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ONLINE TEXTS, ONLINE IDENTITIES: DESIGNATED FREE SPACE OR A SPACE CONSTRAINED?

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Unlike other discourses, the discourse of the World Wide Web enables both members of the elite and ordinary citizens to be noticed. Instead of an individual reading certain print texts in a discourse because those texts are the only ones available, the surfer can choose from a vast array of online texts in any genre on the web. In particular, the personal home page allows anyone to become a published author, expressing personal and political views. Both the elites and the ordinary citizens are authors of online texts.

The personal home page is similar to its predecessors the broadside, the pamphlet, the book and the magazine in that it determines who can participate-in this case, those who are computer literate; the personal home page is also different from its predecessors in that there are no monitors determining what can be published. Without that monitor, the home page author must abide by a set of constraints to ensure that the audience takes him or her seriously. This is a paradox between print and web discourse: we want to be involved in this new type of discourse that touts total freedom of expression, but we have to abide by certain rules if we want to be taken seriously. Hence, there are certain sets of constraints that the home page author must work within.

In this essay I accomplish two objectives: 1) through my secondary research, I argue that a paradox between the home page as a designated free space and as a space with constraints does exist; and 2) I present two student home page authors who successfully encountered these constraints in an Introduction to Computer Science course, thereby creating both an effective sense of personal and community identity with their audience.

The Secondary Research:
Theoretical Frameworks for Web Page Action

The constraints a home page author faces are the same constraints a print author may face. There are several theoretical frameworks for understanding these constraints. In this article, I explore three: the cultural studies perspective, the critical literacy perspective, and the classical rhetoric perspective. It is these perspectives that allow a home page author, either knowingly or otherwise, to communicate his or her personal and community identity to an audience. Personal identity will reveal the author's credibility as an individual, while community identity will reveal the author's credibility in specific groups.

The Cultural Studies Perspective:
Voice, Emancipation, and Expression

The cultural studies perspective that explains "social formations and practices involved in the sharing of consciousness as mediated by language and situation" (Berlin and Vivion IX) provides a way to describe the political power and limits of web pages. This involves what John Killoran calls "a sense of voice and agency" (141). Why people on the outside of specific discourses need a sense of voice seems obvious. After all, the vast majority of society is excluded from participating in the world's decision-making processes. For example, the average citizen is not permitted to have

a hand in making policy on local, state, and federal levels, nor are we asked to create the standards or criteria for what determines a good book or a popular song; those decisions are left up to dominating institutions. Therefore, we use the personal home page as a means of "democratic citizenship, a critical engagement with public discourse and a position in the ongoing public conversation" (Killoran 141). Citizens who are not part of dominating institutions can finally have a voice.

Equally, like citizens, politicians use the web as a means of engagement in the ongoing public conversation that Killoran discusses. Barbara Warnick, in her book *Critical Literacy* in a *Digital Era*, discusses politicians' role on the web. Warnick writes that politicians on the web "have simply migrated online" (91). The web, in particular the personal homepage, is used to espouse the views of both citizens and politicians.

People find in the web a mechanism for achieving a form of freedom: emancipation. For children, freedom from their parents; for students, freedom from their studies; for parents, freedom from their children and the mundane existence within the four walls they inhabit every day. Charles Chueng writes "emancipatory possibilities of the personal home page are perhaps more important than the sheer size of the audience it can reach" (46). So how do people emancipate themselves on the World Wide Web? The process is easier than one may think. For starters, personal home page authors have the choice of using their real name or creating a fictitious name; authors have the opportunity to list hobbies and interests, real or otherwise; in fact, with the personal home page authors can create an entirely new life for themselves.

The web also provides authors with a forum to express ideologies and opinions. On the web, people feel free to be Jewish or Muslim, gay or lesbian, and for or against issues that are playing on the world's stage. The World Wide Web can be seen as an ocean

and the personal home page as a seaport where ideologies and thoughts are docked. Of course, just because someone posts a personal opinion on the World Wide Web does not mean that person will be unscathed from another person's opinion or belief, but rejection is sometimes less painful from a distance. There is just as much opposition online as there is offline. Perhaps the acceptance and rejection of a home page author's ideologies and opinions rests on which online communities he or she belongs to.

The Critical Literacy Perspective:
Community Building and Social Action

From the perspective of critical literacy, which Warnick explains as "cultivating a reflective, questioning stance towards the forms and context of print and electronic media" (6), the web offers a way to create or hinder community. In their article, "Complicating the Tourist Gaze: Literacy and the Internet as Catalysts for Articulating a Postcolonial Palauan Identity," Karla Saari Kitalong and Tino Kitalong of explore the Internet, which "plays a substantive role in organizing and shaping the culture, politics, and literacy practices" of the Palauan peoples (101). The authors discuss literacy practices, or functions, of the Palauan people. These functions may also represent those web users who are not of Palauan citizenry or origin.

According to the Kitalongs, personal home pages have a community-building function, which revolves mostly around the inclusive and exclusive language that the home page author chooses to use. In the case of one particular Palauan home page, note Kitalong and Kitalong, "there is much Palauan language being used, which indicates an awareness of a larger audience, while addressing the in-group" (102). The authors go on to write that using Palauan language "can function as an attention-getter, a way of breaking into conversation, in the way Americans might use 'say' or 'well' to

begin a sentence" (103). The use of language also permits Palauan web users, as well as other web users, to create a medium for both insider and outsider audiences.

Another function of community identity and literacy that the authors illustrate through the Palauan's use of the web is the social-action function. Social action can be viewed as an individual or group taking the initiative to solve social problems. These social problems range from Palauan residents in Palau communicating with other Palauan residents living outside of Palau to creating online petitions to initiate legislative action. Warnick, too, discusses personal web pages that often contain links to political web sites and/or create parodies of political sites, allowing individual authors to "insert their voices virus-like into the commerce of mass media (Killoran 141). The web has also increased voter turnout, in particular for the state of Arizona. The electronic poll was first used in the 2000 Arizona Presidential Preference Primary in which "nearly 40,000 of the electorate voted reported turnout and minority group representation substantially increased" (Warnick 94). The need to initiate social action is clear for both residents of towns and cities to entire nations.

The Classical Rhetoric Perspective:
Techno-Ethos and Virtual Pathos

By turning to classical rhetorical theory, we understand how web page authors use pathos and ethos to try to persuade. While community identity is most always purposefully constructed on the personal home page, personal identity unmasks itself regardless of the author's intention to include it or not. In fact, an author is judged by his or her audience based on the unintentional construction of identity. As a result, authors must build a strong sense of ethos to be regarded seriously in this online discourse. In other discourses, authors of printed texts construct ethos by producing cred-

ibility and good character. Theresa Enos, Professor of Rhetoric, and Shane Borrowman, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Arizona at Tucson, write that credibility "is a construct wherein a rhetor's authority to speak on various matters rest" (96). In order to gain this sense of credibility an academic author will most likely provide a vita before or after the text. This vita may include the author's place of schooling, place of employment, and previously published texts. Ethos is strengthened when an author provides reasons that are credible.

Another way to produce credibility is for the author to show that he or she is knowledgeable about the topic being discussed; this knowledge can be shown by producing facts and justified opinions. Yet another way in which authors strengthen ethos with the reader is by proving good character; good character, however, is more difficult to produce than credibility. Enos and Borrowman write that good character stems from good virtue, and they quote Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to aid their explanation: "virtue comes about, not by a process of nature, but by habituation" (97). So good character is produced by virtue, which is produced by habit. A good habit for every rhetorician is the ability to use language effectively to accomplish a means to an end by rising to the occasion warranted from audience, purpose, and situation. Accomplishing this means to an end is harder than it may seem to an inexperienced rhetor; however, experienced rhetors have a firm handle on their writing.

Constructing ethos, known as "techno-ethos," on the personal home page constitutes a peculiar paradox. On the one hand, the personal home page is designed as a free space for the individual and community; on the other hand, the free space provided is not completely free since authors must construct a strong sense of techno-ethos to be taken seriously.

Techno-ethos, write Enos and Borrowman, "is built on a firm

foundation of technological know how" (104), but the author "relies heavily on the same tactics" (98) used to create print ethos. However, that is where the similarities between the two types of ethos construction end because, on the World Wide Web, authors are expected to design personal home pages with interactive elements which "are easy to navigate and easy on the computer-tired eye" (107). The interactive elements unique to the World Wide Web are buttons, navigation bars, frames, hyperlinks, and interactive graphics. A "clear mastery of medium lends the group credibility, and constructing an "easily readable text that is easily navigable" (107) will be a factor in creating the author's credibility.

The home page author also, as in techno-ethos, engages in virtual pathos. Virtual pathos is the creation of emotional appeal on the web. Killoran writes that the web is "replete with Pathos" (134). It seems obvious that the average home page builder and web user do not possess anything of value to market, so these users "often exercise the promotional impulse in hyping their own sites" (135). The home page author "hypes" his or her site by using many of the interactive elements discussed along with techno-ethos. These interactive elements not only construct credibility and good character, but they also evoke emotion.

Interactive elements are not the only facet of the home page that evokes emotion; Killoran writes that slogans and graphics evoke a reader's emotions too. Graphics found on the personal home page can be compared to the colorful pictures that are found in printed text. Graphic representation in any text is a sign system, and, writes Art Silverblatt, et al., graphics "are language for the eye" (215). It is graphics that the web surfer sees or looks for before digging into the text of a home page. Moreover, the graphics that are chosen by the home page author will, indeed, "reflect the ability of visual images and messages to contribute to the discourse of power" (215) provided that together the graphics and the text are able to

form a coherent meaning. Aside from the interactive elements that are used to construct techno-ethos, the author also has other textual matters to consider: typography and color.

Typography is the size and font of a text. Silverblatt, Ferry and Finan quote Kevin Barnhurst, author of *Seeing the Newspaper*, as saying that "typography can provide a graphic representation of the content, reinforce messages, or comment on the content: the form of typography can mimic sizes, weights, shapes and postures from the environment" (217). Typography jumps out at an audience, bringing their emotions to a rolling boil or a cool temperament. Colors, like typography, will "evoke a wide range of emotional responses in the" (223). Silverblatt, Ferry and Finan go on to write about the different emotional responses an author evokes by the colors he or she chooses to use: "extroverted personality types prefer warm colors (red, orange, yellow); in contrast, introverts are attracted to cooler, subtler tones such as blue, green, or purple" (223). From the research I did on the work of Silverblatt, Ferry and Finan, it appears that graphics, typography and color play a dual role in the design of a personal home page: they convey the emotions and opinions of the author, and at the same time they are likely to elicit readers' emotions, opinions and reactions concerning the author's ethos and the home page's contents.

Although the personal home page has been designated as a free space for users and their ideas, cultural studies, cultural literacy, and classical rhetorical theory illustrate that the home page author must work under challenging conditions. Killoran gives two reasons why personal home page authors work within constraints: 1) "these parameters (constraints) define a model of public subjecthood in a domain in which subjecthood has few precedents" (132), and 2) by following these constraints "we can be sure we are saying the right things about ourselves if we display ourselves with such officious representations" (133). Thus, the three theoretical

frameworks discussed challenge all home page authors, especially students.

The Application Section: Two Students Face the Cultural Constraint

In this section of this paper, I intend to show how two student home page authors at St. Edward's University faced cultural constraints in their Computer Problem Solving in Computer Science class (COSC 1301). These two students did an exceptional job constructing both personal and community identity within the three theoretical frameworks of cultural studies, cultural literacy, and classical rhetoric, and therefore, successfully worked with the constraint they were challenged with. Hence, both students successfully negotiate the paradox of reconciling home page as a designated free space and as a space with constraints.

The professor for this course is Richard Kopec, Ph.D., and the prerequisites and course objectives from the course syllabus for COSC 1301 provide useful information about the structure of the course. COSC 1301 has no prerequisites. The objectives of the course include, but are not limited to, learning how the microcomputer is used for problem solving and quantitative reasoning, introducing students to the discipline of programming in computer science, and learning about the internet and the various tools to access its various component (Kopec).

The rules for Dr. Kopec's assignment are simple and allow his students to be individuals while working within certain constraints: all materials you create must be new, you must include interactive elements, you must include one web page feature, frames should be used to display your pages, each web page file you create should have an appropriate name and title, you must include at least one new GIF image, and you must be creative (Kopec). Clearly, one is able to see that this course provides a challenge to those students who are either not computer literate or techno-savvy.

The first student home page belongs to Cindy Trippe (Fig.1). Her genre is autobiographical. Trippe engages herself in two of the Kitalongs' functions: community-building and social-action function. The community-building function is evident through Trippe's use of inclusive and exclusive language. She creates a table of nine words that she believes describe her; in fact, she emphatically captions this table "Words That Describe ME." This inclusive word list (student, daughter, leader, friend, sister, worker, athlete, aunt and volunteer) provides a keen insight into Trippe's personal identity as a family member (daughter, sister, friend, aunt) and into her community identity (leader, student, worker, athlete, volunteer). The caption of the table is orange suggesting excitability and activity, which are associated with an extroverted personality, and "ME" is capitalized suggesting she is determined and proud. This makes sense since the background color of her home page is yellow, which signifies an intellectual persona.

Trippe uses exclusive language to list her personal interests while positing a question and providing an answer: "If you like hiking, rock climbing, swimming, gardening, running, long walks on the beach, cooking, traveling, ballroom dancing, reading, dogs, then... send me mail." Not just the listing of personal interests places Trippe in several communities, but her invitation for other web surfers to email her permits an interaction with the members of these diverse communities.
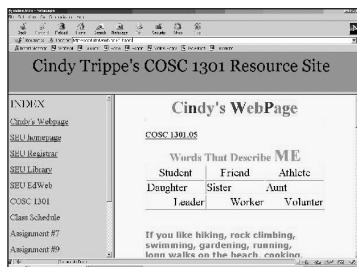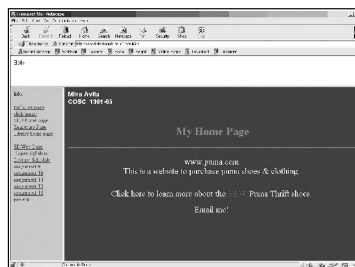

Figure 1

Figure 2

An emphasis on travel is illustrated throughout the rest of the web page. Keeping with Kopec's guidelines, Trippe creates a bulleted list of "places traveled" and a numerical list of places she would like to travel to. By listing these places, Trippe yet again opens herself up to the possibility of diverse community interaction. She might discuss these places with other web surfers who either live in, have visited, or want to travel to these locations.

The text just above the bulleted list provides Trippe's call for social action. Once again Trippe posits a question and provides an answer: "Are you interested in learning about world issues and human rights like ME? Visit Amnesty International!" First, she makes it known to her audience that she is a person who cares deeply about issues that are playing on the world's stage. Trippe's deep emotional connection towards world issues is illustrated again by the red text and the capitalized "ME." Second, by providing a hyperlink to Amnesty International Trippe is inviting her audience to visit their web page. This invitation suggests that Trippe wants her audience to visit Amnesty International and then email her, thereby starting another possible community interaction and ultimately avoiding face-to-face persecution of her ideologies and opinions.

Trippe's credibility and voice stem from the language she uses to describe herself. We trust people who are involved with family, and we are prone to respect people who are leaders and hard-workers and who care about the world's issues. Trippe's good character stems from her [not forcing her audience to read her home page and respond, but from] her inviting the audience to read about her interests and respond to her call for social action rather than forcing her audience to read her home page and respond. Trippe's use of virtual pathos stems from the colors and interactive elements she incorporates.

Although Trippe does not use all the interactive elements that Enos and Borrowman and Killoran discuss, she uses many of these elements correctly and in a user-friendly manner, providing her with a modicum of techno-ethos and virtual pathos. Frames divide her web page, making her home page, the St. Edward's University home page, registrar's office, library, and COSC 1301's home page accessible. She places hyperlinks at a welcoming distance from each other and uses a "return to top" hyperlink for her reader to easily go back and forth. The graphics Trippe uses, original GIF images, are coherent with the text: The envelope signifies email; the globe signifies world issues and human rights; and the suitcase and road sign signify her passion for travel. All these graphic signs are easy to comprehend and help explain the text.

It is Trippe's use of language, appeals to ethos and pathos, and image that demonstrate her capability to successfully work with the three perspectives, thus successfully meeting the challenge of the cultural constraint.

The second student home page evaluated belongs Mike Avila (Fig 2). The genre of Avila's home page is advertisement. Before the audience notices Avila's name and course number in the top left corner, they will most likely notice that the his home page is a dark, royal blue, which suggests trust, loyalty and sincerity. Using blue for an advertisement makes perfect sense since consumers want to buy goods from businesses they trust. Silverblatt, Ferry and Finan report that "[T]he University of Basel in Switzerland compiled [color associations] and responses to color from subjects in Western Europe and the United States" (224). So, according to the University of Basel's research, the identities that Trippe and Avila project through their color choices are accurate.

Most of Avila's text is composed in the form of what Killoran discusses as slogans (135). The first piece of text after the title is a hyperlink to Puma.com, and right under the hyperlink is the rea-

soning behind the home page: "This is a Website to purchase Puma shoes and clothing. Click here to learn more about the NEW Puma Thrift shoes." Avila lets his audience know exactly what to expect if they continue surfing his home page. By choosing to capitalize "NEW" in red text (Fig. 2), Avila is suggesting not only that he himself is an extrovert, but also that this new type of shoe is for readers with an extroverted personality.

Avila's community identity is that of a Puma shoe representative, and he communicates his credibility to the audience by sharing his knowledge of Puma footwear styles and footwear favorites in bulleted and numerical lists. The bulleted list is composed in the vibrant Comic Sans MS font, which could suggest an excitability that Avila may have towards the product. His community identity and good character are strengthened with the inclusive language used in the paragraph that explains the Thrift shoe line. For starters, Avila uses "you" and "your" several times to create an intimacy between the audience and the particular shoe line: "your favorite old shirt, your father's tacky necktie." This line is crucial to the building of Avila's good character and his advertising pitch because he is not asking his audience to sacrifice anything in order to own a Thrift shoe. In fact, he invites the audience to take articles of clothing they already own and turn them into a "classic, low profile Top Winner style" shoe. Also, the table Avila constructs incase the words "REPRESENT: Go to the Puma Web site and submit your personal Puma photo and win prizes." People embrace the opportunity to represent products they use-with the "personal Puma photo" the reader has the chance to model for Puma—especially when prizes are involved!

Furthermore, Avila extends himself to the audience by inviting them to buy Thrift shoes and "receive a numbered certificate of authenticity . . . and receive an invitation to join the Thrift Web community." What teenager or twenty-something does not want an

authentic article of clothing or the chance to belong to his or her own community?

Avila's personal identity is not blatantly visible to his audience but hidden in his language. With the assumption that Avila, not being paid by Puma but doing this as an assignment, really believes in the product he is advertising, the exclusive language he uses to describe the shoe is an indication of how he defines himself: "individually numbered," "extremely limited edition," "and uncommonly unique." Also, I believe that the motto Puma uses to define its shoe—"Shoes with a Soul"—may indeed define Avila as a spiritual person.

Avila's use of Techno-ethos and virtual pathos, similar to Trippe's, is not established using all the interactive elements to achieve his objectives. Through his frames, the reader is able to easily view his banner, a links section, and the home page. The graphics bring the page to its fullest advertising potential. The Puma logo makes no mistake in telling audience members what they are looking at. The logo also serves to separate the text, so the reader does not feel overwhelmed by the hyperlinks and lists. The small black puma in the bottom left corner is, of course, a symbol for the Puma Corporation. Pumas are known for their fierce attitudes and fast legs, so adding this graphic was a wise move on Avila's part. The last graphic after the paragraph is of a sneaker. Since the home page is an advertisement, Avila may have figured that the graphic that is inserted last will be the graphic his audience remembers. If you are advertising sneakers, then you want your audience to remember sneakers—another wise move on Avila's part.

Like Trippe, Avila's use of language, appeals to ethos and pathos, and image demonstrate that he has overcome the cultural constraints on building successful web pages.

Conclusion: They Succeeded-But What if They Had Not?

In the beginning of the application section, it was noted that both Trippe and Avila did an exceptional job constructing both personal and community identity within the three perspectives explored in the secondary research, and therefore, successfully worked with the constraint they were challenged with. Hence, both students successfully negotiate the paradox of reconciling the home page as a designated free space and a space with constraints. However, to consider the importance of their exceptional job, knowing what the outcome of the home pages would be without heeding the cultural constraint is imperative. If the authors ignore the cultural constraint, and in turn, ignore the three perspectives, their audience would not understand the online text and therefore would not understand the authors' personal or community identities. It is only when the home page author adheres to the constraint and its perspectives that the author's audience truly understands the depth of what the author is revealing.

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