Virtual Diffusion
Ethics, Techné and Feminism at the End of the Cold Millenium

Cynthia Haynes

Its mixed genres and its interdigitating verbal and visual organs ask for a generous literacy from the reader. In its most basic sense, this book is my exercise regime and self-help manual for how not to be literal minded, while engaging promiscuously in serious moral and political inquiry about feminism, antiracism, democracy, knowledge, and justice in certain important domains of contemporary science and technology.

Donna Haraway

W HEN I READ AND FIND (UNEXPECTEDLY, YET HOPEFULLY) A KIND OF self-conscious confessional plea from an author to her reader (like Haraway's above), I instinctively feel at ease—as if in searching for the *logos* (or argument) in a text, somehow finding ethos makes it more palatable when *logos* asserts its proverbial cycle of claims, grounds, and warrants. When several texts are grouped (as in this section on ethics and feminist concerns), we wonder what means of linking them together we might use in order to co-respond.[1] We tend, I think, to rationalize (to make rational by means of linking) texts according to whatever *techné* (or art) is in fashion. Since Aristotle, the trend has been the argument, its *logos*. But I want to set another trend, to take another direction, to turn.

Consider this. It is now possible to visualize research by using algorithms to analyze millions of academic papers, and to create from this analysis a three-dimensional graphical landscape where mountain ranges "signifying hot research issues in biology may connect to an area in physics by a narrow ridge" (Steinberg 46). In other words, we could plot the logical links among loosely connected texts (even among arguments over time), plot them on a graph and analyze the raw data. We would then have a mathematical trajectory of points plotted, a rather crude inhuman representation of a sequence of conceptual displacements. But, what sort of index/map would we have? Of what? And why would we want it?

According to Chuck Meyers, project manager at Sandia Laboratories where this technique was developed, what we find in such a map are "connections that were previously hidden" (qtd in Steinberg 46). This accounts for why I am drawn to certain ideas and expressions in the essays contained in this section, and also for why I am drawn to the 'hidden.' Thus, it is a with/drawn tactic with which I conduct my efforts to co-respond, or to establish what I prefer to call a 'responsive relation.' My turn (trend) reveals itself in the form of holotropes of ethos and holograms of techné, immaterial images in what might be (re)en-visioned as hidden inflections of ethos, *techné* (though one not in the service of *logos*), and the feminine.

Yes, there are dangers in technology, in educational technologies, in education. And others in this collection have argued skillfully about these dangers and offer significant critiques of technomanic and technophobic pedagogy and rhetoric. Let me confess to having argued in this manner myself, though my confession is no concession to *logos*. It is the system we all inhabit. But I cannot resist mixing things up by sampling, plundering, pirating, hijacking, splicing, bootlegging, cribbing and blending—stirring in the unexpected with the expected. In short, I plan to pilfer (and deconstruct) narratives that we might not imagine as pliable. I aim to ply the trade routes of the past millenium for the morphological future now hailing us into a responsive relation to technology, and to each other.

HOLOGRAMS OF TECHNÉ

We know that in this cold (modern) millenium *techné* has been both a poison and a remedy (*pharmakon*).[2] And like writing (the *pharmakon* of Plato's millenium), technology is both threat and ally. The more extreme fears of technology seem to operate from a logocentric interpretive framework. That is, our relation to technology has been determined by our objectification of the world and our use of technology to subject the world to our will. Martin Heidegger captures the nature of the problem in his essay, "What Are Poets For?" He writes: What threatens man in his very nature is the willed view that man, by the peaceful release, transformation, storage, and channeling of the energies of physical nature, could render the human condition, man's being, tolerable for everybody and happy in all respects (116). What Heidegger reveals, in all its horror, is that man's self-assertion over against the objective world is a function of ethics gone awry, of value-systems (moralities) that man super-imposes by "reason" (*logos*) of his fundamental belief in his ability to control nature. In this essay, written as a lecture in 1946 (the date is not insignificant), Heidegger laments the link between objectification and values:[3]

The fact that we today, in all seriousness, discern in the results and the viewpoint of atomic physics possibilities of demonstrating human freedom and of establishing a new value theory is a sign of the predominance of technological

ideas whose development has long since been removed beyond the realm of the individual's personal views and opinions. (112)

On recent visits to Los Alamos (NM) and Pearl Harbor, I had occasion to think "in all seriousness" about the realities of moving "beyond the real of the individual's views and opinions." Sitting next to Japanese tourists (wearing translation headsets) as we watched film footage of the attack on Pearl Harbor was a surreal experience. I had to ask myself how they would feel standing next to me as we stared at larger-than-life photos of the victims of Hiroshima in the museum in Los Alamos. The paradoxical effect of a will to domination of nature with technology (and abuses of it for violent ends) and a fear of technology (with attendant scapegoating, exclusion, and surveillance in order to defuse the fear) has inured educators to the suffusion (overpouring) or refusal (pouring back) of techné. To conceive a "responsive relation" to technology compels us into diffusion (pouring out over a wide area, to scatter, disperse).

Thus, I want to pour out (and sail among) an archipelago of *ethoi* from the essays of this section, but it is difficult when *logos* guards the gate. James Porter reminds us (via John Barlow) that the old paradigm "Guardian Class" served a Cold War mentality as justification of individual rights under the auspices of protecting U.S. citizens from terrorism. This squares with Arthur Kroker's analysis of French accounts of technology in a bimodern age. In Kroker's view, bimodernity means "living at the violent edge of primitivism and simulation" (18).What Kroker discovers is a response to the question of what to do "when technology is no longer an object that we can hold outside of ourselves but now, in the form of a dynamic will to technique which enucleates *techné* and *logos* in a common horizon, is itself the dominant form of western being—possessed individualism" (14). If the dangerous alliance is formed by *techné* and *logos*, an ethical alliance might be formed by techné, ethos, and the feminine. As I have stated elsewhere, "if *techné* and *logos* have formed the violent edge of primitivism, simulation and possessed individualism, then feminist teaching is where *techné* and ethos converge to form the ethical horizon of authenticity, negotiated space, and dis/possessed individualism" ("Inside," @dig par. 20).

HOLOTROPES OF ETHOS

From a panoptic view of the ethos of community (Porter) to synoptic views of the ethos of individuals (Guyer), the authors in this section mark the pedagogical scene with transgressions of the techno-logical. It is, in a manner of speaking, a section linked by transgressive moves and bimodern edges. A question we should ask is to what end this method of linking is put, a question similarly posed by Susan Romano: "The question becomes, then, not what are the technical means by which we can problematize student identities, but rather, to what ends do we do so." To what ends, with what ends, do we link? Lyotard says that "to link is necessary, but a particular linkage is not" (80). Some say this is

an irresponsible political position. Without invoking the logic of responsibility, I suggest rather that we evoke "responsive relations" among teachers, students, and the technologies that serve as thresholds across which we may "turn," thresholds that bind us together as well as set us apart.

What are the possibilities for plying a theoretical, practical, and pedagogical alliance among techné, ethics, and feminism? Carolyn Guyer sets one such example:

> The truth I instinctively sense in what I am trying to draw here has me wary of being distracted by discussions of refinements among layers of mediation and variations of representation. . . . In exploring boundary-crossing more than the boundaries themselves, it is clear I am choosing a philosophical and political direction. . . . Always, when differences of any kind are not perceived in their paradoxical nature *as both necessary and permeable,* values concerning them become judgments about people, infecting culture with the prevailing principle of dominance. (my emphasis)

Guyer chooses to announce her wariness of conventional argumentation, and she resists the pressure to glorify politics, a tactic I find commendable, and one I employ via Haraway and Guyer in my expression of solidarity with them. "Permeable" and "promiscuous" are interesting (and evocative) terms with which to ply feminism, justice, science and technology together. This is what I mean by finding hidden connections.

Martin Luther King, Jr. may not have known how his "dream" presaged Cynthia Selfe and Olav Hauge, but where linking is not dependent upon *logos*, we can tack into the wind instead of allowing it to determine our route. Hauge, a Norwegian poet, wrote a poem called "It's the Dream" and captures the essence of linking by way of plying old trade routes:

> It's the dream we carry in secret
> that something miraculous will happen
> that must happen—
> that time will open
> that the heart will open
> that doors will open
> that the rockface will open
> that springs will gush—
> that the dream will open
> that one morning we will glide into
> some harbor we didn't know was there.

This is how it felt to read Selfe's essay. In her skillful analysis of commercial images about technology, Selfe (in a nod to her own history) grants us a powerful view of ethos in her observation that such ads often "fail to show" people of color. She writes: "These ads are what my grandmother would call 'mighty white.'" It does not seem incongruent to me to imagine Selfe as a child keenly

logging her grandmother's truisms and teaching as a "nomadic feminist cyborg guerilla" (Handa), invoking her grandmother's wisdom in the classroom. My responsive relation to Selfe's invocation is quickened with kinship.

You see, it is not difficult to trace the paradox of electronic pedagogy, to see how it permeates and is permeable. It is how Guyer describes "boundaries of difference as the locus or situation of paradox, being at once both noun: wall, divide, fence, and verb: pass, shift, transfer." It is a turn, a turning away from splitting hairs using either and or, words (for example) that often lace a feminist panegyric on agentic subjectivity (either we have agency or we don't). Could the "subject" be both permeable and permeating in social relations?[4]

Porter relies on Foucault for one answer. Reminding us that there will always be relations of power in the social network, Foucault advocates a less utopian set of options with which to deconstruct those relations. He writes: "The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination" (Foucault 18).

Susan Romano picks up the theme by experimenting with what she terms "pedagogies of the self." As researcher of online teaching practices and student discourse, Romano's ethos emerges often, though nowhere so "responsively" as in this remark: "As lurker historian, I read primarily from a teacher's perspective, with interest in outcomes but without responsibility for them, and I read at a more leisurely pace." Like Haraway, Romano reveals her reading protocols, which serve as an ethico-imperative to her reader. Not "read me in this way" (a logical imperative), but "it is necessary to read with me in this way," a mode of reading designed to include her reader rather than to assume for her reader what protocols of reading she must adopt. As I read her, Romano exhibits a responsive relation to her students and her readers. She invites me (and you) to read over her shoulder, a familiar place for situating us as lurkers. In an interesting twist, lurking is historically perceived as a male practice. To find a woman pirating a practice of men in order to situate herself within the commerce of feminist composition research is not nothing. The hermeneutics of lurking, like the permeable and promiscuous, confounds established protocols of argument and research and thereby plies an old trade route where we are used to staking our interpretive claims.

Following the trade winds, Gail Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan also point to issues of ethos when they recount the claims of many computers and composition researchers as mostly grounded in an "egalitarian ethos," the classroom as community, the teacher as facilitator, the computer as equalizing. "As women" and "as feminists," Hawisher and Sullivan might seem to offer their ethos in a straightforward manner, but it is more oblique than we might assume (another hidden connection). And, it comes immediately through the voice of Tina, "Hi everyone." With Tina's self-conscious questions, asked without guile

and posed blushingly, we hear Hawisher and Sullivan's ethos mediated by Tina's words. When they claim that "self-image is problematic for her and more problematic as it becomes more visual," they articulate an interesting turn of events. In the effort to name a problem for feminist compositionists researching how computers and Internet technologies complicate what has heretofore been assumed (i.e., its ability to evoke an "egalitarian ethos"), Hawisher and Sullivan suggest an ethos grounded in something else—they mark their ethos squarely in the tension between text and image, specifically in the "vexed relationship between online writing and images." Inside this relation, the vexation of the being between text and image, they respond to Tina. Thus, theirs is another instance of the responsive relation.

VIRTUAL DIFFUSION

I pause here to recapitulate how and why I have been writing against the grain of a conventional response essay. First, I am thinking against the grain of logical linking mechanisms. Second, I am working against the grain of mainstream feminist practices. Third, I am surfing the rhetorical trajectories of what will have been an off-the-chart virtual diffusion. No index for me. No solid grounds, just "groundless solidarity" (Elam 69). In short, my aim is to in/fuse my *ethos* among the pieces in this section (like injected dye into living organs, a fluid dispersal) as a means with which to view those brilliantly lighted points of radiation (or the archipelago)—not the commonplaces (*topoi*) of their electro(exo)skeletal arguments, so much as the uncommon *ethoi*, or the "common circulatory system" we all share (Haraway 22).

One warning, however—when traveling inside the fluids of our bodily metaphor, it is necessary at all times to "practice safe rhetoric." Elsewhere I have explained that to be rhetorical, to practice safe rhetoric, means to look at something from a number of perspectives, to analyze our culture in terms of how discourse shapes culture, shapes material and social conditions, and shapes attitudes. To be rhetorical is not to participate in scapegoating. It is not about placing blame, it is about understanding, to literally stand under something in order to speak about it, or against it, or with it (not to be confused with literal-mindedness, which can work against understanding). It means to question without being cynical, to look for answers without creating new problems, it means to include rather than exclude, to act rather than react. We cannot afford to engage in cynicism and exclusionary rhetorics that threaten to infect the progressive work of sociotechnologists like Donna Haraway, rhetorical ethicists like James Porter, and cyberfeminists like Diane Davis, Susan Romano, Gail Hawisher, Pat Sullivan, Cynthia Selfe, and Carolyn Guyer, all of whom examine identity politics in the light of actual practices and educational goals. Safe rhetoric, to be blunt, is about protecting oneself from infectious and communicable toxic discourse.

This does not mean that we can avoid the rhetoric of negative cyber-hype, but it does mean we can help determine the discourse protocols by engaging in

productive discussion about computer-assisted instruction and the Internet in terms of their psychosocial impact on individual and collective lives. And especially with respect to the use of Internet technology in education, we should do so rhetorically, going slowly, doing our homework (so to speak) before we make claims about the "value" of the Internet and about its effects. The fact that children, women, and other marginalized and vulnerable groups are the potential victims of Internet stalking (and worse) raises crucial questions about how educators can protect the freedom to use this powerful medium at the same time they try to protect those who use it against potential abuses.[5]

To do our homework, however, means we must ply another old trade route called "freedom." Porter navigates these murky waters in his discussion of free-speech and violent speech on the Internet. In his view, the liberal-individualist perspective (that he claims is at work in the field of rhetoric and composition) "does not address the material conditions of the networked writing situation or the fundamental inequalities and differences that exist there." In his critique of this perspective, Porter suggests that a "communitarian, reciprocity-based ethic," such as that advocated by Connelly, Gilbert, and Lyman's "Bill of Rights for Electronic Citizens," offers "an ethic based on a gift-exchange system of property."

Interestingly, there may be a hidden connection here to the "hacker ethic" common among young (usually white) male computer programmers. Jan Rune Holmevik explains how the hacker ethic evolved:

> To hack in computing terms means to take an existing computer program and modify it to suit one's own needs and preferences. At the time when computers were far less powerful than they are today, writing programs that would make the most out of the limited computer resources at hand were very important. For the early hackers at MIT, the purpose of hacking was to make existing programs smaller and more efficient. The motive for doing this was often to impress one's friends or peers, and hence, listings of computer code were circulated freely for others to read, learn from, and be impressed by. When Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle of Essex University in the United Kingdom wrote the first MUD in 1979, they made all the source code available for others to use and improve on. . . . In 1989, a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University, James Aspnes, wrote a MUD he called TinyMUD. It was a typical hack, written in one weekend. In contrast to other MUDs which could only be modified by wizards with special programming privileges, the TinyMUD was user-extensible which meant that anyone could add to it. The design of the MUD architecture was no longer a privilege for the wizards only. In the TinyMUD, anyone with an account on the system could build new locations and objects and describe them as s/he wished. (Haynes et al., 1997)

We might be tempted to discount the hacker ethic as an alternative to the liberal-individualist view of technology in education, but it may be more productive to guard the question of this ethic, to use it without excusing (Spivak,

"Feminism") its obvious ties to a masculinist domination of access to the actual and symbolic "code" with which the computer languages and cultures of the Internet have been written and in which they are implicated. The fact remains, the hacker ethic is a *gift-exchange system of writing*. We ought to ponder the implications of this for collaborative learning theories in rhetoric and composition, especially how the development of collaborative technologies on the Internet (i.e., educational MOOs, Linux operating system, and HTML)[6] could be used as models for new ethical electronic pedagogies in the field of computers and writing.

CONFUSION

The problem of institutional ideologies that *confuse* (pour together) the "solitary writer" and collaborative learning, as Porter points out, has to do with giving up their "principle orientation" toward the individual student. Taken one step further, when technology adds to the "confusion," when we pour together (often in disjunctive ways) new modes of intelligibility (and new codes), it effectively "outs" the faculty in ways that they may find unnerving. In Romano's study she concludes that "[t]eachers allotting class time to electronic conferences [i.e., online class discussions] and committed to sponsoring equitable discursive environments find themselves awkwardly positioned with regard to their own assignments." Not only this, but teachers become more accessible because of Internet technology, and the degree to which they prepare for teaching is revealed in ways we are only just now understanding.

To put it another way, educational technologies that utilize Internet-based programs are disturbing the *logos* of the "academy" and sending shockwaves throughout academia. The Internet challenges institutional systems by radically changing the way we teach and argue, and with whom. Not only is the Internet capable of jamming the credentialing machinery (such as online dissertation defenses),[7] it is beginning to split open the nature of grading,[8] as well as assessment at the level of tenure and promotion.[9]

As for the trade route of feminism, we have great distances before us and contrary winds. We could do with some confusion (pouring together) and a little deconstruction. I would, however, inject a more favorable view of deconstruction than Teresa de Lauretis, who merely flips the question of sexual difference over. She argues that "do [ing] away with sexual difference altogether . . . closes the door in the face of the emergent social subject, ... [and] if the deconstruction of gender inevitably effects its (re)construction, the question is, in which terms and in whose interest is the de-re-construction being effected?" (De Lauretis 25; qtd in Romano). Placing Spivak in dialogue with De Lauretis, I would stress that in the space of difference from which reversals operate to gain political independence, "there is always a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this reversal" (*Outside* 78).[10] Spivak reminds us that we must accustom ourselves to starting from a particular situation and then to the

ground shifting under our feet. As I mentioned earlier, Diane Elam's phrase for this kind of reading with and against the grain of feminism is "groundless solidarity" (69).

Although problems and solutions are conventionally the marks of argumentative discourse, especially about global issues, I prefer to consider where we have been together, and where we will have been—to look back and to drift on in the wake of our traversals (and our groundlessness). We have turned by way of hidden connections. We have lurked promiscuously. We have linked by way of diffusion. We have engendered the "responsive relation" by way of practicing safe rhetoric. Hopefully (and as I began, unexpectedly), we have plied old trade routes and tendered a new techno-commerce with which to exchange our tokens, our *ethos*, and our gifts of teaching and writing. And perhaps, we have sailed into some harbor we didn't know was there. It's the dream we carry in secret.

NOTES

1. I am what you might call a token feminist. That is to say, I use tokens of feminism and *ethos* as gift vouchers. I prefer to write as part of a running exchange. Cixous helps me explain why: "If you give a text that can be appropriated, you are acceptable. When the text runs far ahead of the reader and ahead of the author, or when the text simply runs, and requires the reader to run, and when the reader wishes to remain sitting, then the text is less well received" (7).

2. Jacques Derrida deconstructs this Greek term and cites Plato's *Protagoras* in which Socrates "classes the *pharmaka* among the things that can be both good (*agatha*) and painful (*aniara*)" (*Dissemination* 99).

3. This problem is one that I take up extensively in my dissertation, "In the Name of Writing: Rhetoric and the Politics of Ethos" (University of Texas at Arlington, 1994), though it is more focused on unhinging the link between *logos* and morality as it traces the politics of *ethos* in rhetorical traditions.

4. See my short essay on "the self/subject" in *Keywords in Composition* for a view of how these terms are contested within the rhetoric and composition field.

5. These passages appear in altered form in the section on ethics of our introduction to my chapter in *High Wired*, "From the Faraway Nearby" (p. 6–7).

6. This research is in progress in the dissertation by Jan Rune Holmevik (University of Bergen, Norway), "Constructing Cybermedia: Collaborative Technological Development on the Internet."

7. In July of 1995, the first ever online dissertation defense was held at Lingua MOO. The candidate, Dene Grigar, has co-authored (1998, with John Barber) an essay on her experience, "Defending Your Life in MOOspace: Report from the Electronic Edge" The transcript of the online portion of the defense can be found at http://wwwpub.utdallas.edu/~cynthiah/lingua_archive/phd-defense.txt.

8. One of the most outspoken voices on the topic of grading, especially in electronic environments, is Eric Crump. He has uploaded several threads on listservs

that deal with the issue of grading. One may be located at: http://dewey.lc.mis-souri.edu/rhetnet/gradegame/#end.

9.   Mick Doherty, Becky Rickly, Traci Gardner, Eric Crump, Victor Vitanza, and other participants in C-Fest (an online series of meetings I established in 1996 at Lingua MOO) have gathered various sources in which efforts to construct collaborative position statements about the use of technology in teaching and research are made available online. See the Lingua MOO Archive and Resource page for logs of C-Fest meetings on the topic, http://lingua.utdallas.edu/archive.html (esp. meetings from spring 1997 meetings), and Eric Crump's site on professional recognition, http://www.missouri.edu/~sevenc/recognition.html. Mick Doherty has also gathered links to key sites at http://www.rpi.edu/~doherm/recognition. For the joint CCCC/NCTE effort online, see Becky Rickly and Traci Gardner's site, http://kairos.daedalus.com/promo/promo.html. In addition, in the first issue of *Pre/Text: Electra(Lite)*, co-edited by Victor Vitanza and me, a critical polylogue on the T&P issue can be found at: http://www.utdallas.edu/pretext/PT1.1A/PT1.1A.html.

10.   Deconstruction involves a "double gesture," not a single reversal. Once the reversal occurs, it is necessary to implode the binary altogether—to *refuse* (pour back) its axiology. As Derrida explains the "double science" of deconstruction, "to do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. . . . The necessity of this phase is structural . . .the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself. . . . That being said—and on the other hand—to remain in this phase is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system. By means of this double. . . writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new "concept," a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime" (*Positions* 41-42).