek to disrupt this view and suggest that there are always moments in the development of a technology when the social relations that constitute it are in play, open to and indeed dependent upon the participation of those who would use that technology (Feenberg, 1992). Can we find one of those moments? More specifically, can we find a burgeoning democratic moment in the development of a technology?

Following Hauser's lead in adopting an empirical attitude, we turn our attention to a project that undertakes the ambitious goal of building social relationships and technologies simultaneously—though on a small scale, in a local community, "a little democracy." This project, a community information system called Connected Kids

(http://troynet.net/connectedkids/, April 20, 2002), shows how vernacular rhetorics function as complex processes of negotiation in which social actors make and remake (and are in turn made and remade by) both their social relationships and the technologies that support and sustain them.[1] A collaborative effort initiated by Teri Harrison, SUNY at Albany, and Jim Zappen and Sibel Adali, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Connected Kids is developing an interactive database of youth-services resources. (We adopt the somewhat awkward convention of making "Connected Kids" a grammatical agent to acknowledge the radically collaborative nature of a project whose strategy and purposes include turning the proposed users of a technology into designers of it.) The proximate goals of Connected Kids are to permit youth-services organizations to disseminate information about themselves and their programs and events, and simultaneously to enlist young people as participants in the development of information and multimedia content for the database. The project illustrates Hauser's vernacular rhetoric as a process of negotiation, a "self-structuring activity" in which social actors make and remake themselves in concert and sometimes in conflict with others (112-13). It is a rhetorical process of negotiation among programmers, designers, and users participating in the development of the database, and among teachers, parents, and young people engaged in the production of multimedia content for storage in the database and display on the World Wide Web.

Practicing Democracy: The Connected Kids Project

In his analysis of letters written to Franklin D. Roosevelt during his bid for a third term as President, Hauser documents the overwhelming support for the President

expressed in these letters, the confidence of ordinary people that he was the person most capable of handling the threat of war and also the person who cared most about them. Hauser's analysis of these letters reveals "a moral America . . . dedicated to peace, patriotism, and decency" and "a virile America devoted to self-sufficiency and self-sacrifice" (260-61). Our analysis of the Connected Kids project reveals similar cultural values. Users of the developing database seek and indeed insist upon self-sufficiency but are apprehensive about both their own technical expertise and resources and the performance capabilities of the database. Young people show both a remarkable self-confidence and self-sacrifice and an equally remarkable dependence upon contemporary social and family values. Both groups are engaged in ongoing self-structuring activities in negotiation with themselves and others.

But while the cultural values revealed in our analysis of Connected Kids are in important ways similar to those that Hauser observed in the Roosevelt letters, we found far less unanimity of opinion than he did. We can only speculate about this diversity, but we suspect that it is a product of the differences in the particular historical (and rhetorical) moments that we have chosen, respectively, to study. Hauser selects a moment near the end of Roosevelt's second term, a moment at which public opinion has coalesced around the threat of a world war and the evident benefits of the New Deal to masses of ordinary people. We have selected a moment very near the beginning of the development of a large and complex community information system, a point at which the local community participants are unconvinced of the benefits of the project and skeptical of the professed good intentions of their academic neighbors. We are interested in observing the process of negotiation by which we academics and our partners from local youth-services

agencies build the technical system, but also and more especially the process of negotiation by which we build a social community of shared interest—a process that Hauser aptly calls a "self-structuring activity" (113). We are equally interested in observing the process of negotiation by which young people participate in this endeavor, creating their own images of themselves, exploring their own identities and sharing them with others via the World Wide Web—another "self-structuring activity" but one that is always and everywhere unfinished.

Still in its early stages of development, Connected Kids has engaged representatives from youth-services organizations in participatory-design processes to develop specifications for the database, to assess the progress of the design team, and, where necessary, to redefine the system specifications. Connected Kids has also conducted focus-group meetings with students in the middle and high schools and with parents to determine how and why they use—and would like to use—World Wide Web resources. In addition, Connected Kids has involved Rensselaer graduate and undergraduate students in a variety of activities directed toward the creation of a social and physical infrastructure to ensure convenient access and ease of use of the database, especially among underserved and underprivileged populations. These activities include rebuilding recycled computers, installing computers and networking equipment in local youth-services facilities and after-school programs, and conducting on-site training in basic computing, image processing, and Web design in the after-school programs. In these collective social activities, representatives from youth-services organizations, graduate and undergraduate students, and young people are making and remaking their social relationships and the technologies that support them in discursive practices by

which they negotiate their basic cultural values and beliefs both within themselves and with others.

We offer two examples of these processes of negotiation: one from the participatory-design meetings with representatives from the youth-services organizations, another from computer-training sessions in the local after-school programs.

In the participatory-design meetings, partner organizations expressed conflicting needs. All felt a need to be self-sufficient, and most felt some apprehension about their own technical capabilities and the capabilities of the proposed database. Initially envisioning a system that would provide little more than a calendar of events, the design team learned that as a group the youth-services organizations wanted to present a much more complex array of organizational and programmatic information. Some larger organizations already had Web-based information systems and were apprehensive about duplicating their efforts. Smaller organizations worried about their limited resources and technical expertise, and doubted their ability to maintain these systems for themselves. Some had had discouraging previous experiences with student-designed technical resources. Recalling her previous experiences with these students, one representative from a small organization observed (with a smile): "Sometimes we can't get rid of them." Teri and Jim acknowledged the problems that small organizations had with students who completed projects and then disappeared once their classes were over, leaving the organizations with technically sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing Webs that the organizations were unable to maintain.

The participatory-design meetings demonstrated the need for ongoing processes of negotiation between designers and partner organizations—self-structuring activities in

which all parties actively reconstitute or reinvent both their social relationships and the technologies that sustain them. We're working on it. To address the needs of both large and small organizations, the design team is now developing a database and World Wide Web interface capable of providing both a port of entry to the existing Web-based information systems of larger organizations and a self-sufficient Web-based information system for smaller organizations. For the smaller organizations, we are attempting to provide ongoing support of several kinds: Web design and maintenance, computer reconstruction and/or purchases of new computers or components, computer troubleshooting, and negotiations with Internet service providers. On the academic side, we continue to struggle with institutional structures (courses, credit hours, and calendars) that make it difficult for students to provide the sort of ongoing support the smaller organizations need. We have not yet achieved (and may never achieve) the degree of self-restructuring it will take to enable Rensselaer students to be full and continuing partners in this project, but we are making progress.

The computer-training sessions in the local after-school programs show young people similarly engaged in the process of negotiating both their social relationships and the technologies they are just beginning to learn to use. Connected Kids designers initially speculated that the database system would be more appealing to parents, teachers, and young people if they could see something of themselves in it—a speculation confirmed by initial meetings with students in the middle and high schools. The designers have therefore launched a series of learning experiences in which young people are developing informative and visually appealing content for the database: art galleries representing the work of students in local schools, science and technology information

modules for middle and high school students, and art work and story telling by kids in the after-school programs.

The after-school computer-training sessions are especially instructive as processes of negotiation between and among social actors and technical systems. Like the representatives from the partner organizations, the young people in these programs experience conflicts in cultural values and engage in complex processes of negotiation with their families, within themselves, and with the computer technologies that are new to most of them. On the one hand, the young people seem to be remarkably self-confident about themselves and their futures; on the other hand, they seem to be just as remarkably dependent upon contemporary social and family values. Most are in the lower grades and just beginning to learn to write. In one of their activities, the teachers asked the children to draw a picture and tell a little story in answer to the prompt: "If I could be anything in the world, I would be . . . ." The students developed their responses in conversations with their teachers, in processes of negotiation in which they discovered what they thought by talking through their ideas and then writing them out in stories. Their responses reveal the complexity of their developing social relationships. Clearly they felt confident that they could be anything that they wanted to be. But equally clearly they were powerfully influenced by larger social values as represented in the mass media. Many wanted to be successful sports figures or entertainers. Others wanted to be veterinarians, wedding planners, bakers, and teachers. Some just wanted to be rich and famous. Others wanted to care for animals or to make other people happy, for example, by planning their weddings (like the wedding planner in the movie, perhaps?). Some just liked muffins and pastries. Some seemed confused or conflicted. One wanted to be a teacher because she thought

that she would enjoy correcting papers and watching movies with the other teachers. Another wanted to be a scientist rather than a cashier because he would rather look through a microscope than take people's money from them.

It's not surprising that the kids were also influenced by their own family values. Some who wanted to be sports figures or entertainers hoped to be rich or famous. But one acknowledged that she would give the money to her mom because she herself would not know what to do with it. Another wrote that she was inspired by her own mother to become a foster mom. But she also noted that she would be a foster mom to only two children because three would be much too great a challenge!

Strikingly, these young people seemed not to be tied to traditional gender roles. One girl wanted to be Michael Jordan, and another wanted to be a New York Yankee. A boy wanted to be Aaliyah. These stories illustrate the complexity of their negotiations with the world—wanting money, for example, but not knowing what to do with it. They also illustrate the openness to new possibilities and new social relationships in which girls can do "boy things" and boys can do "girl things." As Hauser observes, our stories are deeply rooted in history and cultural memory, but they are also "a means for meeting the challenge of a past and future moving in opposite directions" and thus a means of not only reporting history but also transforming it (112).

The after-school programs are also instructive as processes of negotiation with the computer technology, which was new to most of the kids. To ensure access and use of computers among underserved populations, Connected Kids has involved Rensselaer students in rebuilding computers with free Linux software (Red Hat 7.2), installing and networking the computers in the after-school programs, and offering instruction in the

use of the software. Although some of the older kids seemed comfortable with Linux, probably as a result of their experience in the schools, most of the kids in the lower grades—those who attended the after-school programs—were just beginning to learn to use it. The kids proved to be quick and eager learners, but they were schooled in some conventions of print literacy that seemed to work at cross purposes with the computer technology. Connected Kids teachers sometimes asked young people to write out their stories before typing them into the computer. The students were meticulous about their handwriting, checked their spelling with the teachers and other kids, and rewrote whole words rather than replacing individual letters when correcting errors. These habits carried over to their use of the computers, with curious results. At the computers, they typed slowly, often searching at length for the correct letter. When the software underlined misspellings in red, the kids would routinely erase and retype whole words, again searching at length for each letter. If the underlining persisted, they would replace a word, even if it was actually spelled correctly. When they were telling Halloween stories, one group included the figure of Frankenstein, whose name was underlined in red. Despite several attempts to correct the spelling, the underlining persisted, presumably because the Linux spelling tool did not recognize the name. The kids changed the name to Jack and were obviously very pleased with the result. With time, the kids learned to ignore the red underlining, but they persisted in correcting whole words rather than individual letters, and they seemed willing to correct or edit only their most recent text, the habits of print literacy apparently carrying over to the keyboard and screen. Presumably, they will eventually learn to take a stronger stance in their negotiations with the computers. But we suspect that they will need to learn most of these lessons for

themselves, as they, like all of us, negotiate a past and future moving in opposite directions.

Beyond the Sublime: Two Directions for Rhetorical Inquiry in the Digital Age

We conclude this essay with a roadmap of sorts, pointing the way to a vital and, we hope, newly relevant rhetorical tradition in the age of the Internet and the World Wide Web. In particular, we want to highlight two important paths rhetoricians might take in order to pursue not merely a sustained critique of the rhetorical tradition, but a reconstruction of that tradition in the interest of making and remaking "little democracies." The first path is a familiar one: pedagogy and curriculum. We will spend little time elaborating on this path, except to note that with our use of the terms "pedagogy and curriculum" we hope to point to moments like those discussed in the foregoing description of the Connected Kids project: opportunities to remake the entrenched aims and modes of rhetorical instruction. Connected Kids has undoubtedly fostered pedagogy and curriculum, but has done so through what Hauser has identified as "processes of negotiation" rather than through the more traditional, institutional exercises of offering courses, programs, etc. This sort of "vernacular pedagogy," as we might call it, is one promising new direction for the rhetorical tradition that recalls, and perhaps re-imagines, a sophistic tradition of situated learning, challenging and broadening the borders of the *polis*.

The second path we recommend reflects a relatively unexplored trajectory in the recent history of American rhetorical inquiry: the design of communication technologies. As we have tried to show in the case of the Connected Kids project, pedagogy and design

become intertwined and mutually informing when they are pursued in the spirit of Hauser's vernacular voices. Connected Kids demonstrates how the voices of the children of Troy along with the voices of adults—parents, teachers, social-services personnel, city officials—are actively articulating the institutional and technological connections that create "subject positions" we can actually see, even point to: in the database, on the network, and in the community. Shaping democratic citizens in our increasingly networked environment calls for a stronger-than-ever commitment to clarifying the discursive positions, functions, and forms that permit participation in the practice of democracy. A rhetorical education is, of course, a valuable way to foster such a commitment. But pedagogy and curriculum are not enough. The communication technologies that increasingly influence and, in some cases, actively (re)form institutions are built of the same stuff as any rhetoric. In Berlin's words, both rhetoric and communication technology qualify as "device[s] to train producers of discourse (137)." As we saw in the examples of the Connected Kids design meetings and in the words and artwork of the students being introduced to computer technology for the first time, the devices trained everyone involved to utter an "appropriate" discourse, even when deliberations about what were and were not "appropriate" utterances never became explicit. The Connected Kids project reveals the tremendous potential for rhetoricians to intervene in the making of communication technologies with an explicit agenda: ensuring that a participatory model of discursive practice prevails. In fact, we ignore this opportunity at our peril. Rhetorics of one sort or another will prevail, training the future producers of discourse in such matters as who can and cannot enter conversations about matters of material and social importance, and how these conversations should proceed.

Increasingly, these rhetorics will not appear in any textbook, but instead will be integral to the devices, software, and networks that give physical form to our social environments.

We might recognize in the model of tacit rhetorical training that our communication technologies impart a familiar combination of fear and fascination. What software developers sometimes refer to as "elegant solutions," we might just as readily call "the sublime," an idea that hearkens back to the cultural moment in which American democracy first emerged, and thus reminds us of the role of Hugh Blair in spreading the rhetorical tradition in antebellum America. In the view of many historians of rhetoric, Blair's views on such matters as invention and the sublime constituted a powerful reinscription of the predominant white, male, upper-class subject position (see, e.g., Golden and Corbett; Halloran), to whose authoritative genius women and the middling classes were supposed to defer. And yet as Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran argue in the Introduction to their forthcoming new edition of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* Blair's overtly elitist and colonialist rhetoric could be put to liberatory purposes in specific local contexts. The uses of traditional rhetorical texts may be as much a matter of negotiation as are the vernacular voices attended to by Hauser.

Built into our cutting-edge technologies of communication are tacit assumptions about the ability of the average citizen to "invent" that are as elitist and anti-democratic as anything purveyed by the much-maligned Hugh Blair. For the vast majority of ordinary citizen "users," the appropriate activity is "browsing" – a metaphor more bovine than human. At best, browsing invites us to participate in what amounts to an emerging stylistics of online discourse. Those who would engage in *inventio* ("designers") or even *dispositio* ("developers") of online systems and the "content" that flows over them are

supposed to meet higher levels of technical expertise. And yet as the Connected Kids

project suggests, there are gaps in the Wizard's curtain through which ordinary citizens

may poke their noses, even at this primitive stage of the digital era. The challenge for

those who would defend rhetoric is to establish a strong participatory tradition with/in the

network: a tradition where citizens don't merely browse, but invent, discuss, and

negotiate.

Notes

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