Putting 2.0 and Two Together:
What Web 2.0 Can Teach Composition About Collaborative Learning

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An Introduction and a Disclaimer

Writing about technology in the 21st century is a tricky business. It's the ultimate exercise in humility: knowing that as soon as your fingers press the keys, those same keystrokes may function in a new, or newly obsolete, way before your words are even published. Combine this with trying to discuss technology and how it can be used in any one specific discipline and you're liable to feel like a dog chasing his tail, always a step behind until you're too dizzy to keep running.

Indeed, discussing, studying, or writing about technology today is so transient that it has the power to take ideas that are immediately refreshing and exciting, and quickly turn them into antiquated ideals of hope that can only materialize if nothing new is developed before you figure out the first edition. As a result, writing this article is a bit like writing a placard for a museum exhibit.

So why bother writing anything at all?

The simple answer is that this article, and the resulting conversation, is not about new technology at all, but about the study of the conversation itself; the heart of rhetoric. What you are viewing here is a museum-in-progress, a real-time archiving of what we think we know and what we think we're *going* to do about it.

The first lesson that Web 2.0 technology teaches us, then, is that no data—however immediately obsolete—is ever useless. Conversation is writing is text is data, and *Google*'s mission "to organize the world's data and make it universally accessible and useful" (Google, 2008) coupled with its high stock value provides enough justification for why the conversation (and ownership of the conversation) is worthwhile and necessary.

But even as we discuss evolving technologies, what purpose do we fulfill by trying to apply any one particular technology to any one particular discipline, especially one as contested as the field of composition? The question is an interesting and necessary one, but increasingly misleading.

Our goal should never be *what* technology can teach us, but *how* using it and discussing it can help us produce our own community-specific knowledge that can be used with or without a computer. As I aim to demonstrate in this article, using technology is no longer merely an activity we engage in, but a space that we—and our colleagues, students, family, and long-lost friends—occupy and live in.

So ignore, if you like, the potentially pretentious title of this article: promising, yet again, that

technology can offer us something newer and better than before. Perhaps it's not best to fall into the same old trap of exploring what technology can do for us in the field, lest we move into the same circular motion of always trying to catch up to the next best thing, a technology or our tail.

Instead, I invite you to think about what collaboration can teach us about technology, because the heart of our current cutting edge technologies is the interaction and conversation that we're having with each other. Without these interactions and conversations our favorite websites and technologies wouldn't even exist. So with a clean conscience that what I wrote at the top is now firmly cemented in the past tense, I welcome the real conversation that takes place when texts are composed, friends are made, and knowledge is produced.

Framing Questions and Definitions

In order to explore what Web 2.0 means to a lot of people in academia, business, and on the web, it may be helpful to first acknowledge the behemoth present on nearly every college and high school campus: *Facebook*.

Though initially started as a social site for active college students, it has welcomed in the entire world; by summer 2008, *Facebook* reported over 90 millions users (Statistics, 2008), with conservative estimates of the current college student population upwards of 20 million strong.

The site is the epitome of a popular and hyper-socialized Web 2.0 site. Both students and the general public are interacting textually on its platform from both academic and decidedly non-academic spaces. While increasingly ubiquitous WiFi and Internet access has made web-based interactions more popular, what separates this new generation of Internet sites from previous ones is its inherent social nature.

Some of the most popular sites on the web today—such as *Wikipedia,* which was visited by 107 million people in October 2007, making it the eighth most-visited site on the Internet (Rhys Blakely, 2007)—not only provide products for users, but rely on those users to enter text and interact with others in order for the site's product to be desirable.

In essence, Web 2.0 sites allow users to collaborate with others to produce personalized experiences.

While no one site can encapsulate the diverse experiences a user may have on popular Web 2.0 sites, for this article I have chosen *Facebook* because of its dependence on user interaction via textual production.

Facebook is perhaps one of the most popular and representative examples of Web 2.0 technology: Internet sites that not only allow users to view information, but that function as "platforms" to interact with and revisit in the same way computer users run programs and store data on their personal computer desktops (Tim O'Reilly, 2005).

As a subset of the umbrella of Web 2.0 sites known as social network sites, *Facebook* is a clear favorite on campuses. *Facebook*'s rival sites like *MySpace* and *LinkedIn* respectively boast more

users and similar motivations, but *Facebook* represents itself as a leader in this new version of Internet website by prominently relying on its "Wall" feature: an infinitely regenerating space where anyone can write on another person's profile page.

This feature is important to note because once written on, the text is public to anyone viewing the profile, thus asking users to consciously consider audience when writing on it as opposed to, for instance, composing a private email on the site. This consideration of audience is complicated by the fact that a person can write on *someone else's* wall, thus enabling her to author a text on a personal profile not her own.

While this is happening, the owner of the profile still controls the space and the text: he can delete someone's Wall posting or he can add new friends or write on others' Walls which may prompt them to write back. As a result, each time someone adds text to his wall, the entire profile changes. Thus my carefully considered page from earlier is opened up to a situated conversation (including the one shown here), which may affect how others view my identity through the page.

As the owner of my profile, I maintain a fixed yet evolving identity as I invite others to coauthor the text of my profile page. As a result, a profile page on *Facebook* becomes a site of social and textual collaboration with complementary goals of self-expression and reaching out to a real and relevant audience: both things compositionists strive for in classrooms and collaborative assignments. Furthermore, student-users are not simply co-authoring a text, by writing on each other's profiles they are co-authoring *each other*.

Facebook's Wall function is a further embodiment of new waves of technology in that it provides compositionists lessons on three distinct intersections of collaborative textual production online and in the classroom.

My purpose in this article is to highlight three questions that Web 2.0 is addressing in a virtual space, which may have implications for instructors of composition interested in collaborative theory and practice in their own academic spaces:

- **WHO** is a text addressing? Web 2.0 sites focus on users working with each other to create textual and visual representations of their interaction. This process encourages users to collaborate while being aware of their roles as author and audience.
- **HOW** is a text collaboratively authored? Web 2.0 sites rely on the production of never-completed texts to build expanding communities. This infinite production of text highlights the process nature of composing valued in composition and collaboration.
- **WHERE** is a text produced? Web 2.0 is online and virtual; it can be accessed and interacted with in classrooms and faraway countries. This function extends the

classroom into realms of the physical and virtual extracurricular space.

By exploring these three parallel questions, we can further see the relationship between Web 2.0 technology and collaborative textual production in and out of our classrooms. Whether this technology is used in the classroom, or simply acknowledged more fully as existing beyond classroom walls, compositionists need to recognize how this technology is affecting the nature of social and textual production in the 21st century.

As we move deeper into this exploration, I consider these definitions essential to understanding the concepts of this article:

- **Collaboration:** Defining online collaboration means ultimately determining whether or not users are aware and/or complicit in their actions to produce shared document(s). This article does not attempt to make this determination, but instead aims to demonstrate the *potential* for explicit collaboration that may or may not develop. Likewise, while Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1990) quote Deborah Bosley as defining collaborative writing "as two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document" (p. 15), I herein agree with Nels Highberg, Beverly Moss and Melissa Nicolas (2004) who believe that Ede and Lunsford's "concepts also apply to writing groups where individual writers produce individual texts" (p. 4). This important conflation of co-authoring and group writing will allow us to complicate definitions of collaboration and collaborative writing by including work of scholars like Anne Ruggles Gere (1987) who demonstrate writers/users seeking both individual and group success.

- **Web 2.0:** For this article, this highly debated term simply refers to interactive websites that portray the "web as platform" (O'Reilly, 2004). These sites include useful and successful websites that span social network sites (*Facebook*), wikis (*Wikipedia*), suites of sites (*Google*), commercial sites (*Amazon*), and other websites like blogs and file-sharing sites that rely on user-input interaction to sustain content and community. My use of the term Web 2.0 likewise considers Henry Jenkins's (2006) use of "participatory culture," where "consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing" (p. 60). By definition, there is no one, single website or technology that is wholly representative of the Web 2.0 movement. Throughout this article I have primarily used *Facebook* as a case study for Web 2.0 and social network sites mainly because of its ubiquity and popularity with students. *Facebook* is likewise an interesting site to study because unlike wikis, whose purpose is largely to produce a type of knowledge that is "truth"; or blogs, which primarily host one main author and myriad respondents, social network sites like *Facebook* offer no singular purpose for users nor a clear distinction between author and editor or producer and consumer, making them a model of Web 2.0 as platform, and spectator culture as participatory culture. Granted, user- and textual-interactive websites are only one small part of the larger Web 2.0 picture (as there are useful individual and non-textual sites available), but for the purposes of studying student-user collaboration and composition, I have focused this article on social networks for hopefully apparent reasons.

- **Community:** Composition scholars have long debated the term "community" as a concept both "appealing and limiting" (Joseph Harris, 1989, p. 21). Other fields, however, tend to address the term through the lens of an eventual purpose. While business scholars Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis," (p. 4) and social-scientist Howard Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace," (p. 5) this article looks to simplify the working definition of community. By applying Kenneth A. Bruffee's (1984) broad "community of knowledgeable peers," we can assume that an online community is a group of users who both have a common reason for occupying the same site and/or textual space, and who likewise possess at least a basic understanding and mutual respect for the practices, norms, and purposes that they share.

- **Text:** Any alpha-numeric input (whether individual or part of a whole) by writers/users online is considered text for this article. This includes (but is not limited to) Wall posts, photo tags, comment boxes, etc. Gloria Jacobs's (2004) simple use of the word "text" to describe not only the alpha-numeric input by a user, but all of the contextual implicit and explicit interactions that inform that input succinctly considers online and off-line input. Her study of instant messaging makes clear that no single line of text in this medium can be taken out of the context in which it is written and received. Likewise, a single post on a *Facebook* Wall is a piece of text in the same way that the Wall taken at large is considered text. This division is beyond the scope of this article, but will undoubtedly be an important distinction for future scholars to explore.

A New Sense of Community

According to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), as reported in a featured front-page story in the *Detroit Free Press*, "technology-literate" students should be able to "create media-rich presentations for other students on the appropriate and ethical use of digital tools and resources" by the time they graduate from high school. The same article recommends that children aged 4-8, in prekindergarten to second grade, should be able to "in a collaborative work group, use a variety of technologies to produce a digital presentation or product in a curriculum area" (Lori Higgins, 2007, p. 8).

According to ISTE, students should be able to use technology to collaborate *before* they can even compose academic texts.

This is where our expectations of young students meet the inevitability of the culture in which we are educating them. It is not uncommon these days to walk into nearly any composition classroom on nearly any campus and find students typing and clicking on personal laptop computers, some of which may be connected to the Internet via school-provided WiFi connections.

Students are now actively engaging in creating texts via websites like *Facebook* that rely on users and their content-producing text to exist. As a result, students are literally bringing outside texts, communities, and practices to composition classrooms each time they log on to the Internet. They are already collaborating and composing before lessons are even given.

Witnessing student-users actively participating in such an interactive and textually-dependent medium is the first step to realizing what Web 2.0 technology can teach us about collaborative composition.

Within Web 2.0, users create text in order to populate sites with data; in turn, users can access their (and other's) data virtually from any Internet-connected website. As a result, Web 2.0 sites are traditionally viewed as more "useful" than previous generations of websites because of the possibility of transferable interactions—such as the ability to communicate, sell goods, or make a user's life easier. Among these newer sites, *Google Documents, CraigsList,* and *Twitter* are three of the more popular and colorful examples of this pragmatic approach to the web.

This is what was meant by technology industry vanguard O'Reilly Media in their 2004 conference when they targeted the "web as platform" as the cornerstone of any site deemed Web 2.0. Likewise, their resulting "Meme Map" shown here illustrates some of the commonly perceived secondary traits of this technology.

Of particular note, primary author Tim O'Reilly focuses first on the technology, but then on the user as he or she "control[s] [his or her] own data"(O'Reilly, 2005). The data in this case refers to the text (including written text, photo uploads, hyperlinks, etc.) on each Web 2.0 site; and each of the periphery bubbles are connected to the central ideas of platform and user by incorporating both textual reception *and* production, a major difference from Web 1.0 sites.

More relevant to compositional studies, though, each aspect of Web 2.0 points to the interplay of user, text, and another user. These inherent and interactive relationships highlight the social—and potentially collaborative—nature of this new breed of website as well as place a focus on all users to play both author and audience at any given time.

What lies underneath this process is a new wave of attitudes towards textual production and collaboration that may have far-reaching effects beyond a student writing an email to a friend via

Facebook while working on a research paper in *Word*.

Web 2.0 sites are changing the way users receive, produce, and define text. In a study exploring ways students collaborate and compose in visual spaces (including student-authored websites), Margaret Price and Anne Bradford Warner (2005) conclude that students "are less accustomed to think of themselves as authors, rather than consumers" of visual compositions.

When users write on a person's *Facebook* Wall, for example, they are consciously creating a public text meant to be viewed by everyone who visits the profile page. The autonomous author of the posting (as text produced on the Wall is called) retains his or her identity—provided by a corresponding photo and name attribution—but the text becomes situated not only on another individual's profile, but also on the Internet via *Facebook*.

User- and text-based Web 2.0 sites provide tools to users combining desires of self-expression and community participation. However, current users may not be fully considering the implications of the public nature of their textual productions. While the above user may have *wanted* to communicate to his or her friend, and for his or her friends to see his or her posting on the Wall, the near-infinite audience of the Internet opens the possibility that this text may present him or her with the unintentional dissemination and recontextualizing of his or her original message as more users interact with and spread it via the social web of such sites.

Such regeneration keeps *Facebook* in business, but also raises important questions for how composition teachers discuss audience in relation to similar collaborative textual productions in class.

As Price and Warner (2005) note, students composing for the first time in an online and interactive visual space may find it hard to switch between being consumers and authors. Likewise, Peter Holland questioned the role of authorship in a hypertext environment over a decade ago, stating that "it creates two types of authors/editors, refusing to distinguish between the two: those who write sentences and those who restructure materials" (Holland qtd. in Rebecca Moore Howard, 1995, p. 791). These consumer/author and author/editor binaries vividly display the complexity of being an audience member in a medium of blurred public and private space.

Traditional academic texts may invite audience comments in the virgin margins, and emails may elicit responses by opening new text boxes, but sites such as *Facebook* literally invite audience members to interact with a person's privately-composed text in a very public way, which complicates notions of authorship in such interactive and potentially collaborative textual productions.

By continually revising and providing platforms for new content, sites tantalize users with the potential of new discoveries and interactions each time they visit. Users may visit a site multiple times a day to engage with text, and each other. This produces these sites' most unique selling point for compositionists: the promise of writing for an actively engaged audience.

Unlike previous notions of publishing student work to the web to provide them an audience, Web 2.0 provides students an audience who can *write back*, interestingly conflating author and audience.

Price and Warner's (2005) study of composing in visual spaces notes this by saying, "authorship and audience tend to work together: if a writer cares about her audience, she is more likely to feel and behave like someone with author-ity." Thus, student-users of sites like *Facebook* deliberately compose to fulfill desires of self-expression and communicating to a greater public audience, which may empower them not only to visit the site multiple times a day, but to interact with the text on the site in new ways.

This likewise not only confirms that "writing is not a solely (or even largely) individual act, but a social one [where] new ideas and texts…are developed intertextually from bits and pieces already out there," (Johndan Johnson-Eilola, 2004, p. 200) but that users *want* to do this and, gauging by the popularity of such sites, are comfortable with the virtual spaces in ways that perhaps they have not been in traditional academic spaces.

But this is not the only difference between new and old sites in users' eyes. Simply put, *Facebook* is "cool" (as is *Twitter, Google, Firefox*, etc.*)* Users are not only buying in to the platform and aesthetic that a site like this provides, but in essence the entire zeitgeist of the community. These sites echo Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's (1991) view within composition classrooms over two decades ago that "collaborative activities increase along with a greater sense of community in computer-supported classes" (p. 58).

In other words, computers support communities, and communities support computers—a combination that provides student-users with a sense of belonging, and perhaps a sense of urgency to continually be a contributing member of a collaborative community.

21st Century Collaboration

The field of composition has emphasized the social nature of writing for decades, but modern technology seems only recently to have embraced the term "collaborative" as a way to describe their interactive capabilities.

Indeed, Kenneth A. Bruffee's ur-text, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," is as relevant to our understanding of new media today as it was to collaboration over twenty years ago. Bruffee's (1984) historical view of collaboration highlighted the "social context" of "peer influence that had been—and largely still is ignored and hence wasted by traditional forms of education" (p. 638).

In this case, the process nature of collaboration relied on peers "learning to converse better and

learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value" (p. 640). In other words, the process of community building—the most essential aspect of successful collaboration—was studied through conversation. Without relevant conversing, the community loses value and collaboration becomes increasingly more difficult to foster.

This is why *Internet Movie Database's (IMDb)* recommendations and review sections have been so important to their success: the community is seen as relevant, and since the conversation has been archived so that a user will not feel like he has missed anything, every user is a potentially powerful member of the community bound by common interests (who likes what music, buys similar books, etc.) and common desires of self-expression. In essence, by all arriving at the site independently, but then contributing in individual ways, the successful Web 2.0 site *IMDb* has created Bruffee's important "community of knowledgeable peers" (p. 644).

As a result, "a sense of community" often is referenced in a lot of literature about collaborative learning. However, we can infer that as it relates to technology, this sense transcends mere feelings of belonging and instead refers to a deeper sense of purpose. Nowhere is a sense of purpose more concrete than when a community is trying to produce something. And in the case of textual production online, that something is typically knowledge.

While it may be true to assume that most wiki projects aim for truth, accuracy, or coherence in their final products, the same cannot necessarily be said of other Web 2.0 sites. For example, are users on *Amazon* merely contributing text to help the site sell products? Are users on *Twitter* actively updating their statuses to build a linear timeline? And to the point of this article, are users on social network sites like *Facebook* actively attempting to co-author texts to produce knowledge relevant to others, or is this type of activity mainly a solipsistic form of sharing where users are interacting, but not collaborating?

These questions will occupy scholars in composition and technology alike in the coming years. For now, though, it may be the most we can do to agree that Web 2.0 sites provide the clearest form of widely-available *potential* for collaboration than any technology preceding it. By providing users with ready-made communities who interact primarily via textual production,

these sites offer undeniable overlap between social and academic fields of thought.

Of course, as discussed previously, considerations of authorship and power are complicated not only by social and academic forces, but also the commercial nature of most Web 2.0 sites. Ede and Lunsford (1990) point to "changes in copyright laws, in corporate authorship, [and] in computer-generated discourse [as] related to theoretical challenges to the 'author' construct" (p. 139). Because of the blurry lines drawn between ownership of collaboratively produced text, issues of ownership on websites can further the discussion of intellectual ownership in classrooms.

For example, the case appears clear that a review of a book on *Amazon* is mine once it is posted and attributed to my name. However, is that review ultimately responsible for why a person purchases the item under consideration? If my reviews are helpful, and my textual contributions proliferate on the site, could that theoretically encourage more people to purchase items? As a result, should *Amazon* pay me a commission? The text is mine, but the computer servers are owned by the site, and the "results" of the text are undetermined, with only the influenced user and the owners of the website benefiting.

This kind of hypothetical situation may provide an excellent discussion point for debating the merits of attribution and rewards within the academic system. Everything from good grades to tenure involving collaborative writing may be affected by the judgments such discussions produce.

Besides a sense of belonging for users, or economic gains by companies, textual production on these websites most importantly produces conversation; a sustained discourse. Nowhere is this more apparent than on *Facebook's* Wall, where the situated space creates a meta-community of peers related to the owner of the profile.

Presumably, all of the participants on the Wall wish to form a community of peers who have the profile owner in common. A private email would just as easily form a person-to-person link, but a Wall posting builds upon a sustained dialogue even when the entries cover different topics. Taken together, these texts tell a story to any visitor of my profile that I am a particular type of person with particular kinds of relationships. But what happens when a friend offers something I do not like, or something that I do not desire to be known publicly?

This also becomes a power situation, but more so, the discourse of this meta-community takes on what John Trimbur (1989) attributes as an "abnormal discourse [which] represents the result at any given time of the set of power relations that organizes normal discourse: the acts of permission and prohibition…"(p. 608). Referring to Richard Rorty, Trimbur critiques his view of abnormal discourse as too heavily empowering the individual who is "ignorant of [the] conventions" of a given community (Rorty qtd. in Trimbur, p. 607). This abnormal discourse

serves as a check on the normal (and normalized) discourse within a cohesive community.

On a profile Wall, this intertextuality of normal and abnormal discourses produces a complete text in much the same way classroom conversations and coauthored texts provide a view of the complements and conflicts of social interaction. What Web 2.0 offers those in the composition field though, is the continuously changing view of what it means to consent and belong to such a fluid community.

Though often asynchronous, texts produced collaboratively on websites should be viewed as elongated conversations whereupon users talk to each other to achieve common goals—advice on what to buy, gossip on shared acquaintances, or simply acknowledge someone else's existence textually.

All of these textual interactions are borne from individual desires, but taken collectively produce a cohesive whole which demonstrates O'Reilly's core competencies of harnessing collective intelligence and "trusting users as co-developers." To see users as developers brings the conversation of collaborative textual production back to students in the classroom, and considerations of what pedagogical choices need to be reconsidered in light of this new technology.

On Walls, comment sections, and wikis, individual entries are both individual finished texts, and evidence of an evolving text. This public display provides what James A. Reither and Douglas Vipond (1989) look for in "writing as a collaborative process [which] gives us more precise ways to consider what writers do when they write, not just with their texts, but also with their language, their personae, their readers" (p. 856).

Composition instructors can instruct students how to write and then evaluate their final products, but collaboration privileges the invention and composing stages (pre-writing and writing) in ways that ideally challenge the writers' ongoing thoughts about the composition process.

Web 2.0 sites provide instructors with a way of not only encouraging and facilitating these stages of the writing process, but also as textual evidence of the process. Technology now allows instructors to see the textual movements of authors as they interact with each other by not only comparing drafts and final products, but by allowing access to the milestone conversations and considerations that produce the text. In other words, the conversations of process become the text of the final product.

Sites like *Facebook* offer compositionists a new view of this power struggle in and out of academia specifically because their success is contingent on the collaborative nature present in writing groups and collaborative writing projects, and because the sites were borne outside of academia walls. On the current of ubiquitous WiFi access, this spatial divide allows those in the composition field to transgress traditional barriers of power relationships by walking the bridge between online and real spaces via these new sites.

Making Friends Through Visual Interaction and Versioning

This fresh look at community exists not merely in conceptual ways, as it has in the past; theoretically there are communities of scholars on library shelves and in the ghosts of academia, waiting to be communed. But this change in view is the most important lesson Web 2.0 can provide those in the composition field regarding audience.

Communities like the one present on *Facebook* are mainly visual. Text on the Wall is made more powerful by the corresponding author's profile picture next to it. Researchers have not yet begun to fully consider how this affects the way student writers perceive and enter into a conversation and community.

For example, notes the difference between reading:

> As researchers begin to explore ways that emerging new media can supplement traditional views of textual production in academia, they need to consider that the "Web [is] not simply a platform for distribution, but [is] a medium to be exploited" (Price and Warner).

and seeing the same text with corresponding pictures of the authors (provided through their personal and program websites at Spelman College):

This is exactly what students (and anyone who uses features like *Facebook's* Wall) are seeing everyday. What are the implications for community, authority, and collaborative writing when users make that shift from textual to visual, or vice versa? How does it change reading of the text if students felt capable of writing *back* to the authors as if in a real conversation? Students may be able to use these websites to literally join a community that has only existed in the abstractions of names, book titles, and concepts till now.

For example, take the simple scenario of an amateur author/researcher (played by me) contemplating a professional author/researcher's (in this example, Andrea Lunsford) work. In the past, the amateur could cite cross-references, read supplementary material, or insert his own conjecture to address the professional's points. However, with near-instantaneous friending and access via Web 2.0 sites, the amateur can ask the professional directly, such as in the following video:

Through email, personal homepages, and social network sites student-users are coming to *expect* to be able to connect with authors, researchers, and professors the world over. This expectation may not be fully realized as of yet in the classroom, and is undoubtedly something that should be rectified in future discussions of what it means to collaborate or research with established authors. Far from the calls of the death of authors, Web 2.0 has made them more accessible than ever.

Perhaps the most unchallenged misperception of the Internet is that it is merely a static space, a virtual world where people go to visit or interact before reentering into the "real world." What compositionists and others need to recognize is that this perception only recognizes the finished (product) side of this reality. The truth is, newer Web 2.0 sites are making it easier to acknowledge the unfinished (process) side of each visit to this virtual space.

As users explore new areas of the web, they are not only experiencing and consuming data, they are creating data and, as a result, knowledge. This knowledge then becomes new aspects of the virtual landscape to be traversed by new users. This Web 2.0 that has "embraced the power of the web to harness collective intelligence" (O'Reilly).

What others know becomes what I know the more we interact online.

Successful sites present, collect, and re-present data so that users encounter unique interactions with others, and the virtual space itself, each time they visit. Citing one example, "*eBay* grows organically in response to user activity" (O'Reilly). As users sell more products and review each other's actions, the site builds its own *ethos*. People trust the site and feel more at ease interacting on it.

Likewise, *Amazon* sells more books than their competitors because of their focus on user interactions. A quick glance at my log-in page displays the company's recommendations to me based on my previous purchase history. Further,

if I were to click on an
item I would be presented
with not only a description
of the product, but also
user reviews, another set
of recommendations of
books like this one, and a catalogue of the most popular products presumably related to the one I am interested in. All of this enriches my online experience by making me feel part of a community, which implicitly encourages me to buy more, but to also contribute to the community by offering my own recommendations or knowledge-building. In short, a successful site like this asks me to collaborate to create a better product. And, as a happy customer, I willingly do.

Yet what can this commercial interaction teach researchers like Price and Warner who once concluded, "it is the urge to define 'collaboration' as a single thing, or to assume that the outcome of collaboration is a finished composition, that has led to problems with collaborative pedagogies of the past"? Sites like *Amazon* present two clear lessons on how Web 2.0 can teach compositionists new ways of thinking about collaboration.

The first is that by displaying and archiving all of my purchases and review history every time I log in, the process of my textual interaction with the site is always on display. My visits to the site are an infinite work-in-progress. This vivid display of process leads directly to the second lesson of community building through collaboration.

The rhetoric of the site—"recommended *for* you" and "products you'd also like"—suggests not only interactions with others, but a sense that those others, be they marketing programs (like *Google's AdSense* which caters banner advertisements to my web activity) or actual users (who can track my activity by following my hyperlinked name), understand me and who I am. This is a new type of 21st century collaboration based on personal desires of expression (what I buy, what I suggest to others) and textual production through features like the "Customer Reviews," which dominate the product description page.

The possibilities are made even more personal when we consider the language that many successful Web 2.0 sites employ to make users feel like a part of a supportive community. To ask students in a classroom to refer to each other as "friends" is sure to draw chuckles at best, skepticism at worst. Yet sites like *MySpace* and *Facebook* only exist to connect users through electronic friendships.

Though dropping the "friend" moniker, the more professional site *LinkedIn* refers to a user's contacts in a network, and myriad commercial sites like *Amazon* lull users into a sense of security by referring to our "fellow" customers who may be "just like us." This focus on amicable rhetoric undoubtedly alters our view of community specifically by fostering "a sense of" community. This general feeling of being a part of a supportive, similar, and knowledgeable community complicates my earlier definition and requires we redefine our own communities in the classroom.

To focus on Web 2.0 is to focus on user interaction. But to focus on interaction asks us to look more closely at access. Concerns about the materiality of access where users face myriad options and challenges to computers, Internet access, and proficiency are valid. Beyond this, though, the issue of access also concerns temporal favoring. When the original author or empowered stakeholders are unduly privileged, a late-coming audience takes on a role of retorting and commenting on something that has already taken place, and already taken its place on the shelf of academic thought.

For example, think of a comment section on a popular news story, such as this one from an online article (Zachary Gorchow and Todd Spangler, 2008) on August 26, 2008 in the *Detroit Free Press*:

This particular article was posted to the website in the early afternoon. Six hours later there were over 500 comments on it. This is both an important lesson and an important caution for compositionists embracing Web 2.0. There is a significant difference in participating in a conversation from the start, or in joining one only after hundreds of others have had their say. This issue of access to participate not only affects users' desire and textual production, but also affects the text; the article I read at 1pm carries much more context after hundreds of users have added text to it by 7pm.

As a result, what Web 2.0 technologies offer us, is a glimpse into a future discourse I am referring to as *versioning*, which takes into consideration that as new voices join a conversation, the direction and outcome of the conversation itself changes. In the same way new software releases are labeled 10.1 and 10.12, etc. our texts—both social and academic—are undergoing subtle changes when delivered in different modes and occasions.

For example, a quick gloss of many Works Cited pages may refer to the same article written by Author X that appeared in Journal Y at some past date. Although the article may be commented upon, anthologized, or modified by succeeding editors, the initial text is still privileged as the original, and hence, "true" text.

Web 2.0 offers us different versions of the same text that can be acted upon, which then may change the course of the conversation and the text itself. So the same Text by Author X is still initially printed in Journal Y, but then it is shown as a lecture on *YouTube* in a slightly modified way, to which bloggers then comment on and invite comments from, perhaps in a semi-anonymous wiki environment. After the initial text makes the rounds on these different venues, it becomes a completely different text, and the conversation that beget the more recent text gets privileged over the original.

Examples abound for this process; everything from Ede and Lunsford's versioning of their articles on audience, to editions of books on collaboration by Bruffee, even to deluxe editions of CDs or DVDs. But none of these examples fully take into consideration the instantaneous versioning offered on the web.

Web 2.0 offers us the role of co-collaborators, but also challenges us to determine what is concrete and what is ethereal. In this way, an original text is not only not canonized, it may even be considered obsolete if not a part of this versioning process. We need to realize that students are not only receivers of these varying versions, but they are also potential active co-collaborators for the text.

Thus *versioning*, as a model of writing, revision, and reception in post-Web 2.0 technology, is inherently collaborative in that co-authoring and recontextualizing is necessary for there to be new versions of a particular text. This new model is not merely re-placement or even minor modification in the mold of revision (such as editing for length, or author-initiated revision for new audiences), but an asynchronous co-authoring that uses an original text as an inspiration for a conversation-fueled authoring of a new text, or texts.

The interactive nature of Web 2.0 technologies facilitates this give and take that neither over-privileges the original author or text, nor wildly changes the content of the ultimate text. To think of revision of texts in light of Web 2.0 as *versioning* places the focus of composing back squarely on the interaction, collaboration, and process required for nuanced writing.

What We Do and Where We Do It

It seems that regardless of what the field's view of this technology is (or becomes), there is a momentous swell of social and textual production outside of the academy that composition needs to more fully address, if not embrace. Perhaps more than any other time in recent history, writers (who are both students in the academy and users online) are approaching composition classrooms with a diverse set of collaborative writing experiences and, more importantly, a demanding set of expectations for their writing and communication instruction.

This trend, which Professor of Education Technology Martin Weller deems, "the expectations of students that have been raised in a Web 2.0 world," is causing the divide between academic and social settings, or "traditional" and technological classrooms, to become even more pronounced (as cited in John Timmer, 2008).

Overlooking this sharp divide, I ask compositionists to look closer at the *where* of textual

production and collaborative community formation; as student-users turn to social media like *Facebook* and *Wikipedia*, their ideas of terms like collaboration and text are increasingly being challenged by the traditional academic definitions of the same terms. Through a stronger emphasis of studying the spaces in which these definitions are being challenged, we can better gauge when to learn from this technology, and when to teach to the technology.

The first step in accomplishing this is to challenge the binary views that surround social technology use in the 21st century. Taking up Arthur Applebee's initiation of the term "extracurriculum" within composition studies, Anne Ruggles Gere nods "to the fact that writing development occurs outside formal education" ("Kitchen," 1994, p. 76). However, merely acknowledging this writing-beyond-the-classroom is not nearly sufficient exploration for the 21st century.

As Wall posts become the new kitchen tables, and wiki articles the rented rooms, writing is undoubtedly the prominent activity online and outside of the academy. However, although Gere claimed that extracurricular writing "remains largely invisible and inaudible to us, writing development occurs regularly and successfully outside classroom walls" ("Kitchen," 1994, p. 78), this is increasingly not the case as college campuses and classrooms view WiFi access as near-requisite, and students tote fewer spiral-bound notebooks and more laptops to their classes.

Our largest challenge moving into the 21st century is fighting against conceptual binaries such as either/or, us/them, or academic/extracurricular.

Providing one example, Ray Oldenberg explores the nature (and importance) of "third places" in his book, *The Great Good Place*. Situated beyond the first place of home, and the second place of work, Oldenberg's third place possesses "the *raison d'etre* of…differences from the other settings of daily life" (1999, p. 22).

Oldenberg's physical, third space is truly an "other," an alternative from the trappings of the necessary or required places of life. In his catalogue, cafes, coffee shops, and hair salons all fit this description; but it is not too much of a stretch to see how online places like *Facebook* could also fall under this term to describe the area that student-users often escape to beyond their home lives in the dorms and workplace classrooms.

In fact, this confirms the redefinition of community as offering a sense of belonging to student-users. Here, a community's purpose is not explicit knowledge production of "truth," but of a sharing of knowledge within the community that is all at once activity, purpose, and product of the place. Like the close-up of a Wall conversation, interactions within third places undoubtedly create knowledge that can be transferred elsewhere, but their success is not necessarily hinged on the sole goal of producing knowledge. This is what separates current virtual third spaces from previous extracurricular groups of the past.

While well-meaning scholars like Linda Myers-Breslin, who calls us to "help students transition from their extracurricular, real-world communities to their academic or professional communities,"(2000, p. 165) espouse a view of binary, evangelical treatment of these groups beyond the academy, such treatment devalues whatever knowledge production and social

collaboration that takes place on these sites by implying that it is not yet of a higher, academic degree.

This rhetoric of transition is problematic in that it propagates an "us vs. them" understanding of extracurricular writing. If we hope to take advantage of the wealth of collaboration and textual production taking place freely beyond the academy's walls, we must rethink these notions of rightful place, and instead focus on the interactive spaces where useful activity and discourse is taking place. To do so it so honestly define what collaborative learning is in the 21st century.

The fact that these spaces need to be respected by authorities in the academy goes without saying, but in addition to our understanding and exploration, comes a very real need to shed light for out student users that these places and spaces may not be as autonomous, private, or self-owned as they may currently seem. In order to accomplish this shift of balance from learning to teaching, I make the final turn of this article to social geography, specifically informed by Nedra Reynolds's *Geographies of Writing*.

Reynolds addresses textual production specifically within her study, positing, "Places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of *habitus*. Theories of writing, communication, and literacy…should reflect this deeper understanding of place" (2004, p. 2). Indeed, Reynolds's study could not exist without the theoretical idea of inhabiting or dwelling inside of a space; here, a textual space.

This space occurs both in public and private contexts, as Reynolds considers when she uses cell phone conversations in public areas—such as busses—as her example of this perception divide. "The public-private split, while illusory in several ways, is one of the most dominant paradigms about space in our culture, one that leads to notions of ownership…when a text is viewed as having an inside and an outside—with the audience, in particular, as a factor outside—writers can't think of texts in terms of movement or exchange," she writes (2004, p. 12).

This is a legitimate concern for claims that posts on a Wall are part of a collaborative community. After all, many posts are intended for one user to another, and so even though the space is public in nature—complete with an "outside" audience as Reynolds terms it—the textual production is intended as private, or at least semi-private.

This (mis)perception by student-users provides one of the best opportunities for compositionists to discuss the roles that ownership and authority play when there is the presence not only of a real audience, but also one that can contribute and collaborate on the text being produced.

Reynolds contends that, "universities are centers for learning but are also organized to keep many outsiders from feeling welcome" (2004, p. 141). In other words, we already inhabit well-established spaces of authority, ownership, and elitism that can inform our understandings of virtual spaces.

This inhabitation shares the idea that ownership of text (or conversation) occurs most strongly once people are *inside* of a space, where they may feel a sense of privacy, security, and

community. In other words, ownership and the potential to collaborate—in some sense—textually seems to occur best when groups possess perceived autonomy.

This feeling of autonomy is not only important for shared perceptions of authority within a group, it may also be the first marker of potential for successful collaboration within a community. Anne Ruggles Gere notes:

> Authority resides within individual members of autonomous groups because they choose to join other writers with whom they are friendly, share common interests, backgrounds, or needs. Autonomous writing groups depend upon members who are willing to give away, temporarily at least, authority over their own writing, indicating that they respect and trust one another enough to surrender their language to one another's critical scrutiny. (*Writing*, 1987, p. 101)

Obvious feelings of shared-ownership, then, successfully commingle with individual desires to collaborate within a chosen community in these often-extracurricular writing groups. Indeed, Gere contrasts the autonomy of writing groups outside of the classroom with the semi-autonomous and non-autonomous groups formed and supervised by instructors; the chief authority figures within composition classrooms. Historically, autonomous groups have avoided authority.

It is ironic, then, to consider Reynolds's findings from students asked to define their ideals of community. Receiving feedback from Leeds students, Reynolds relays many notions of home and independence in her students' descriptions of their experiences in and around the college community.

However, while this may originally echo Gere's autonomous groups of shared or ignored authority, Reynolds's students advocate "the comforting presence of a police station nearby…desirable places to live are those that have a sense of community…desirable is what [a student] is accustomed to or familiar terrain" (2004, p. 106-107).

In other words, students in the "real" world sought out authority as an ideal component of their chosen communities. While discussing physical geographies, students continually returned to ideas of comfort, community, familiarity, and most interesting—authority. By equating the comfort of community to that of a nearby police station, these students reveal the very tangible idea that authority in the real, physical world is welcomed and often sought after.

People feel more comfortable near a police station in an unfamiliar part of town while avoiding the authoritative hovering of an instructor in a classroom, or refusing to believe that analogous authority figures exist online near the "home" of their personal profile pages.

As a result, as students continue to house their personal data on personal profile pages, take part in communities of friends online, and collaborate on open textual spaces within interactive web sites, we must all confront the contrasting perceptions of authority that exists in the physical and virtual worlds. While it may be taken as a given that collaborative writing in an authority-based composition classroom may be difficult, but certainly possible, we may need to explore the

presence of authority in currently perceived extracurricular web sites that are increasingly becoming ubiquitous parts of our students' lives, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Despite being available publicly on the Internet, many students still do not consider authority figures (such as a concerned instructor) to have the "right" to invade these spaces. Likewise, text they enter on each other's Walls is in some sense owned in their eyes, and so should not be admissible in any judgment against them.

These conflicts of perception are merely a part of a larger conversation about extracurricular collaborative composition we should be having in the academy. It likewise sets the stage for the conversation with our student-users about what they consider collaborative within these spaces.

It may surprise no one to read that "85% of teens ages 12-17 engage at least occasionally in some form of electronic personal communication, which includes text messaging, sending email or instant messages, or posting comments on social networking sites," (Amanda Lenhart, et al., 2008) according to a Pew Internet and American Life study.

However, the same study cites that 60% of those same teens do not consider these electronic texts as "writing" (Lenhart, et al., 2008). We are entering a time of momentous technological innovation and textual production, while also facing the fact that our student-users are not realizing that what they are doing in their own spaces are what we value in our academic spaces.

The solution to crossing this final divide involves instructors moving out before we invite others in. It involves avoiding the pitfalls of "searching for a single technology to substitute for face-to-face communication [that] misconstrues the problem. Rather, we need to devise an appropriate mix of face-to-face and other media depending on the work, its temporal sequence, the context, and the distances to be traveled" (Bonnie Nardi and Steve Whittaker, 2002, p. 102).

Student-users are seemingly already doing many of the things that we value and teach in our classrooms.

More than ever, instructors need to take on roles of advocacy and support, helping students realize—not their potential, but—that their current actions are valuable. In doing so, we are inviting them *to teach us* how this new technology can support collaborative composition. This allows us to use our expertise in guarding the academy while also participating as true collaborators with our student-users via new technologies.

Although most students today were born into Web 2.0 communities (with all of their inherent expectations and potentials), these student-users are no more natural heir-apparents to these spaces than we are to the academic hallways we inhabit. Both spaces require an often subtle set of realizations and agreements in order to be navigated successfully.

At this momentous time, though, we are being offered the fortuitous synchronicity of theory and activity, in that neither "our" academic communities nor "their" virtual communities could exist without textual production. Both sides offer their own set of experiences and expertise; it is now in our hands to further support the collaboration.

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