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Narration and the network: Postmodernism and freshman composition

Ford, Robert Gilbert, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1992

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NARRATION AND THE NETWORK:
POSTMODERNISM AND FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

by

ROBERT G. FORD

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Narration and the Network: Postmodernism and Freshman Composition

by

Robert G. Ford

Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* provides useful tools for investigating the student-student and student-teacher relationships in a composition class conducted on a computer network via modems. Lyotard's examination of how knowledge has been legitimated in the classical to postmodern period suggests that along with the delegitimation of the grand narratives of emancipation and speculation has come a reduction in power of narrative means of legitimation, leading to the postmodern age of paralogy, in which knowledge is legitimated by local groups of experts enacting momentary rules to guide their specific discussions.

Throughout this text, Lyotard dispenses with the idea that narration might hold a strong position as a legitimating structure. At best, he suggests that "little narratives" continue to exert importance, but only at the level of examples and statements made by scientists, not at the level of the laws or rules of significance. At the same time, Lyotard privileges the importance of scientific knowledge and scientific means of legitimation. Relatedly, he also privileges technology, suggesting ultimately that computer data banks will provide society with an efficient means for determining the rules needed to guide the experts involved in paralogical legitimation.

Such privileging of science and technology is not fully justified, for narrative means of legitimation are still important, as is shown by the data saved from a class taught over a computer network as part of a distance education program using modems. The data from this computer modem course suggest
that narration is still powerful as a force for legitimation, both in how the class is legitimated as a structure, and in how the students and teachers play legitimating roles with each other. Class members speak to each other from narrative positions of power. However, they speak from multiple narratives forming cross-cutting and blurring senses of narrative power. Thus, these narratives lead to disruptions in the class, disruptions that operate in ways similar to Lyotard's notions of paralogy, leading to a system of narrative paralogy.
DEDICATION

In my family, you learned the power of narrative early. For me that knowledge came at my Aunt Fannie’s round oak kitchen table in her house in Huntsville. She’d serve tea cakes and tell me her memories, her opinions, her beliefs. She told me about my mother’s mother, her sister, who died in 1932. She told me about the women in the Bible. She told me about my parents. She told me stories that taught me how to think.

My parents, in the drive to and from Houston for these weekend visits filled the car with stories too, stories about me, about their lives before me, about the stories that Aunt Fannie would tell me. Sometimes, my mother’s stories would touch on her mother too, and I’d learn about Indians in Oklahoma and a store in Gould during the oil boom.

I dedicate this project to these story-tellers, my great aunt, Fannie Sample, my father, Robert Ford, my mother, Lucille Ford, and her mother, my grandmother, Ida White, for teaching me the importance of stories.

I dedicate this especially, though, to my mother, who now listens to my stories too.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank Linda Driskill, who changed my career when she introduced me to composition ten years ago. She encouraged me to teach my students to be aware of the writing process and to brainstorm. Through brainstorming sessions with her, I've stumbled into the ideas contained in this dissertation. Throughout the twists and turns of my writing process, Professor Driskill's support and encouragement have helped me finish this dissertation.

I also thank Wesley Morris, who has helped me with two such projects, and Harold Rorschach, who read my work in the increments it came to him.

I wrote this dissertation while on sabbatical from Houston Community College; the College's support has allowed me to complete this project.

The Distance Education Office at Houston Community College has helped in many ways, from conversations with Mary Beth Schillaci to develop ideas and support from Pat Barden and Elaine Reed to gather data.

I also thank the students I met over the modem, especially in Spring 1991, who helped change my ideas about teaching.

Thanks also to Anthony Chee, Dean of Instruction at Central College, and to Dottie Pearle for helping me complete this project. I especially thank Tom Montgomery, for helping my students with their computers and for saving my life with the last computer I used for this project.

I also thank the Arts and Humanities Division of HCC. I thank J. Frank Thornton and Nancy Kirkpatrick, for their support; Margaret Ford, for our love of Paris; and Elizabeth DeLeon and Melissa Miles, for everything else.

I thank the members of my personal network for their help this year. Each of the following people is first for me.
Cheryl Peters, my patron at HCC, who has supported me, taken me dancing, and spent an especially complicated night printing this dissertation.

Linda Daigle, my favorite collaborative peer, who has helped me confront aspects of teaching as I never have before.

Sydney Elliott, who listened to an early version of this dissertation while she took me on a wild ride in San Diego.

My mother, Lucille Ford, who let me grapple with Lyotard on her sofa.

Marsha Recknagel, who listened to me ramble about Lyotard, while we sat on park benches, watching sheep and foxes ramble about.

Moragh Montoya Orr, my first friend in graduate school, who helped me finish by finishing with me.

Susan Wood, who has been a confidant at crucial moments.

Gilbert Finnell, my friend and landlord, who provided a marvelously deconstructive house in which to deconstruct Lyotard and myself.

Gene Voss, who helped me relieve stress through exercise.

Mark Broome, my friend, student, and teacher, who helped me organize my thoughts for this dissertation, in a series of study sessions.

David Ottenhouse, who relieved my mind during long conversations.

John Star Baxter, my most inventive cousin, who on the morning after I completed my outline, surprised me with a piece of his art.

Karen Glazier, who has helped me integrate the worlds of my career and my friends with the kind of energy only she provides.

And more friends and colleagues than I can mention. I also acknowledge many favorable horoscopes and fortune cookies, culminating in "A Wise Man Turns Chance into Good Fortune." With the friends above, I have.
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PREFACE

Jean François Lyotard suggests that, today, in what he labels the "postmodern age," "the classical dividing lines between the various fields of science are . . . called into question—disciplines disappear, overlappings occur at the borders between sciences, and from these new territories are born." A guiding spirit behind this dissertation—if a "guiding spirit" is even possible in a postmodern period—is to participate in this process of overlapping, by probing the borders between two separate fields: poststructural criticism and composition theory. These borders (I use the plural to respect the intricacy of their terrain) have been approached repeatedly in the last decade, so many of my readers are already familiar with the issues, languages, and controversies of both fields.

However, because our academic system still values its departments, many readers may be familiar with only one field. As a result, I have written this dissertation for both audiences, trying to explain enough of poststructuralism to clarify it enough (for my needs, here) to composition instructors and researchers, and trying to provide enough explanation of composition to emphasize its intricacies to poststructuralists.

Border-guards can be tricky—at least in grade "B" movies—so one sometimes needs assistance in crossing borders. In this dissertation that assistance is offered by a third field, with its own concerns, its own language: computers, especially their application in education. I thus use a certain amount of computer terminology, but not too much. I am concerned not with the fine points of technology but with the effects, or results of that technology, the texts it allows us to create and how we may analyze them.
In advance, I would like to thank these audiences, especially if any of their members find that my explanations of elements of a certain field cross another border, that of the obvious. I hope, though, that other readers, from different audiences, will find, at the same time, that my explanations seem as if from a useful phrase book and travel dictionary.
CHAPTER 1: THE PROJECT OF THIS DISSERTATION

... the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.

—Jacques Derrida

I first read these words when they were part of assigned critical reading in a Victorian prose and poetry course. They were confusing to me then, so much so that I hadn't the foggiest notion of how to apply them to Mill or Ruskin or Arnold. What, I wondered, what was I supposed to do with them? A few years later, however, as I began to teach freshman composition in a community college, these words became very meaningful, for I found that they helped me understand how I taught writing, and how my students practiced a skill as confusing to them as these lines were once to me. They spoke to me of possibilities—possibilities that writers with low self-esteem could discover hidden talents, that I could play with my roles and responsibilities as a teacher, that the "old" rules of teaching were no longer the only rules.

I now view these lines as reflecting both origins and intersections.

Origins and Intersections

One set of intersections and origins is contained in the language of this passage, for Jacques Derrida is referring to three concepts that together have helped create a wildly complicated series of literary and cultural movements. These concepts, "poststructuralism," "postmodernism," and "deconstruction," are
affirmation"; postmodernism in the image of "a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin"; deconstruction in the notion of "an active interpretation" (292). Together, these terms announce a certain language game that offers no less than a program to view and analyze the world.

"Poststructuralism" may be viewed in several ways, as a philosophical or critical moment, or as a way of looking at some subject, but one of the best explanations of its power as a tool for "affirmation" comes from further in Derrida's essay when he writes of an "interpretation of interpretation" that:

... is no longer turned toward the origin, [but] affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (emphasis added) (292)

Poststructuralism swaps those dreams for a recognition of the lack of transcendental meaning available in language and the concepts it tries to present (or make seem as if they are present). It focuses on uncertainties, on the shaky ground on which our language and culture are founded; it views these uncertainties as part of the lot of the world, not as its nightmares.

"Postmodernism" may be understood as a result of poststructuralism, or as the state of a world that could either create such a method of analysis or find it attractive. Jean François Lyotard, often cited for his use and explanation of the word, (see Barker and Kemp 1; Connor 27; Carroll, David 70) argues that postmodernism
would be that which, in the modern, **puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself**; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; **that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.** (emphasis added) ("Answering" 81)

Postmodernism is thus a movement, possibly referring to a period, even one within another period, that directs how humanity experiences the world. Poststructuralism would be a technique to use to probe that world, to see how it functions.

"Deconstruction" is also a technique, but a more precise one that might be regarded as a tool poststructuralism uses to analyze texts. Jonathan Culler has suggested that when one is deconstructing, "the goal is not to reveal the meaning of a particular work but to explore forces and structures that recur in reading and writing" (260). Through this exploratory process, one, in effect, takes a work apart, looking at its elements, its assumptions, looking at, even, the edges of these elements and assumptions, looking at the margins of a text. One determines what the author says, and what he misses, what terms he uses. In this process, one notices gaps, places where the author's argument collapses, noticing how the collapse is maintained. Deconstruction is, in this way, the very "identification of unity as a problematical figure," as something to distrust (Culler 200). It is a process of looking at what a more traditional frame of mind would overlook as unimportant, as marginal.
These lines also suggest an origin. Such a role is a bit odd, yes, for lines that seem to deny the very idea of "origin," but historically they create an origin of sorts. They occur at the end of the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," which Derrida presented at the conference, "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," at John Hopkins University in 1966. Now regarded as an introduction of poststructural criticism to the United States; the conference was also what Frank Lentricchia has called Derrida's "quietly subversive appearance on the American scene." Lentricchia goes on to call this essay "one of the indisputably landmark essays" of the conference, "an elegant attack on the traditionalist position in general" (160). Thus, one may regard this essay, and by extension this passage, as part of the beginning of a new age in American criticism, the era of poststructuralism, an era that has waxed and waned in the almost thirty years since this conference, but an era still with much power.

Curiously, this origin of poststructuralism in the United States may be viewed as forming an intersection with another origin. John Schilb, in an article published recently in College Composition and Communication, contrasts three papers presented at this conference, including Derrida's, with three essays delivered at a similarly ground-breaking meeting, the 1963 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). This conference has been called "the conference that most historians of rhetoric point to as the first gathering of the 'modern' profession of composition studies" (Connors, Ede, Lunsford 10). After tracing several such laudatory remarks about the conference, Schilb suggests that although the conference may not "reveal . . . so much the objective 'truth' of composition's past," it does suggest the nature of present-day scholars' investments of a particular narrative of it" (424). Schilb
uses the juxtaposition of the two conferences—and the contrasts of such potential pairs of composition and poststructural scholars as Edward Corbett and Roland Barthes, Francis Christensen and Jacques Lacan, and Wayne Boothe and Jacques Derrida—to suggest a series of similarities and differences between current composition theory and poststructuralism.

I mention Schilb's parallel mostly to tease the reader with idea that at the beginning of two crucial movements in academia, the advent of poststructuralism and the shift into modern theories of composition, their leading figures may be viewed as engaged in dialogue. This is an exciting thought, especially given intellectual, political, and economic differences between the two movements that could make such closeness almost illicit. This is a dialogue that remained hidden for some time; in the last ten years it has become more open and heated, as a good dialogue should be in academia. The future suggests even further possibilities, some of which fall within the scope of this dissertation, for it will investigate this connection as it plays with the question of who helps whom—poststructuralism . . . or composition?

Poststructuralism and Composition: Related Ideas

For some time, various scholars have taken what I view as the more conservative of these positions, that poststructuralism offers composition scholars assistance in their quest to understand the writing process, the relationships between writers and readers, and the effects of class structures. Articles appeared as early as 1979 (Sharon Crowley's widely cited "Of Gorgias and Grammatology"), and since the mid to late eighties a series of articles and books have examined what poststructuralism offers teachers of composition.
The issue is now such an accepted possibility of composition research that NCTE, in its "Teacher's Introduction Series," has published an introductory text on deconstruction (Crowley, A Teacher's Introduction to Deconstruction, 1989).

One interesting observation about this new critical industry is that while "traditionalist" critics of literature faced deconstruction with dread, "charg[ing] it with unbridled subjectivism, relativism, irrationalism, and structural self-contradiction" (Lentricchia 162), teachers of writing, although considered "a rather conservative lot," have approached "post-structural [sic] literary theory with a surprising calm, even general acceptance" (White 186). Why such a different reaction—what could poststructuralism give to composition instructors and scholars? I see two answers, one the practical one of offering new insights into their field, the other the political promise of legitimation; the two are interwoven.

Some insights come from similar concerns in both fields with rhetoric, either as a system of rules and structures, or as a system that may seem blocked, unstable, creviced—but still a system that works. John Schilb, in his discussion of the uses of poststructuralism for composition, emphasizes that "poststructuralists have raised significant issues concerning the nature of discourse. Moreover, they have often done so through references to 'rhetoric" (422). Poststructural examination of rhetoric uses deconstructive analysis to "show philosophical texts deconstructing their own arguments and identifying their own strategies as rhetorical impositions"; more importantly, at the same time, such analysis is "not identifying some failing in [a] text that might be made good" (Culler 183). Such a form of analyzing rhetoric asks a question more like "what would happen . . . instead of assuming that elements of the text were subservient instruments of a controlling meaning or total and governing attitude,
readers were to explore every resistance to meaning?" (Culler 243). Rhetorical analysis of this kind yields rich possibilities that constitute an interpretation of the meaning of a text.

Composition has also placed a similar scrutiny on rhetorical devices, first as part of a new concern with "Classical Rhetoric" after Edward Corbett's address on "The Usefulness of Classical Rhetoric" at the 1963 CCCC conference mentioned above (Connors, Ede, and Lunsford 10). Later, "parallel to the rise of poststructuralist theory in our universities, although surprisingly rarely overlapping with it, there has grown up the equally sophisticated New Rhetoric, which places strong emphasis on writing-as-a-process, on the play between discourse and contexts, on how goals undermine or define 'meaning' in discourse" (Kaufer and Waller 67). Now part of mainline writing textbooks throughout the nation, this focus speaks a language that can find theoretical support in poststructuralism.

A poststructuralist in a writing classroom could take these general similarities and push them far, letting composition see new possibilities from poststructuralist theories. For example, poststructuralism would extend the now accepted tenet that "Writing is a process" to "mean that the process that is writing is differentiation and not repetition of the same" (Crowley Teacher's 46). The new focus on the reader could lead to a more "contextualized" notion of readers, in which "teachers would sensitize their students to the institutional situation in which they write, and they would treat the institutional situation as a 'real world' one where students are expected to learn a special brand of writing—academic discourse." Such a focus could lead students to question this discourse, how it controls them, how they can subvert it, how they can examine how their "teachers are invested with institutional authority" (Crowley
Teacher's 46). Thus, a writing course could lead students to ponder how decisions about the meaning of a text are indeed formulated by readers, not on the basis of "the text itself" but as a result of particular cultural influences and practical necessities which themselves merit analysis" (Schib 436).

Such emphasis would, in effect, deconstruct the classroom structure, for if students are readers in a full sense, they would become "active readers—that is, re-writers—of the teachers' writing—her course," leading to a classroom syllabus "always . . . in revision" (Crowley Teacher's 47, 46). It could lead to a class in which the teacher's power, operating through the force of his or her role as the speaker in the classroom (Barthes 311) would be challenged by the student writer's power. Jasper Neel, in Plato, Derrida, and Writing, an influential text the combines classical and poststructuralist philosophy with composition theory, argues that this challenge makes the classroom a place for what he calls "strong discourse," a form of writing that develops power by being confronted by other strong readers. Such a class turns the teacher from "the role of philosopher-king" to "the role of discourse facilitator," leading to results such as the following:

Strong discourse in the classroom, like strong discourse anywhere else, will, of course, derive its strength from its ability to persuade adherents, not from its ability to satisfy the opinion of one teacher, who finally plays the role of tyrant. Strong discourse will also require a kind of pluralism that makes the teacher-centered classroom difficult, if not impossible. (210)

Poststructural theory offers the theoretical basis to lead to such changes. It offers to our students a power previously guarded by a few, a power to recognize a field of study—or, for that matter, an institution such as the
classroom—by its "disorder, incoherence, and arbitrariness" (Ulmer 61-2). Such recognition could lead to both a deconstruction of traditional education and a poststructuralist "affirmation" of educational possibilities.

**Poststructuralism and Composition: Legitimation**

What, though, would be the value of such tendencies for composition instructors? Why would they want to tie movements already in place in composition studies to poststructuralism? An answer lies in legitimation, the process by which ideas and institutions are viewed as valid parts of the structures to which they seek to belong. Maxine Hairston, in her Chair's address to the 1985 CCCC, painted the ongoing legitimation crisis of composition programs and their faculty with the following vivid details:

> . . . we often find ourselves confronting the literature faculty who dominate so many departments, and we feel that we are fighting losing battles: battles to get hard money to staff the writing center, battles to establish programs for training writing teachers, or battles against staffing composition courses with underpaid, low-status, part-timers. Fighting that literature faction often makes you feel like you have invaded China. You can mount an all-out assault and think you're making an impression, but when the smoke clears, nothing has changed. The mandarins are untouched. (273)

One might view poststructural parallels to composition as useful tools to legitimate composition (although I suspect that Hairston would balk at my argument, an idea I'll come back to in a moment). Just as poststructural
analysis empowers previously marginalized, silenced writers, leading them to a fuller notion of their own "author-ity" by emphasizing their important position as authors (Crowley "writing" 95), it could suggest the importance of the programs that support such writers as well. Several years ago a buzzword at CCC was "empowerment." As it was spoken about students, the faculty voices speaking it were chanting its mantra for themselves as well.

However, this appeal for legitimation by waving a banner for poststructuralism has its pitfalls. John Schilb has suggested that "If diverse meanings of the term [rhetoric] are at work, the result could either be new esteem for writing programs, or further marginalization of them" (422). How? One can imagine various scenarios of denied legitimation. Perhaps by relying too much on a theory that has now metamorphosed into other critical theories and has thus lost the power it held ten to twenty years ago. Perhaps also by leading to chaos and nihilism in the classroom. Derrida might insist on "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming" but a class organized around such principles, a class with thirty active bodies seeking liberation from past philosopher-king-teacher-tyrants, could deconstruct in a much less "playful" way. I see alienation; I see lawsuits.

One should also question whether pointing out similarities between composition and poststructuralism or pointing out how composition scholars use—or can or should use—poststructuralist theories in the classroom to do all I have gushed about actually provides legitimacy. "Legitimation" implies that an allegedly legitimate field has its own place, its own position and importance, that it is not at the whim of another place, another field. Jean François Lyotard, in his discussion of legitimacy, suggests various processes by which fields have achieved or are attempting legitimacy. Before the postmodern period, he
argues, one form of legitimacy derived from a field's position within a speculative system linking all fields together as an evocation of a higher Spirit. Later, legitimation derived more from goals of performance, from what a field could generate out of itself. Using poststructuralism to legitimate composition, from either of these perspectives, keeps composition away from legitimacy, for composition is using poststructuralism as the trick to achieve legitimacy: it is not using its own powers to be productive, or its own line to the speculative apparatus.

Referring to Maxine Hairston's image, earlier, one might argue that when composition seeks legitimacy from poststructuralism, it seeks to join the mandarinate of the English department, for poststructuralism has certainly established at least some position in this ruling class. However, assuming the customs and forms of a mandarin does not make one a mandarin: pointing out similarities between poststructuralism and composition or using elements of poststructuralism when teaching writing may only be ways of fulfilling a role as the courtier to a mandarin, not the mandarin. Elsewhere in her article, Hairston suggests that combining literary criticism and composition creates this sort of marginalized position:

Many of us have also revealed our nervousness about our own discipline by encouraging our graduate students to combine rhetoric and composition with literary criticism in graduate programs and their dissertations, assuming that their degrees would be more marketable in traditional English departments. That's an untested assumption, and I think it can be a damaging one. Its effect is to suggest that we fear that our own discipline may not be scholarly and substantive enough for a graduate
student to specialize in it exclusively and write a dissertation on it.

(275)

Hairston clearly views such a position as regrettable, but more she suggests that such regret is due to the idea that writing programs and composition teachers do not need to look towards literature professors for legitimation; instead, they need to look for legitimation within their own abilities, their own fields of study. She argues that "... writing courses are not service courses, but courses in the exercise of a primary intellectual activity" (278). She offers a new plan of attack for composition instructors, to direct them to a search for—and conquest of—their own legitimacy. This plan focuses on "construct[ing] theoretical frameworks that inform ... practice," "learn[ing] to formulate good questions, to examine date—especially data that come to us in language—sensitively and meticulously, to control for bias, and to be careful not to claim too much for ... findings," and "extend[ing] ... connections to disciplines outside our field—not only to linguistics, philosophy, cognitive psychology, and speech communication, but to less obviously connected fields such as biology, economics, and even the arts" (280-81). Through such a plan, composition faculty would access the legitimation apparatus that literature faculty and faculty of other fields appropriate for themselves also.

Composition Legitimized; Poststructuralism in Search of Legitimation

Including the quotation from Hairston above may seem an odd thing for someone writing a dissertation on poststructuralism and composition to do, for it seems as if I am putting myself in the position she criticizes, as if I'm emphasizing my field's lack of legitimation, and by extension my lack of
legitimation, as I fulfill a requirement designed to provide evidence of that legitimation. Oh dear. However, I do view this project as operating in the direction Hairston suggests, for it is focused on examining data from the teaching of composition to determine what that data shows about writing and about philosophy, for although poststructuralism has been claimed by literary scholars, it is a more generally philosophical than purely literary set of theories.

Further, and I think, much more importantly, I view this project as part of another way of connecting composition and poststructuralism, not emphasizing how poststructural theory can aid composition, but suggesting how the field of composition can lead to new understandings about poststructural philosophy, for starters, and potentially for many other fields as well. Such a support of one field by another is a trait that a legitimate field should be able to fulfill; that composition offers new insights into poststructuralism provides, I think, further evidence of composition's legitimate state as a field of inquiry.

How would such a development—of composition's explaining poststructuralism—occur? One possible answer lies in a position that is unique to the field of composition, especially as it focuses on what are labeled "developmental" and "freshman" writing courses in the first years of college, the study of the discourse of writers not yet regarded as "author-ities": our students. Composition's interest in the ways we "write" our classes and ourselves into those classes offers other positions for investigation. Each semester we come in contact with such writers, often many of them if we teach a full load of classes at predominantly teaching institutions where a "full load" may be five classes of forty students each. These classes offer a chance to learn about many aspects of the human sciences, including, for this dissertation, poststructuralism.
Looking at the field of poststructuralism, one notices several areas in which composition could lead to new understandings, new knowledge. One concerns the difference between "rhetoric" to poststructuralists and "rhetoric" to composition theorists. As I mentioned earlier, these two views of rhetoric are similar. However, one may view these as containing distinct differences that are crucial; for example, rhetoric to "the Yale deconstructionists" is different from that "held by most composition specialists" because it examines "the cognitively disruptive role of tropes rather than the available means of persuasion" (Schilb 422). Composition instructors, because they must teach writers "how to write" would have to use poststructural rhetoric in a much different way than a poststructural critic would use it. They have to lead it (granted, a rather non-poststructuralist notion) to help someone else use rhetoric; they don't just point out complications in someone else's rhetoric. Composition instructors would have to encourage students to use the "cognitively disruptive role of tropes" to still try to be persuasive. Students would have to create something; they couldn't just observe the "affirmation of the play of the world." The means that how composition instructors employ, and how students succeed—or fail—to achieve these goals could provide useful evidence about language, evidence that could help elucidate the poststructuralist project, help see if it applies to "marginal," unpublished writers as poststructuralists argue it applies to the "marginal" works of major writers.

Actually applying poststructuralist ideas to actual disenfranchised writers to see how such ideas are legitimate could lead into many areas. Obviously a main area could be the writing of individual writers. However, a broader focus, one that this dissertation shares, is that of how different writers, in this case students and other students or students and teachers write and read each other.
Poststructuralism would be subject to new kinds of tests if we were reading not how Derrida reads Rousseau, but how Jane reads John. And if we knew that Jane is a 39-year-old mother of five and John is gay man of a different race, the data we could glean about poststructuralist ideas multiply in several directions. The readings, misreadings, and interactions between such writers, how they occur, and what elements they contain could situate "postmodernism" in a different realm from the western-centered, dominant culture one it has occupied in the writings of European writers such as Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard.

This project addresses a subset of such writers, the writers who attend two-year community colleges. These colleges have become a potent force in American higher education. They have grown from having a weak position forty years ago, when there were only about 400 such schools in the country (McPherson 137), to a time when they are experiencing a much higher rate of growth than are four-year universities and colleges, serving around 5 million students a year (DePalma A12). Houston Community College, the school where my research was conducted, teaches freshman composition to around 5000 students a semester, the largest number of students taught this fundamental course in the fourth largest city in the nation (Ford 6). This growth in numbers is coupled with problems at the university level, the "tough economic times . . . forcing so many colleges and universities across the country to cut costs and adjust their ambitions" (DePalma A1) and limit their progress, making community colleges even more important than they are already.

Who are the students, or rather the writers, at these schools? They are different from the traditional notion of a college student, for they are older, have families, careers, and represent segments of the population that have not
previously enjoyed access to college. Houston Community College's statement of purpose describes how it addresses such features of these students:

The college is unique in accessibility, flexibility, and sensitivity to the needs of the community and is dedicated to the delivery of quality services in the most effective and efficient manner. . . . [It] offers a broad spectrum of life-long educational opportunities. (1991-1992 17)

The growth in enrollment of these kinds of students at these schools is a development that the poststructuralist I am analyzing in this dissertation, Jean François Lyotard, depicted in 1979: "The student has changed already and will certainly change more. He is no longer a youth from the 'liberal elite' more or less concerned with the great task of social progress, understood in terms of emancipation. . . ." (Postmodern 48-9). Because of these changes, Lyotard predicted a related change in education:

. . . it is and will be served "a la carte" to adults who are either already working or expect to be, for the purpose of improving their skills and chances of promotion, but also to help them acquire information, languages, and language games allowing them both to widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience. (Postmodern 49)

The situation that Lyotard suggested has come true in the community colleges of this country, introducing great numbers of previously unempowered students to our freshman writing classes. Examining the writing of such groups expands the potential power of composition as a tool to investigate poststructuralism and evaluate its legitimacy more than ever before.
In the last few paragraphs, I've suggested that composition could be used to examine poststructuralism (not the other way around, as one might expect) by examining the writers in its classes, but I've omitted a fairly crucial detail: How? How would composition scholars have access to the writing of their students? Possibly by saving all of the mumbo-jumbo of a course, the essays, certainly, but also the notes and exercises that allowed discourse to flow between teachers and students and among students. How would one save all of those ragged pieces of paper, and then how easy would it all be to read? However, what about the kind of writing that a classroom structure provides—the way the class is organized and segmented? How would that be saved? By video or audiotape? Or some other means?

Technology provides a new possibility, for in the last few years instructors have delivered classes through computer networks, either on a particular campus or to students off-campus via modems. Such programs, sometimes labeled part of "distance education," provide "new tools, new approaches to learning, and new educational contexts more in touch" with the needs of their students (Ohler 23). They can take many perspectives, recalling the kinds of issues that poststructuralists examined as well:

In its most positive application, [distance education] is used to cross difficult physical and social boundaries, reaching minorities, high-risk learners, and the handicapped, overcoming the tyranny of time and distance and equalizing opportunity for our nation's disenfranchised. In its worst, it uses its incredible power to reach large student bodies to reinforce old standards and misconceptions and propagate new ones. In both cases it incorporates the techniques and technologies that seem unnatural
in typical classroom settings and yet are part of the everyday environment that students will encounter after graduation. (Ohler 23)

Such teaching thus creates a very different teaching environment from that in most traditional colleges and universities. It addresses issues similar to those considered by poststructuralists because it focuses on the kinds of populations poststructuralism indicates as marginalized by western culture.

More importantly, though, such a form of teaching provides the means to allow composition to assert its power as a legitimating institution, for this teaching occurs in writing, writing that may be saved and analyzed later because the computer systems allow this data to be saved. This dual feature of teaching through writing and saving that teaching dramatically changes research possibilities for composition scholars; it makes them able to examine the writing of their students throughout a semester, to compare writing styles at different times in the semester or styles in different writing contexts and situations. Scholars can examine how students write to each other and read each other's work. Further, the writing relationships between students and teachers are also possible targets for scrutiny. Even more intriguing is the ability to investigate the overall sense in which a class is "written" by a teacher, for in this form of teaching it would be preserved—in writing.

As I mentioned, this form of teaching has become available in the last few years. Although much has been written on such programs, this writing is generally confined to glowing remarks about the bells and whistles of their computer systems. Some writers discuss features of such computer-networked instruction, including Starr Roxanne Hiltz's numerous examinations of what she terms the "Virtual Classroom" (Hiltz and Meinke 431). A few composition
scholars have noted the kinds of writing that such systems have provided, and have provided some degree of analysis of the texts produced from such classes. One might notice Jeffrey Schwartz's discussion of a writing program connecting high school students across the country; Marilyn Cooper and Cynthia Selfe's analysis of conversations occurring through a computer network at a university; and Delores Schriner and William Rice's discussion of a similar system, one they label "A Discourse Community at Work." However, running throughout these examinations of computer networks and of composition courses occurring through them is a fairly limited analysis, one generally positive and usually focusing on issues of administration and teaching than on how one might use the data of such classes. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, in their excellent critique of such programs, provide one of the few published negative examinations of this form of teaching. They note that "as writing instructors, we have not always recognized the natural tendency when using such machines, as cultural artifacts embodying society's values, to perpetuate those values currently dominant within our culture and our educational system" (55).

Thus, this form of teaching offers the chance to study writing in a new way, to assert the legitimacy of composition as a discipline able to explain this new field, able because it is the field of study familiar with the elements of course design, familiar with rhetorical issues of process and reader on which such a system might depend, and familiar with studying the writing of the disenfranchised. This dissertation will examine a class I taught at Houston Community College during the Spring of 1991, a class taught entirely over a computer network using modems to connect students throughout Houston. Studying the data this class produced will allow for further extensions and
analysis of poststructuralism to determine more about its degree of legitimation, to see how well it explains the writers convened by the networks.

Legitimation and *The Postmodern Condition*

However, as I have sketched above, poststructuralism is a wide area, with many intricate twists and turns. I've focused this dissertation on one writer and one work, Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Lyotard's text offers a theory of how the status of knowledge has changed in the west due to the prevalence of what he considers new "language games." Part of this change leads to a new importance of technology, specifically computer data banks, in maintaining and processing knowledge. Thus, the book seems to make a handy companion to a class taught over a computer. However, this text is important for this project for more than what it says about a class taught over computer lines, although there are interesting ideas there. The text is much more interesting for problems it contains, problems that the composition class helps elucidate, problems that return us, once more to the legitimation of poststructural criticism. How? Because Lyotard raises the issue of legitimation as an issue, at the same time that he presents a text that tempts us about its own legitimacy.

Lyotard's career has focused on a range of topics, so wide a range, with so wide a set of arguments, that his position as a "theorist" is complicated. The author of one of two book-length analyses of Lyotard, Bill Readings has suggested, rather bluntly, that

Lyotard is not a theorist. Lyotard's decisive entry into the French academic scene is an instance that, after 1968, theory ought to be
recognized as part of the problem, not as a potential solution. Theory, that is, is an order of discourse that acts to establish the exclusive role of a network of oppositions between concepts or signifiers. . . . Lyotard's attacks on the negativity of theory and critique in de Saussure, Marx, Lacan, and semiotic analysis do not represent any naive affirmation of experience (itself a theoretical construct in reference to a subject), but a deconstructive disruption of conceptual reduction. (xxix)

Lyotard's brand of theory calls into attention problems contained in theory, especially poststructural theory. He seems concerned throughout *The Postmodern Condition* with looking at how theories rise and fall and collapse into each other. Part of this point of view derives from an interest that seems especially unusual compared to the interests of other poststructuralists: his interest, not just for the "desire for the unknown" but for a "desire for justice" as well (*Postmodern 67*). A reviewer for *The Postmodern Condition* has remarked that "one of the problems with this theoretical enterprise [of poststructuralism and etc.] has been the fact that these theories remain enthnocentric, with an emphasis on European art and culture as the prima facie apex of cultural development . . . . One of the insights gained from a reading of . . . Lyotard is the difficulties in accepting the potential freedom in the decentering of cultural imperatives" (Chin 99). Such an observation recognizes that Lyotard, with his interest in charting the stories of theoretical movements and his interest in the ultimate point of justice, is examining ideas important to poststructuralism in ways that questions those ideas.

Such questioning suggests that Lyotard is interested in the idea that the basis, the groundwork, for poststructuralist ideas may be illegitimate. A more
specific, but related issue that attacks the legitimacy of poststructuralism, and that seems to attack the legitimacy of Lyotard's text as well, revolves around the notion of "essence." Diana Fuss, in *Essentially Speaking*, examines the contrast between "essentialism"—the assumption that certain innate features in humanity determine our acts—and "constructionism"—a belief in a social construction of the subject. "Constructionism" is close to the social structuring involved in reading from a poststructural perspective. Fuss makes a series of claims with the potential to delegitimate the poststructural perspective. For example, notice the following series of quotations:

1. My position here is that the possibility of any radical constructionism can only be built on the foundations of a hidden essentialism. (12)

2. Though I remain convinced that appeals to the authority of experience rarely advance discussion and frequently provoke confusion (I am always struck by the way in which interjections of experiential truths into classroom debates dead-end the discussion), I also remain wary of any attempts to prohibit the introduction of personal histories into such discussions on the grounds that they have yet to be adequately "theorized." (117)

3. I have argued from the start that essentialism underwrites theories of constructionists and that constructionism operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism. This is simply another way of saying that constructionism may be more normative, and essentialism more variable, than those
of us who call ourselves poststructuralists hitherto have been willing to acknowledge. (119)

Fuss' arguments are related to a large set of ideas in *The Postmodern Condition*; more importantly, these ideas are illustrated by data provided through the composition class conducted over the modem. These ideas are the notion of the importance of what Lyotard labels "grand Narratives" in supporting ideas, institutions, and social structures. These narratives appeal to a version of essentialism, to a sense of a natural order. Lyotard both embraces them and eradicates them, turning to a form of narrative he labels the "little narrative," a bracketed narrative without its former power, as he argues that the grand Narratives have been superseded by more scientific methods of support. Fuss suggests that essentialism, though perhaps bracketed also, is still of great importance, interestingly enough in the classroom. My data from the writers in my class provide similar evidence, for although Lyotard argues that narratives have ceased to explain meaning, my students—and myself for that matter—don't seem to have caught the message. We are still behaving as if narratives, as if essentialism, still works.

Thus, analyzing the writing of the class, the text of this class, provides data to examine Lyotard's contentions about narrative. That he has already raised the issue of legitimacy about other areas of investigation—the grand Narratives and the poststructural project—makes the issue of his legitimization of great importance.

*The Postmodern Condition: A Brief Overview*

Legitimate or not, *The Postmodern Condition* is an amazing text.
I use the word "amazing" because this work contains elements of both
the common meanings of the word as well as the more hidden, archaic
meanings as well. "Amazing" suggests a text overwhelming with wonder, one
astonishing or greatly astonishing, one great beyond expectation. Lyotard's text
displays such traits, for it provides a brief overview of the history and function of
knowledge in the West, broad subjects, certainly, but ones that the text covers—
or seems to cover—in a quick succession of focused, assertive, persuasive
chapters. These sections examine knowledge by looking at the grand stories
that classical philosophers told around the campfires of their disciplines. The
sections also suggest how these narratives have lost effectiveness in the
modern age, have ceased to hold the attention of their audience, and have
ceased to make their subjects hold together. That so much could be covered,
so much could be made persuasive in so short a text is astonishing, great
beyond expectation—amazing.

"Amazing," though, also contains the word "maze," suggesting uses of
the word from several hundred years ago, uses going in different directions,
relating to frenzy, bewilderment, and consternation. Although my presenting
such definitions might seem overly critical of a work I feel worthy of the other
senses of "amazing," these meanings are also appropriate for this text. The
change in knowledge-governing systems that Lyotard examines leads to what
he calls "legitimation by paralogy," a concept he borrows from chaos theory,
and one that suggests that knowledge operates and legitimates itself as much
through lack of consensus as through actual consensus. Such a system would
thus appear to be fraught with "bewilderment" or "consternation" in its very
processes of operation, since instead of connected strings of information
explaining each other and justifying themselves, knowledge would operate,
move, change, affect, influence more through disconnected or seemingly disconnected actions of "frenzy." Such a frenzy of activity provides an odd notion of legitimation, since "legitimation" suggests an ordered system that allows ideas to explain and support other ideas, and therefore makes those ideas seem reasonable, lawful, truthful. "Frenzy" suggests unreasonable movements, anarchy, lack of connection, and lack of meaning. To Lyotard, though, this movement of ideas, this paralogy, is the system through which knowledge finds whatever legitimation it may hold in the postmodern world. Where a narrative once provided meaning, a paralogical set of interconnections now does the work. Thus, while once mankind could find meaning for some concept in some "eternal truth," now meaning is more determined by a series of what seem to be chance interactions.

However, as I have examined Lyotard's actual presentation of his theories, I have felt a different application of frenzy, bewilderment, and consternation, for although Lyotard has constructed a neat system to explain the loss of narratives as supports for knowledge, he has done so without fully supporting that system. Lyotard's text is brief, only (as he claims) a "report," but it is a report that can lavish great detail to explain some parts of his system but then provide only scant information to explain other parts of it. At times the force of Lyotard's analysis is like a frenzy, one in which all manner of ideas and levels of examples are being paraded in front of the viewer; at other times, though, the text makes major leaps over the viewer's head, without explanation or with only the briefest sense of connection.

My response as a reader is bewilderment; I wonder if I am merely unable to make the great leaps that Lyotard assumes I should make. I doubt my knowledge of history, I wonder why I've attempted to read the text. Then,
though, I feel a different kind of bewilderment, one with the text, for the text seems to collapse in its presentation of its argument at crucial moments. For this project I am examining two moments in the text, one concerning the disappearance of the legitimating effect of narratives, and one concerning the importance of computer data banks in the postmodern world of paralogy. These two moments seem to me crucial to the text, for with the first Lyotard is eliminating the classical to modern structure of knowledge from the possibilities available, and with the other he provides, up to the last paragraph of his text, the means through which his structure of paralogy enhances or provides legitimacy. However, as I will show, these are moments in which Lyotard leaps over problems in his argument and leaps over possible objections a reader might make.

Further, these are moments that seem to me crucial to an analysis of the text produced by teaching freshman composition over the modem. Lyotard's overall concept of the legitimization of knowledge provides a fascinating theory to explain just what happens in a course operating solely through a computer network. In fact, the course suggests the very importance paralogy. However, at the same time, the course also provides evidence that suggests holes in Lyotard's theories as well. Lyotard dispenses with the notion of narratives quickly, almost by assumption, but an analysis of the modem class suggests that the concept of narratives continues to function, even in a structure that operates according to paralogical laws. Also, and perhaps ultimately more importantly, the very use of computers in the course suggests a major flaw in Lyotard's final argument about how computers will aid in the legitimization process.
Lyotard bases his argument for the narrative connection to knowledge on his discussion of language games, on the intricate movements of language to create the social order. However, when Lyotard addresses the use of technology to hold and provide information useful for decision making, he writes as if holding and providing are fairly straight-forward processes, not ones influenced by the tendencies of language. Further, since Lyotard seems to assume that the concept of narratives has vanished from the performance or paralogy-oriented world of computers, he avoids confronting the possible interference that narratives might play with such a system.

Teaching freshman English through a computer network, and more specifically the interactions among students and between students and instructors suggest that the use of computers is much more complicated than Lyotard implies. Lyotard provides an effective theory to explain some aspects of how the information structure of the class operates; however, his tendency to drop narratives from his poststructuralist world coupled with what seems, frankly, an oddly non-poststructuralist position vis-a-vis the use of computers, makes the class an intriguing tool to investigate Lyotard.
CHAPTER 2: LYOTARD'S TERMINOLOGY: VERSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE,
OPTIONS OF LEGITIMATION

The Narration of the Text

Fitting its role as a "report," *The Postmodern Condition* opens with a statement that seems to function as a thesis: "Our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (PMC 3).\(^1\) The key to this statement is the clause "the status of knowledge is altered" since here Lyotard hints at the story he is about to unfold in his text. "Status," "knowledge," and "altered" are crucial, for the main thrust of this text is an examination of the different means by which the classical to modern to postmodern worlds have used different criteria to gauge the status of knowledge. Such means have also been "altered"; the point of the text is to suggest how.

Examining the relationship between these three terms further, one must question just what is "the status of knowledge"; what does the phrase mean? It implies that knowledge has some power, some meaning, some significance; it is able to exert some influence, command some respect. Lyotard, as part of the western philosophical tradition, refers to that significance as "legitimation"—the philosophical concept denoting how a term, here knowledge, gains respect, reputation, power. It achieves this effect by receiving the praise of experts in its field, by being considered by other "knowing observers" as part of its field, by

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\(^1\) All references to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* are to the translation by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). I will refer to this text, following the abbreviation used by commentators on Lyotard, as "PMC."
being viewed as important to more general fields as well. Lyotard's text focuses on how this concept of "legitimation" confers "status" on "knowledge" and on how the means through which legitimation has been achieved have been "altered."

I am interested in these concepts because they are, quite simply, very useful tools to probe what occurs in a course delivered over the modem, specifically here freshman composition. The appeal to a means for legitimation, the use of narratives, and the sense that something crucial has been altered, something that corresponds to a shift into a "postmodern age," are all intriguing concepts for such a form of education. In this and following chapters, I will focus my gaze on Lyotard's text in two ways: first, just what his theories are and what he proposes about this alteration in the status and legitimation of knowledge, and, second, how these ideas contain problems in the way he presents them, problems which an examination of data from a course taught over a computer network will emphasize and, to a certain extent, even counter.

I've found that I've needed to see my approach to Lyotard as part of this double perspective, part of which requires the use of summary. To be able to use Lyotard in this dissertation I have had to summarize his ideas, no small task since his ideas may seem clear, but clear only in a highly interrelated way full of much qualification. However, because Lyotard's text is, in effect, a narrative of the history of change in knowledge legitimation systems, my summary has elements of this narrative, his narrative, as well. When discussing the role of narrative in traditional societies, Lyotard emphasizes the Cashinahua's method of relating its culture's narratives, the stories that preserve its past and maintain its traditions. This traditional narrative has the following formula:
"Here is the story of ........ , as I've always heard it told. I will tell it to you in my turn. Listen. . . . Here ends the story of ........ . The man who has told it to you is ........ . . . " (PMC 20)

With this structure a new narrator relates a story told by an old narrator and becomes, ultimately, part of the story, for in the next narration of the story his name will be part of the story, as the one who told it last.

Lyotard's text is not a major cultural narrative, since only those who have read its words know its directions precisely. However, it is a story, starting in ancient times and ending with the present and future. Its elements are part of the western cultural narrative; the changes that Lyotard narrates have been narrated by other philosophers, other teachers and writers. Thus, even though the total apparatus may seem unique to Lyotard, its elements seem familiar.

This familiarity may be due to Lyotard's presenting the narrative of western culture by using a version of the Cashinahua formula: he is re-telling the story of, say, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Luhmann, Habermas—and these are just the names of some previous narrators appearing within the text, not counting the 231 endnotes citing other storytellers. Lyotard is telling their stories as he has "always heard [them] told, "telling them in his "turn." Now, telling something in "his turn" is a little different from "re-telling" it; if I tell something in my turn, I will most likely make certain changes in emphasis, certain alterations. One may regard Lyotard as doing just that, for as he re-tells western culture, he arranges it and criticizes it to fit what is his thesis, not the thesis of Plato, Descartes, et al. He tells us to "listen" to his story.

I also find the Cashinahua formula a useful way of thinking about what I wish to do with Lyotard. I'm about to tell the story of Lyotard's text, The Postmodern Condition, as it's been told to me, as it appears in the aqua-
covered book I'm holding—that's the summary. But I am also about to tell it in *my turn*, about to rearrange some of its elements as I explain what Lyotard is saying, about to lead to an application of its themes to other ideas (teaching over a modem, etc.). One reason—the main one—I find this formula so attractive right now is that it helps me throw off a worry I have about summaries. Re-telling something seems to me like such a lower-level activity, like something I should not have to do—or even want to do. After all, shouldn't my reader as a reader of Lyotard have a right to read him on his own? But, of course, what if that reader on *his* or *her* own did not read Lyotard as I wanted him to be read? What if he or she saw the relationship between narrative and scientific knowledge *differently*? What if the problems I see in Lyotard's understanding of language and technology don't appear to such a reader? When I retell Lyotard's ideas, I will be emphasizing the way I want a reader to read them, to lead that reader to a vision of Lyotard that helps me explain my other topic about teaching over the modem. This leading is "my turn," my reason to say "listen."

Such an involved system of summary and analysis seems an important technique to use with Lyotard because of a related idea: the importance of the event. Part of Lyotard's interest in traditional narration, in the Cashinahua formula, derives from viewing narration as a temporal way to obtain information. The importance in narration is the time the narration takes, the experience the listener has as he's moved through the story. Other critics on Lyotard discuss this importance of the event; one can also see its significance in Lyotard's other major text, *The Differend*. Reading *The Differend* is a complicated, time-laden experience, since one must work through a series of overlapping "Notices" that gradually move the major points along. One needs the space and time
between the notices to process their points, to connect their implications. Although *The Postmodern Condition* seems to be a much more simply-structured book, it also functions as an event. Lyotard traces the history of knowledge through stages, but there is also a sense of repetition in his discussion of those stages (as a look at the outline of the text shows). The end of the text, where Lyotard connects his various ideas to the notion of computer data banks, seems almost unimportant, anticlimactic, when compared to the rich tracing of the stories of knowledge and culture. Relatedly, re-telling Lyotard’s ideas as summary, as the time and space of narration allows, seems appropriate as a means to present his ideas and to present my criticisms and modifications.

Now, I will admit to pushing the Cashinahua formula a bit more than it may merit, especially with the notion of what “in my turn” might mean. There is the sense that Lyotard implies that this traditional narration structure preserves sameness, that the stories recited are unchanging, solid in some way. If so, then Lyotard might argue that I have misrepresented what he does with the stories of Plato, Descartes, etc. If not creating narration, just what is he doing? Another way of seeing Lyotard’s project (and relatedly what I’m doing for my project) is to move to the notion of science and scientific language, scientific knowledge. Although Lyotard retells the western cultural narrative, he also makes new scientific statements, which he labels *denotative or descriptive utterances*, about it. These are new statements about what is, what occurs, in culture, society, and education. His chapters turn a gradual movement into specifically labeled stages and steps. A fair number of the 231 endnotes work to offer scientific proof for the events he claims are changing the notion of
knowledge; he is not just re-telling other writers' stories; he is using their ideas as proof for his own.

Similarly, beyond just re-telling Lyotard's narrative, I am using my own form of scientific proof to examine his text. Partly, this proof appears by applying Lyotard's own principles and laws, about narrative and about language, to his text, to his treatment of the "grand narratives" and the computerization of knowledge. I think that this proof shows gaps in Lyotard's arguments, and partly, this proof will come from the evidence I see from teaching freshman English over the modem. (I admit this evidence comes partly from my narrative re-telling of my experiences with my students.) This evidence provides examples and instances which may serve as proof for arguments opposing Lyotard's ideas.

Earlier, above, I referred to a "double perspective." At first, this perspective denoted my looking both at what Lyotard writes and at problems in these ideas. However, the double perspective also embraces the two directions of Lyotard's text: narration and science. Lyotard presents a struggle between these two forms of knowledge as the struggle which has caused "the status of knowledge [to be] altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age," what I suggested as Lyotard's thesis earlier. It's an important struggle to understand what Lyotard provides in his text; it also helps explain my technique in this project, for it's a struggle I've waged as I've constructed this dissertation, and it's a struggle represented in the class. Immediately, for this chapter, it's the struggle Lyotard presents in *The Postmodern Condition*; it's the struggle he fights himself.
The Structure of *The Postmodern Condition*

One may divide the sections of the text into two groups. In the first group, Lyotard is defining terms and establishing concepts. The first three chapters present three interrelated topics: Lyotard's field, knowledge (ultimately knowledge in computerized societies), his problem, the need for this knowledge to be legitimized, and his method, the language games which he argues structure our access to knowledge and provide a sense of legitimation. The next two chapters expand the notion of knowledge, focusing on narrative and scientific knowledge. In chapters six and seven, Lyotard continues this role, by defining the two forms of knowledge that he will examine: narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge. The rest of the text comprises the second group. Here, Lyotard tells his narrative of the change in knowledge. In chapters four, eight, nine, and ten, Lyotard presents the role of knowledge in the classical and modern world, leading into the explanation of the role of grand Narratives and their eventual delegitimation. Chapters five and eleven to fourteen cover the postmodern period, and the tendency for legitimation to come from language games, seeming success through performance, and paralogy.

Interestingly, chapters four and five provide a brief overview of the general tendencies of the rest of the text. Chapter four discusses the "modern" notion of "the social bond," a topic that depends heavily on ideas presented in more detail in the discussion of the grand narratives and their legitimation in chapters eight to ten. Similarly, chapter five focuses on the "postmodern perspective" of the social bond, a version that relies on the theories of performativity (and their unacceptable consequences) that Lyotard develops in chapters eleven to fourteen. Covering the material twice is by no means a novel approach for a writer trying to persuade his readers of his ideas'
encompassing significance, certainly, but such a technique is especially appropriate for Lyotard. The method may be an early version of the emphasizing of reading as an event, a technique that is more pronounced, as I've suggested, in later works such as *The Differend*. In that text, an introductory section suggests the main ideas of the text (somewhat) before the reader plunges into the complicated overlapping of what follows. In *The Postmodern Condition*, the introduction to the fuller theories that chapters four and five provide allows the reader to get his or her bearings before moving into the more carefully structured main part of the text. Because what these introductory chapters contain relates to the later chapters, I'll discuss them as part of those units: chapter four when I examine chapters eight to ten (in my chapter three), and chapter five when I examine chapters eleven to fourteen (in my chapters four and five).

**The Nature of Knowledge**

Before turning to Lyotard's narrative about the legitimation of knowledge, I need to address how he uses his key concept of "knowledge" and its two main variations: "narrative knowledge" and "scientific knowledge." Lyotard presents a complicated interrelation between these three concepts, especially between the two variations; at times the text appears to be a war for control between the two concepts; just as they vie for power in the structures of science and society. However, although, ultimately, what Lyotard means by "knowledge" does seem allied along a narrative/scientific axis, elsewhere in the text, especially early in the text, Lyotard suggests other possible divisions and classifications of the
term. Thus, to have a full understanding of the significance of knowledge to Lyotard, one needs to investigate these other meanings.

Knowledge: Knowledge, Learning, Information

Lyotard's main topic seems to be knowledge in general; that is at least suggested from his title, from the title of his first chapter, and from the opening hypothesis of the text. He implies that he will look at the change in status of all knowledge. Throughout the text, Lyotard does refer to this general concept of knowledge, mentioning "transformation in the nature of knowledge" (PMC 6) or "knowledge in the most highly developed contemporary society" (PMC 11), or the "technological transformations [that] can be expected to have a considerable impact on knowledge" (PMC 4). I've chosen these three examples because in them Lyotard is touching on his overall theory about this overall subject: how a change in knowledge is occurring in the west due to technology. Such statements potentially refer to a very general sense of "knowledge," suggesting a wide range of subjects. My pocket dictionary suggests that knowledge is something like "the sum or range of what has been perceived, discovered, or learned"; such a definition could lead one to consider the knowledge of art, history, popular culture, mathematics, management—really anything. One could easily imagine any of these or other subjects being affected by the transformations in technology; we learn about such changes daily. Thus, if Lyotard approaches knowledge in this broad way, he implies a broad range of applications of his theories about how the legitimation of knowledge has changed.
Just as does my pocket dictionary definition, Lyotard makes the distinction between knowledge and *learning*. Learning is, to Lyotard, "the set of statements which, to the exclusion of all other statements, denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false" (PMC 18). These "denotative" statements are statements of the facts, figures, and nuances about various topics, including such as I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Science is one of those topics; science is a form, a "subset," of learning, one governed by rules that its denotative statements should be "available for repeated access" or should be "accessible in explicit conditions of observation" and that its statements must "pertain . . . to the language judged relevant by the experts" (PMC 18). Learning is thus, in a sense, a concept focused on the topic being studied itself: what it does, how it works, what it says.

*Knowledge* is a wider concept, one that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of *efficiency* (technical qualification), of *justice* and/or *happiness* (ethical wisdom), of the *beauty* of a sound or color (auditory and visual sensibility), etc. Understood in this way, knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming "good" denotative utterances, but also "good" prescriptive and "good" evaluative utterances. . . . (emphasis added) (PMC 18)

With such application, we move from looking simply at a certain subject, to looking at the significance or importance of that subject as judged by experts and as placed in some overall context. Such a context does not just suggest that some concept is true or valid; instead, a concept is supported and maintained by its being efficient, just, happy, or beautiful. Lyotard uses his
discussion of "grand Narratives" to discuss this support system, the system, in fact, of legitimation.

When talking about knowledge and learning, Lyotard uses a related though distinctly different general term, information; this distinction will be important for understanding Lyotard's views on language and technology, later. When suggesting the effects of technology on knowledge, he makes a statement that almost provides a formula for the meaning of information and its relationship to knowledge and learning:

The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It [meaning knowledge] can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. (emphasis added) (PMC 4)

Learning is what knowledge both knows about and provides meaning for (in the act of legitimation). Information is what represents learning in technology. Information appears to be a divided, segmented form of learning; it is learning made more concrete, made more quotable, made more insertable into technology. The hierarchy of the three terms appears to be this: knowledge gives overall meaning, learning provides claims, and information represents those claims. Lyotard implies a clean connection between the three terms.

One notices the same hierarchy when Lyotard continues his discussion of the representation of knowledge in technology, elsewhere in chapter one. Notice the following:

... the new technologies ... make the information used in decision making (and therefore the means of control) even more mobile and subject to piracy.
It is not hard to visualize learning circulating along the same lines as money, instead of for its "educational" value or political (administrative, diplomatic, military) importance; the pertinent distinction would no longer be between knowledge and ignorance, but rather, as is the case with money, between "payment knowledge" and "investment knowledge. . . ."

(emphasis added) (PMC 6)

Here information appears to be what comes out of technology, either on the screen or printed, the data that is held, read, and used by decision-makers. Learning is the denotative, descriptive statements about the world. Knowledge is the significance, value, point of all of the learning represented as information in the hands of its users.

I'll return to the distinctions between these three terms when I examine the relationship between knowledge, language, and technology, later, but for now, one should notice that these distinctions make knowledge seem to be a broad, encompassing term, since it supports a wide variety of subjects through a network of different levels of representation, each addressing, for example, a certain topic in its own way: as a particle of information on the page, as the notion that particle recalls, and as the significance of that notion.

As potentially all-encompassing as these ideas of the levels of "knowledge" might be, Lyotard spends much of the rest of his text dividing knowledge not so much into levels as into distinctly different, separate, but related types, the forms of "narrative" knowledge and "scientific" knowledge.
Knowledge: Totalizing and Critical

This distinction is crucial for Lyotard's text and for this dissertation, but before I discuss its intricacies, I wish to shift my focus to another, possible division of knowledge suggested by Lyotard, one that in its position in and its dismissal from *The Postmodern Condition* suggests the greater importance and greater complexity of the narration-science distinction. As I mentioned above, in chapter four Lyotard focuses on the modern notion of the "social bond." Lyotard presents this bond, the means through which society is constituted, through two "methodological representation[s]": "either society forms a functional whole, or it is divided in two" (PMC 11). The first view, which Lyotard also calls an "organic whole" (PMC 11), is "a unified totality, a 'unicity' (PMC 12), aligned with Talcott Parsons's "conception of society as a self-regulating system," or with systems theory (PMC 11). This view of society looks for a "unitary and totalizing truth [that] lends itself to the unitary and totalizing practice of the system's managers" (PMC 12). The second view of society, "the critical" or Marxist view, focuses on "dualism" and is "wary of syntheses and reconciliations" (PMC 12). This theory looks at the struggles between groups, on how differing views of humanity's needs and aspirations lead to rearrangements and revolutions.

Lyotard emphasizes that determining—or at least considering—the nature of society is important for understanding "what the state of knowledge is—in other words the problems its development and distribution are facing today" (PMC 13). The choice between these two views of society affects knowledge by providing it different implicit roles: either the view of knowledge's role as an "indispensable element in the functioning of society," as implied by the unified view of society, or the role of knowledge as exerting a "critical function" that focuses on oppositions and differences (PMC 13).
However, almost even as Lyotard suggests this oppositional view of society and the related roles of knowledge, he deflates the importance of this distinction, by collapsing the two theories, in effect, back into one. Lyotard suggests that the critical view of society has "lost its theoretical standing" since it has "blurred to the point of losing all of its radicality" (PMC 13). Instead of providing a means to destroy the notion of an organic whole, a system, it has created a new notion of a system, that is still a system even with its vestigial elements of criticism. Lyotard charts this deflation as follows:

We will have to content ourselves with a glance at the balance sheet, which is possible for us to tally today now that their [the Marxist] fate is known: in countries with liberal or advanced liberal management, the struggles and their instruments have been transformed into regulators of the system; in communist countries, the totalizing model and its totalitarian effect have made a comeback in the name of Marxism itself, and the struggles in question have simply been deprived of the right to exist.

Everywhere, the Critique of political economy. . . and its correlate, the critique of alienated society, are used in one way or another as aids in programming the system. (PMC 13)

Reading such words today, in 1992, given changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, one notices a slightly different meaning than they would have had in 1979, when first published, but their main implication is still assertive: that because of the collapse of the critical view of society, the opposition between the two roles of knowledge seems suspect. Although Lyotard says that "the alternative seems clear" between the two roles of knowledge, "the decision
seems difficult, or arbitrary” (PMC 13), for it is one based on distinctions that no longer appear distinct, definite, or permanent.

Lytotard suggests that a possible way around this problem would be to consider not two roles of knowledge, but two different kinds of knowledge: one kind, a dominant form, that would be the knowledge of the system; the other, more bracketed, that would criticize from within the system:

One, the positivist kind, would be directly applicable to technologies bearing on men and materials, and would lend itself to operating as an indispensable productive force within the system. The other—the critical, reflexive, or hermeneutic kind—by reflecting directly or indirectly on values or aims, would resist any such "recuperation." (PMC 14)

Although such different kinds of knowledge would work together potentially as separate forms, the "positivist" kind of knowledge clearly seems to have precedence. Lytard's description of this kind of knowledge, including words such as "operating," "indispensable," and "force," makes its role seem more important, as does its alignment with the winning theory of the social bond.

Lytotard continues his emphasis of the superiority of "positivist" knowledge in his next lines, at the start of the next chapter, chapter five on postmodern theories of the social bond. Here, as he moves into his theory of postmodern society, he attacks the notion of dividing knowledge (and society) into coordinating, but equally significant parts as a means of avoiding making an absolute choice between one of the two forms:

I find this partition solution unacceptable. I suggest that the alternative it attempts to resolve, but only reproduces, is no longer relevant for the societies with which we are concerned
and that the solution itself is still caught within a type of oppositional thinking that is out of step with the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge. (emphasis added) (PMC 14)

The words I've emphasized are important for understanding the way that Lyotard views this notion of dividing knowledge into types. "Attempts to resolve" refers to finding a means of preserving the critical theory of society. By asserting that two forms of knowledge, one critical, still function within a "unified" society, Lyotard seems to help alleviate the loss of the critical theory of society, to allow it to continue to have value, even if it has been discredited as a major principle of social organization. However, such a resolution, such a saving of critical theory, does not work; the new solution merely "reproduces" the loss of critical knowledge, by making it the lesser of the two forms of knowledge. With its still inferior role, the decline in significance of this form of knowledge has not been resolved: the attempt to protect it by continuing to connect it to the structure of knowledge—in whatever marginal way—has failed.

Even more importantly, though, for Lyotard, such quibbling about whether or not critical theory still exists and still has value is "no longer relevant," for the basic components of society have changed. Thus, the discussion, the levels of distinction, between theories of society, roles of knowledge in these societies, and kinds of knowledge within the seeming winning view of society are all superseded by other concerns: they are "...still caught within a type of oppositional thinking that is out of step with the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge."

This last phrase, "the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge," brings us back to what I suggested, earlier, was the main dividing system of knowledge for Lyotard, for he suggests throughout The Postmodern Condition that the
"most vital modes" of knowledge are narrative and scientific knowledge. His suggestion of this other possible system of division between totalizing and critical knowledge is especially interesting and important, though, when one notices just how it works and how it is dismissed. Lyotard presents a theory of society, one that offers correspondingly opposing ideas of knowledge in and for that society. These ideas are expressed first as separate "roles" within two forms of society or as separate "kinds" within one combined form of society. When the differing forms of society collapse into each other, the different roles/kinds of knowledge coalesce also. Although they seemed separate and although they still may seem separate, they are not; they are somehow the same. Further, whether they are the same or not, the issue is no longer important, because new concerns, new forces and powers have taken over, changing the lines of argument, shifting the game.

These forces are the forces of language games, the distinctions between different kinds of statements that structure narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge. It is the issue of this "difference" between narration and science that makes how Lyotard treats this other system of knowledge—focusing on the organic whole vs. critical theories—so interesting, for what this system suggests is at least the possibility that the difference between narrative and scientific knowledge—and how it functions—are not so distinct as Lyotard might at first claim. The notion that one of two choices takes precedence is both a stated and unstated issue for Lyotard; it is one that will help us see how his text works, and how it applies to my larger project: analyzing a class taught over computer lines.
Knowledge: Narrative and Scientific

Earlier, I suggested that I view this section of the dissertation as a narrative re-telling Lyotard's narrative, and as an analysis of what his text contains. The previous two sections may be viewed either way: as an analysis of Lyotard's terms, or as an extended narrative interlude, an alternative scenario, different ways for Lyotard to have approached his main topic of knowledge. With such distinctions, whether between knowledge, learning, or information or between organic whole or critical theories of knowledge, Lyotard shows that he is aware that to be understood and discussed, knowledge must be broken down.

Although my re-telling has suggested, perhaps from its order, that Lyotard has divided knowledge first by the means I've discussed, my story has omitted a fair amount, from fairly early in his text, for from the second paragraph, Lyotard suggests that there are important variations of knowledge and that of these variations, one is more important. In my re-telling, I've been teasing (and risking annoying?) the reader about these variations and their importance, by focusing on other issues. Now the issue at last comes to this: just what are the variations; how do they work; what do they do? Lyotard answers these questions, at times clearly, at times teasingly himself, by playing with another question, one I'll address a bit further along (as a way of extending my teasing): Which is most important?

Lyotard first unites what he labels narrative and scientific knowledge in chapter two, while discussing the issue of legitimation, an issue with which these two forms of knowledge are concerned:

... scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition
and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call
narrative in the interest of simplicity. . . . (PMC 7)

With this opening connection of the two terms (coming after another statement,
an actual opening statement, one with a different direction, one I'll discuss
later), Lyotard is establishing basic premises about the relationship between the
two concepts: issues of how they together create a "totality" of knowledge, how
they control different kinds of information in "competition," how their existence is
a "conflict" within knowledge (just as a division of knowledge into unified
knowledge and dualistic knowledge produces conflict as well).

**Narrative Knowledge**

Lyotard focuses chapters six and seven on discussions of these issues.
Chapter six (at least after he dispenses with the distinction between knowledge
and learning, discussed above) examines narrative knowledge. This
discussion comes about as part of an examination of how the legitimation of
knowledge produces "culture" in traditional societies. Knowledge is based on
"customary" rituals and traditions; these traditions are expressed, preeminently
(to borrow a form of one of Lyotard's words), by a "narrative form." As a result,
narrative structures lead to "traditional" or "customary" knowledge, a legitimated
form of (to recall earlier distinctions) the "learning" or "information" they contain,
legitimated to reflect the needs, goals, and structures of their societies (all PMC
19).

How do narratives achieve a sense of legitimation and therefore support
culture? The telling of major, popular stories of a culture allows that culture to
"define its criteria of competence, and . . . to evaluate according to those criteria
what is performed or can be performed within it" (PMC 20). Narratives contain stories of "positive or negative apprenticeships" whose "successes or failures either bestow legitimacy upon social institutions (the function of myths), or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) of integration into established institutions" (PMC 20). Thus, narratives support the societies of which they are a part by emphasizing the values of those societies, as exemplified by stories that the religious, political, and social institutions support, just as they provide examples of how other possible actors relate to these institutions. Such roles give these narratives much power, for they suggest the means of integration as they suggest the importance for integration.

Narrative knowledge also is important for its relationship to language and language games. Lyotard suggests that "the narrative form. . . lends itself to a great variety of language games" (PMC 20). Lyotard uses the phrase "language games," deriving from Austin and Searle, to refer to the different kinds of utterances humanity can make. Narration relies on many different forms of utterance to carry the story and its hero along. Such games include descriptive statements about the world, proposals about possibilities, questions about confusions, and other possible uses of language. This use of language games is important for Lyotard, for much of his entire theory is based on how language games provide the "method" (PMC 9—from his chapter title) to understand the development of knowledge. I will investigate this issue of language games a bit later, for it provides a ready tool with which to probe Lyotard, so I will skip much of its application for an understanding of narrative. For now, the key point is this: narratives "are . . . tightly woven together in the
web [they] form...;" a web formed by language forms of various types and uses (PMC 20).

Further, the very act of telling and re-telling narratives about its culture, its people and its past helps create and solidify the social bond. Earlier, I mentioned Lyotard's views on the modern social bond, specifically the two theories of its totality and its dualism. Narratives help a traditional society to "never forget," for "its social bond [is not ] only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them" (PMC 22). The act of telling stories affects this bond in two ways. The first derives from the roles of narrator, subject of narration, and listener that constitute narratives. Traditional narratives such as the Cashinahua narrative allow for these roles to be interconnecting. Thus, a "current narrator" could become the future "hero of a narration" told by one of his listeners (PMC 21). The current narrator's "only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself" (PMC 20); the listener obtains the "authority" to re-tell the story simply by listening as well (PMC 20). There is thus an intermingling of roles: the narrator of one story can become the hero of another; one listener can become the narrator of another story; at one time, the hero of a story was a narrator, and before that a listener, as well. Such interconnection brings together the members of the society; it creates a social bond.

This bond also derives from the effect of narratives on time. Popular, cultural stories are re-told in "fixed form[s]," allowing them to have a certain rhythm (PMC 21) that allows them to be remembered. This form may include elements of a narrative that are unclear to some listeners, as elements of "nursery rhymes... and repetitive forms of contemporary music" (PMC 22) are unclear, for individual phrases may seem nonsense if looked at too closely.
However, the beat of the rhythm makes these stories stick in their listener's minds, helps them remember them: "In their prosody can be recognized that mark of that strange temporalization that jars the golden rule of our knowledge: 'never forget'" (PMC 22). The structure of the narratives helps its listeners remember it; I'm reminded of The Iliad, or Beowulf in the power of their rhythm. As I write, Lyotard's reference to contemporary children's stories has led me to hear "The mouse ran up the clock, hickory, dickory, dock" over and over. That language is what allows me to remember those ideas.

Because of these features, Lyotard says that narratives provide a sense of "immediate legitimation" (PMC 23). They involve members of their culture in the very act of their re-telling as they lull their listener's minds into remembering their stories. As a result, such stories achieve cultural power and are able to continue to flow through their societies, from one listener to another, from one generation to the next.

Scientific Knowledge

Lyotard's discussion of scientific knowledge focuses on similar issues—the roles of players, the use of language, the effects on the social bond—but he argues that science approaches these features from a different perspective. Part of this perspective derives from a distinction within science between what Lyotard calls "the research game and the teaching game" (PMC 23). This opposition within science continues throughout The Postmodern Condition; it is a tool that Lyotard uses to emphasize the very intricacies of science. Viewing science as composed of a research game and a teaching game helps one understand Lyotard's definition of scientific knowledge, as presented in chapter
seven, for the two games assign different roles to the players involved in science. Narratives, by the structure Lyotard presented earlier, seem to assume a certain interchangeability between the roles of the story-teller, the topic of narration, and the listener, but the rules of science have seemingly more stringent rules for these positions, and the two games of science assign these rules in slightly different ways.

First, look at the game of research. At the center of it is the assumption that the speaker "should speak the truth" about his topic and should be able to "provide proof of what he says" even by "refut[ing] any opposing or contradictory statements" about the topic (PMC 23). Thus, his authority, his position as a *legitimated* authority, does not come from just having the position of speaker or from having heard the story before (as in narration): the authority arises from knowing something sufficient about the topic. Similarly, the listener also must have a certain kind of authority; he must be able "to give (or refuse) his assent to the statement he hears" (PMC 23). To do so, he too must be an authority or an "equal" to the speaker, a position that is evident when he speaks and actually gives—or refuses—his assent (PMC 23-4). Thus, he is not simply a passive listener, one coming perhaps with no information about the topic. He must be knowledgeable, ready to speak on the topic for the exchange to have meaning. The topic too must satisfy more stringent conditions, for it must be "susceptible to proof . . . as evidence in a debate" and it must not "supply a plurality of contradictory or inconsistent proofs" (PMC 24). The issue of what is proof, what makes it sufficient, and what makes it inconsistent, are important concerns for Lyotard throughout this text, as he examines how legitimation structures have changed, providing different means for obtaining proof and delivering legitimation.
The "research game" is the process by which speakers and listeners debate topics, reaching for proof, searching through inconsistency. It requires, though, the "teaching game" to supply appropriate listeners (and speakers) to provide the degree of competence needed to continue the game:

... the scientists [sic] needs an addressee [in my terms so far, a listener] who can in turn become the sender [a speaker]; he needs a partner. Otherwise the verification of his statements would be impossible, since the nonrenewal of the requisite skills would eventually bring an end to the necessary, contradictory debate....

Equals are needed and must be created. (PMC 24)

Teaching creates these equals through a process that assumes that students do not know what teachers know, but that they can learn what they are taught. What they are taught is a set of ideas whose degree of proof has been considered adequate already, in the "guise of indisputable truths" (PMC 25). These truths help students learn their fields and build the competence—and confidence—to become the equal experts needed to continue the research game.

Thus, the two games of science fit together with a certain degree of interchangeability. One might argue that narration, with its revolving positions of speaker, listener, and topic, also has elements of interchangeability. However, for Lyotard, the organization of the shifting roles of science is assumed to be more precise, more measured, more analyzed than is that for narration. Student becomes teacher only after satisfying tests which document sufficient proof, sufficient learning. That learning is judged to be appropriate evidence of knowledge (recalling the distinction between learning and knowledge, discussed earlier) by satisfying certain criteria. Further, in the
narrative structure, any person could occupy any of the three positions: speaker, listener, or topic. In the scientific structure, listeners and speakers can share roles, either in the two-way conversation of the research game, or the momentarily one-way conversation of the teaching game, but the topic, the subject of the scientific discourse, is not an option; it is talked about, analyzed, but at least as Lyotard discusses it in this chapter, it is not a position that may be occupied by either the speaker or listener. (There is, of course, the analogy between scientific knowledge and knowledge of society and politics. Using this analogy, one might imagine a more interchanging set of roles, but these roles would still be governed by more stringent rules than are the roles of the narrative structures—for more information, notice the following chapter.)

This arrangement of roles is crucial to understanding Lyotard's concept of scientific knowledge. Still, to emphasize the difference between science and narrative even further, Lyotard launches into an analysis of the pragmatics of science that suggests a point by point comparison/contrast of science with narrative. He examines the following bases of comparison, which I'm listing below for emphasis before I discuss them:

1. Scientific knowledge requires that one language game, denotation, be retained and all others excluded. . . .

2. Scientific knowledge is in this way set apart from the language games that combine to form the social bond. . . .

3. Within the bounds of the game of research, the competence required concerns the post of sender alone\(^2\). . . .

\(^2\) However, as I've suggested, in scientific knowledge both posts—sender and addressee—are important. The sender, though, must be *competent*. 
4. A statement of science gains no validity from the fact of being reported. . . .

5. The game of science thus implies a diachronic temporality, that is, a memory and a project. (PMC 25-26)

The individual points are important in and of themselves, but looking at the order in which Lyotard presents them says much about his conception of science as well. As one looks at these five points, one may discern four stated to implied transitions, which might be phrased something like this: between points one and two—language; between points two and three—the social bond; between points three and four—legitimation and validation; between points four and five—temporality. With narrative knowledge, these four areas were provided all at once, in the moment of narration that gives meaning to language and society and provided an aid for memory. With science, they are separate components, analogous to the complication present in the stricter division of roles.

Getting back to Lyotard's specific points, first look at the first and second ideas, focusing on language and the social bond. While narrative requires language for many purposes, including forming a social bond from its use of language games, science is focused on denotative, or descriptive, statements about what is, what is judged to be truthful: "A statement's truth-value is the criterion determining its acceptability" (PMC 25). Other forms of statements are important, but "only . . . as turning points in the dialectical argumentation, which must end in a denotative statement" (PMC 25). These other language games of narration lead to the development of a shared social bond between speakers and listeners. With science, what matters is that a statement is judged to be true; a speaker gains a right to participate in the discussion only if he can
"produce a true statement about a referent" along with the "verifiable or falsifiable statements" that will convince the experts of his truthfulness (PMC 25). The social bond that develops is formed indirectly "because it develops into a profession and gives rise to institutions . . . run by qualified partners (the professional class)" (PMC 25).

As his third point, Lyotard argues that the speaker's competence is what matters in the game of science. This competence gives a scientific statement its legitimacy. Conversely, "there is no particular competence required of the addressee (it is required only in didactics—the student must be intelligent)" (PMC 25). Now, this last statement is intriguing, for it seems potentially contradictory to what Lyotard has argued earlier. When he first discusses the role of the listener in the research game, he suggests that "it should be possible for the addressee validly to give . . . his assent to the statement he hears" (PMC 23), and even discussing the singular importance of denotative statements just a few paragraphs before he mentions the role of experts (PMC 25) to give assent to the truthfulness of scientific statements. Would not these experts be listeners, listening to the speaker's scientific statements? So—and this is an odd question—how is it that they have "no particular competence required"—if they are experts? The answer lies in the sense and the timing of their role. While Lyotard's notion of narration implies a free substitution or shifting of roles, his discussion of science implies more set roles. A listener does not "gain potential access to the same authority simply by listening" (PMC 20) as in narration. At the moment of listening, the authority is possessed by the speaker. The listener is "supposed to have, potentially, the same qualities as [the speaker]" (PMC 23), but these qualities are knowable only after the moment of
the speaker's speaking is over; "before that, it will be impossible to say whether
or not he [i.e. the listener] is a scientific scholar" (PMC 24).

This distinction between how the listener both can be a potential equal
and yet can lack a position of competence seems like a fairly slippery
distinction, but it is an important one to understand how Lyotard views scientific
knowledge. It is a knowledge that is founded on precision, on rigid adherence
to structures, to rules. Unlike the shifting nature of narrative, science is founded
on specificity, on meeting precise conditions, at precise times.

This is how science gains its sense of legitimation, and this brings us to
Lyotard's final two points about science. Unlike narrations, scientific stories are
valid, legitimate, not just because they are reported, but because they may be
judged to be true, because they are surrounded with sufficient proof that they
are true and sufficient proof that they are not false, proof from two directions. At
times, this proof may discredit other knowledge, "knowledge that has
accumulated in the form of already accepted statements" (PMC 26). A new
statement discredits an earlier statement by "refut[ing] the previous statement
by producing arguments and proofs" (PMC 26). Thus, scientific statements refer
to earlier statements and emphasize the history that they and other statements
(earlier, later, at the same time) create. Speakers are supposed to remember
the statements of earlier speakers well enough to propose new statements that
"differ . . . from the previous ones" (PMC 26). Thus, while narrative knowledge
preserves memory within the language games of the stories, scientific
knowledge requires potential listeners to listen carefully, to remember what they
have heard so that they can cite it carefully and to know how to attack it with
equal clarity.
Earlier, when I examined Lyotard's other ways of classifying and dividing knowledge, I suggested how these ways related to each other—how the levels of knowledge, learning, and information supported each other, how totalist and critical forms of knowledge are different yet connected. The same sense of collapsing connection—in the sense that Lyotard plays one off of the other—is important with narrative and scientific knowledge. However, to see its full relevance, one first needs to examine the full use to which Lyotard puts "narration" and "science." Through these terms, he constructs an argument about the rise and fall of the classical to modern to postmodern systems by which knowledge (of whatever form), society, and culture are made legitimate.

The Nature of Legitimation

Earlier, I suggested that legitimation is a process through which various parties, including experts, other observers, and even fields of inquiry, inscribe some concept with importance. The seemingly main use of this concept in *The Postmodern Condition* is to focus on how knowledge—in whatever form, possibly, but most likely here consisting of scientific and narrative knowledge—has received legitimation in the West, from the classical period to the postmodern period. It is a topic thus focused on the realm of ideas.

However, one of the effects of Lyotard's main chapter on legitimation, chapter three, is to expand the scope of his investigation of legitimation from ideas to more practical human concerns. Lyotard draws an analogy between scientific statements and "civil laws," suggesting that they are similar:

Take any civil law as an example: it states that a given category of citizens must perform a specific kind of action. Legitimation is the
process by which a legislator is authorized to promulgate such a law as a norm. Now take the example of a scientific statement: it is subject to the rule that a statement must fulfill a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific. In this case, legitimation is the process by which a "legislator" dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe the stated conditions . . . determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse for consideration by the scientific community. (PMC 8)

This analogy is crucial to much of The Postmodern Condition, for especially in certain key areas, Lyotard uses the similarity of these two structures to explain how they work in different situations, at different times. He suggests multiple ways through which civil acts receive legitimation. He also suggests differing strategies through which knowledge is legitimated, even focusing on how this legitimation must be related to "conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification" (PMC 8—the passage omitted from the above quotation). Crucially, as he is making these arguments, he emphasizes similarities between the kinds of strategies.

More than just as analogy, though, Lyotard also views the two structures as "indissociably linked" (PMC 8), with one seeming to be an extension of the other. This connection occurs because "the right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just, even if the statements consigned to these two authorities differ in nature" (PMC 8). Lyotard emphasizes this connection as a "strict interlinkage," suggesting that it derives from "the time of Plato," the origin of Western culture, continuing to the present, when the connection has become even more acute, for "science seems completely subordinated to the prevailing powers more than ever before and, along with
the new technologies, is in danger of becoming a major stake in their conflicts" (PMC 8). The implication here is that "knowledge" is controlled by "political power." Lyotard extends this idea by stating that

\[
\ldots \text{knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government. (PMC 8-9)}
\]

*The Postmodern Condition* traces this issue of "who decides"; one should note, though, that as part of that tracing, Lyotard suggests that "political power" derives its legitimacy from the system of knowledge and provides legitimation back to knowledge. The shift between these directions is part of the overall thesis of the text, concerning the shift from modern to postmodern culture.
CHAPTER 3: NARRATIONS OF LEGITIMATION

Legitimation through The Grand Narratives

Thus, early in *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard establishes one of his main concerns, the problem of legitimacy. Lyotard's main focus is scientific knowledge, and although he argues that the means through which science has achieved legitimation have changed, still

> It is remarkable that for a long time it [science] could not help resorting for its solutions, to procedures that overtly or not, belong to narrative knowledge. (PMC 27)

Thus begins a major section of the text, a section that outlines the use of what Lyotard calls "grand Narratives" (PMC 15); they are the major cultural stories that help give legitimation to science, to educational institutions, and to society. Before moving into an examination of how narratives legitimate science, though, we should examine several words in the above passage, to notice how they color the legitimation process. When Lyotard writes "it is remarkable," he is emphasizing the difference between narrative and scientific knowledge, as if a possible connection between them is striking, highly unusual, almost too special even to imagine. The phrase "could not help resorting" implies that if it could have, science would have used other means of legitimation, as if narration were the last possible choice, perhaps the least desirable choice available. "Overtly or not" suggests that certain features of the narrations that have legitimated science have remained hidden, veiled and have controlled how we view science by appearing invisible. Such a position could be neutral, certainly, but it could also be potentially threatening, as the fine print of a hard-
to-read clause in an insurance form is "not overt" and is therefore at least potentially a threat. Thus, again, the tone of Lyotard's discussion of "narration" affects his presentation of it, even as a choice.

Even introduced in this bracketed way, the idea that narrative structures provide legitimation for science is a powerful idea, one that Lyotard discusses in chapters eight and nine. Before he presents what he considers the main narratives of legitimation, he examines the history of the need for legitimation in science. This history starts at "the very beginning" (PMC 28), with the Greeks, but Lyotard leads into it by jumping far ahead, to the present day, a time that he will argue has escaped the need for narrative legitimation. Why do so? Partly to emphasize the strength of the narrative form—or partly to introduce the narrative legitimation process with a kind of example that he can label a "crude proof" of the continued use of narratives (PMC 27)?

This proof comes in the stories that scientists tell: "when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a 'discovery.'" They "recount an epic of knowledge" and "play by the rules of the narrative game" (PMC 27-28). This epic is "wholly unepic" for it "concerns the relationship of scientific knowledge to 'popular knowledge' or what is left of it" (PMC 28). As I'm writing, I'm reminded of this use of narrative to legitimate science, for the news media are full of stories of a possible origin of AIDS from tests for polio, conducted in Africa in the 1950's. The stories of such tests, mentioning the participants or actors, the objectives or plot, and the results or climax, unites various themes, including ideas of the first world's use of the third world and the need for standards as controlling mechanisms. Every re-telling of this story in the media makes it function more as a legitimation tool for the acts of researchers trying to verify the origin of AIDS from this direction. This
narrative recalls an even more obvious, older narrative of legitimation about AIDS. From the time the epidemic surfaced and regularly until quite recently, newspaper articles about it included a brief story of what the disease is, who it affects, how it is transmitted, etc. Each re-telling of the story re-emphasized the seriousness of the disease, possibly educating more people, but also making the people who were already educated about the disease re-experience their entire knowledge of its terror once again. The re-telling of the basic story about the nature of AIDS emphasized the seriousness of the disease, lending it a sense of legitimacy.

The tendency for science to use narrative means for legitimation, as in the above contemporary example, is part of a broader search by science for legitimation, one dating from the origins of science as a discipline: "The new language game of science posed the problem of its own legitimation at the very beginning—in Plato" (PMC 28). Although The Dialogues "encapsulates [the] pragmatics [of science]" (PMC 28), it does so in "the form of a narrative" (PMC 28-29), "giv[ing] ammunition to narrative by virtue of its own form: each of the dialogues takes the form of a narrative of a scientific discussion" (PMC 29). Lyotard emphasizes this narrative aspect of The Dialogues to make the following point, one that sets up the need for the legitimation of science and the method for that legitimation—narrative:

Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns:
begging the question, proceeding on prejudice. But does it not fall
into the same trap by using narrative as its authority? (PMC 29)

Thus, by using narrative, science achieves an illusion of legitimation, but as the
last sentence of the quotation implies, this is a legitimation that Lyotard feels is
suspect, that is subject to flaws, for its source of legitimation is one that by its
very nature contains ideas that might "beg . . . the question, [or] proceed . . . on
prejudice," for these are features that might be contained in stories, even major
cultural stories about meanings and origins. Remember that the pragmatics of
traditional narrative lead from teller to topic to listener, with a continual
progression of the roles. Such a structure could beg questions about causes
and effects, reasons, and justifications. Such a structure could serve as a ready
conduit for prejudices, carrying them through the generations.

These issues of legitimation are compounded by and related to two
further features of legitimation in the modern period: the loss of "transcendental
authority" for science (PMC 29) and the renewed dignity for narrative (popular)
cultures" (PMC 30). Although these two developments may seem unrelated,
they combine to produce a crucial creation for Lyotard: a social structure that is
analogous to science and that uses a narrative that has suspiciously scientific
qualities. This new creation arises when Lyotard suggests, very briefly, that

   It is recognized that the conditions of truth, in other words, the rules
   of the game of science, are immanent in that game, that they can
   only be established within the bonds of a debate that is already
   scientific in nature, and that there is no other proof that the rules
   are good than the consensus extended to them by the experts.

   (PMC 29)
This statement is powerful, so powerful that even though Lyotard is about to discuss how narratives have provided legitimation to science (and knowledge and society) he does so after he implies that science is not in need of narrative for support. His observation here is that science depends on itself—on the rules of its own game—for its very legitimation. No "metaphysical search for a first proof or transcendental authority" seems necessary (PMC 29). However, this idea, so powerful that it could be seen as contradicting the points of the following arguments about narrative legitimation, is, in effect, brushed away by Lyotard. It occurs in a very brief paragraph, most of which I have just quoted. Its point is special, and important, but it is a point that is directed at narrative and society, not science.

The point seems to be this: citing what he calls "the modern proclivity to define the conditions of a discourse in a discourse on those conditions," a self-referential, non-transcendent idea, Lyotard explains a modern application of narrative and science together (PMC 30). Lyotard leads into this application in the next paragraph when he cites the "renewed dignity for narrative (popular) cultures, already noticeable in Renaissance Humanism and variously present in the Enlightenment, the Sturm und Drang, German idealist philosophy, and the historical school in France" (PMC 30). One might consider the interest since the Renaissance in common people, their worlds, their interests and activities as possible subjects in art and literature; earlier, gods and goddesses, kings and queens would have been more likely subjects of art. This "appeal" to narrative, new several hundred years ago, arriving along with "the liberation of the bourgeois classes from the traditional authorities," results as "a way of solving the problem of legitimating the new authorities" (PMC 30).
The "new" scientific, self-referential point of view, mentioned above, helps support this new class of authorities, by structuring their narrative:

This way of inquiring into sociopolitical legitimacy combines with the new scientific attitude: the name of the hero is the people, the sign of legitimacy is the people's consensus, and their mode of creating norms is deliberation. The notion of progress is a necessary outgrowth of this. It represents nothing other than the movement by which knowledge is presumed to accumulate—but this movement is extended to the new sociopolitical subject. The people debate among themselves about what is just or unjust in the same way that the scientific community debates about what is true or false; they accumulate civil laws just as scientists accumulate scientific laws; they perfect their rules of consensus just as the scientists produce new "paradigms" to revise their rules in light of what they have learned. (emphasis added) (PMC 30)

In the United States, we might consider The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, and The Bill of Rights as examples of these sort of principles. Lyotard is sketching the analogous systems of society and science; because of this analogy, the new focus on narrative achieves power by applying rules of science, by appearing scientific. This appearance of the scientific in the social is an important moment in The Postmodern Condition, for much of the overall power of the text relies on the science/society analogy. The legitimation of scientific principles is crucial because it implies a related legitimation of social principles and social institutions. Science and the scientific method provide a ready analogy to society and its social, political, and economic forces; Lyotard's
text is equally concerned with showing how social knowledge has changed its mode of legitimation as it is with examining the legitimation of science.

In the act of making this analogy between the scientific subject and the human one, and all of its related connections, Lyotard has shifted from a moment in his text in which he seems to assert the primary position of science. Although he touches on the very ability of science to provide its own legitimation, he uses the occasion to emphasize a new application of narrative knowledge, one broadened from the tradition-laden, tightly repetitive structures of ancient popular or "vulgar" narratives. He uses science, in a sense, to rescue narration from itself. Elements of this sense of a rescue or a saving from narratives occur in the difference between the traditional subjects of the popular narratives and a the new category of "the people"—the subjects of the pseudo-scientific narratives of society. Lyotard refers to this new subject as having qualities that are derived from scientific knowledge: "... Instituting deliberation... cumulative progression... pretension to universality; these are the operators of scientific knowledge"(PMC 30)

This "scientific" structuring of narrative is aligned with a new, bourgeois cultural practice focusing on eliminating traditional narrative cultural leftovers:

It is therefore not at all surprising that the representatives of the new process of legitimation by "the people" should be at the same time actively involved in destroying the traditional knowledge of peoples, perceived from that point forward as minorities or potential separatist movements destined only to spread obscurantism. (PMC 30)

Thus, the creation of the scientific-sociological analogy allows for a means to eliminate traditional narrative structures, by applying new, improved, more
scientific narrative structures. The odd thing, though, is that this new ability of
science to provide explanation does not seem to be able to explain, support,
and legitimate itself. Although Lyotard at least briefly suggests that possibility, it
is immediately subsumed by the scientific structuring of narrative, a form that is
scientific, partly, but narrative, mostly. Still, the very suggestion of a possible
superior or influencing role of science prefigures some of Lyotard's later points
about the importance of scientific knowledge and provides another example of
Lyotard's continuing practice of dropping hints into the text about another role,
another importance of science.

For now, though, Lyotard banishes such suggestions by stating that "the
mode of legitimation we are discussing, which reintroduces narrative as the
validity of knowledge, can thus take two routes, depending on whether it
represents the subject of the narrative as cognitive or practical, as a hero of
knowledge or a hero of liberty" (PMC 31). Lyotard includes these words as he
is about to launch into an extended discussion of the two grand Narratives he
views supporting scientific, social, and educational structures. Even so, in his
next line, Lyotard throws in another jab at the lack of support that support
provides with the quick suggestion of the tenuous state of legitimation by
narrative: "it is already apparent that narrative itself is incapable of describing
that meaning [of legitimation] adequately" (PMC 30). Such a statement is part of
Lyotard's continual "bracketing" of his descriptions of the role of narrative with
qualifications to deflate them, to emphasize his ultimate points. They are, of
course, in narrative terms, a form of foreshadowing, to create a kind of
educated, implied suspense. (Relatedly, of course, my emphasis of these brief
twists in how Lyotard's ideas flow derives from the theme of my narrative re-
telling of Lyotard's narrative: that the reduction of narrative through the appeal of science is an important concept.)

The Emancipation Narrative

Lyotard suggests that the first of the major narratives of legitimation is "practical" since it contains "a hero of liberty"; this is a narrative that Lyotard labels, repeatedly, the "narrative of emancipation" (PMC 33). Who is emancipated? Humanity—from the rule of "priests and tyrants"(PMC 31) How? By reclaiming the "right to science" (PMC 31). Why? Because "All peoples have a right to science" (PMC 31).

This right to science and knowledge for "all peoples" leads to a focus on education, specifically "primary education, rather than . . . universities and high schools" (PMC 31) to allow the people, not just elite groups such as the former "priests and tyrants," to enjoy this right to science. This need for broad, primary education leads to another need, for officers of the State and . . . the managers of civil society" (PMC 32), to supervise and direct these institutions. As a result, this narrative leads to a vast network of educational institutions to train these leaders "because the nation as a whole was supposed to win its freedom through the spread of new domains of knowledge to the population, a process to be effected through agencies and professions within which those cadres would fulfill their functions"(PMC 32). As a result, the narrative of freedom supports an educational system for "the State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the 'people,' under the name of the 'nation,' in order to point them down the path of progress" (PMC 32).
One could thus sketch the plot of this narrative as follows: the subject of narration, the people, finds its right to knowledge fulfilled through education. Referring to the features of narration, mentioned earlier, though, specifically the other roles, one sees an odd parallel to the kind of interconnection presented in a traditional narrative. If the subject of the narration is the people, who is the speaker and who is the listener? In a sense, although Lyotard does not really emphasize these roles, they are filled by the people as well. The people contain this narrative, it is their story. The creation and maintenance of primary through university education keeps the story alive, keeps speaking it to the people as well, ensuring them of their right to knowledge, reminding them of past tyrants who controlled education. The people—in different guises—thus seem to fill the narrative posts.

In his initial explanation of this narrative, Lyotard is referring to the legitimation of science and knowledge. However, as I mentioned above, Lyotard is also interested in how the social subject is analogous to the scientific subject. The emancipation narrative suggests, by its very nature, a clear analogy between science and society, with its human as hero in search of rights to fulfill aspirations. These aspirations are not just for education, for knowledge; they are also for political manifestations of justice, a broader sense of emancipation relating to laws, rules, and regulations governing liberty, property, commerce, and not just the right to education and knowledge. This analogy is especially clear when Lyotard argues that this narrative is still powerful, even in the current period coming after a time of "delegitimation" of narratives (just as the "crude" narratives of legitimation are still espoused by scientists explaining their discoveries). Under this analogy, the "practical subject—'humanity'" is motivated by "the self-grounding of freedom or, if preferred, its self-
management" (PMC 35). The people's control of political institutions ensures that justice will prevail. The plot of this version of the narration develops as follows:

The subject is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself. It is assumed that the laws it makes for itself are just, not because they conform to some outside nature, but because the legislators are, constitutionally, the very citizens who are subject to the laws. As a result, the legislator's will—the desire that the laws be just—will always coincide with the will of the citizen, who desires the law and will therefore obey it. (PMC 35)

There is a strong sense of narrative interconnection in the roles assigned in this epic of freedom, since as in the Cashinahua narrative, the posts of speaker, topic, and listener are interchangeable. This is a narrative composed of many smaller narratives, for the legislators speak about laws for the people to themselves and to the people. Since the legislators are part of the people, their laws are directed toward themselves as well. Guiding this narrative is thus the idea that all of the narrative posts will be held, in a sense, by the people, in a shifting, changing pattern.

With this aspect of the emancipation narrative, Lyotard does emphasize a new role of knowledge in the subject of narration. When one views the practical subject as seeking to reclaim the right to science as a tool for his or her liberation, as in the first way of seeing this narrative, knowledge is the desire, the goal of the action. However, this more social way of viewing this plot leads to another connection between knowledge and the subject. "Knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject," for knowledge provides the
evidence about reality—evidence offered by the descriptive, denotative statements of conditions in the world—that the legislators and the people use to construct the prescriptive statements about what should be done or what ought to be done. Lyotard emphasizes that "positive knowledge . . . inform[s] the practical subject about the reality within which the execution of the prescription is to be inscribed" (PMC 36)—knowledge gives humanity information (referring to the definition of the word that Lyotard uses in the text, discussed earlier) to aid in the decision-making process. Decision-making is therefore like learning, which uses information similarly.

This shift of knowledge from a position related to and tied to the subject to a position merely in support of the subject creates a more complicated role for the experts who wield that knowledge. Since these experts are part of the practical subject, humanity, they are part of its narrative and freedom, and thus have certain rights and privileges. They are able to "reject . . . prescriptions" "if they feel that the civil society of which they are members is badly represented by the State" (PMC 36). Lyotard mentions that if they are opposed to the will of the legislators, then this position "reintroduces the critical function of knowledge" that I discussed earlier. Here, as in the earlier section, Lyotard suggests that a critical, dualistic, analyzing, disputing function of knowledge could be useful, but as earlier, he ends with emphasizing that this critical function is superseded by more important issues: "but the fact remains that knowledge has no final legitimacy outside of serving the goals envisioned by the practical subject, the autonomous collectivity" (PMC 26).

This first grand Narrative is thus grounded on practical issues: on the rights of humanity, first, for knowledge, and, second, for broader areas of liberty.
Although Lyotard provides only one concrete example of this narrative, when he refers to the educational policy of the French Third Republic (PMC 31), his descriptions of its qualities suggest the structures of other democratic educational and political institutions, such as those of the United States. There also seems to be an immediate application to the college-level teaching of writing, for that is a topic also focused on providing its people—students—with training in accordance with their rights—as thinking, educated citizens—to have that training. The form of writing instruction with which this dissertation is most concerned, teaching over a computer network, is even more applicable to this narrative, for such a form of teaching does create a structure that suggests learning as an experience of freedom and liberation. I'll come back to this idea later, but for now, we'll turn to the second of Lyotard's grand Narratives.

**The Speculative Narrative**

Lyotard treats the second narrative of legitimation with much greater detail than he does the first narrative, for not only does he set out its principles—he provides its history as well. Although this second narrative is in some ways simpler than the first, with its two sides, one more focused on science and knowledge, one more social, this new narrative is actually much more involved for it approaches the legitimation of knowledge from a greater degree of abstraction. Understanding such a focus helps one understand the essence of this narrative, for this is a narrative of knowledge, one in which knowledge (and even knowledge of knowledge) functions as the subject or hero of its own epic. Lyotard labels this the "speculative narrative" for it concerns the speculative apparatus that produces this knowledge of knowledge, and that is represented
by the notion of the university, its fields of inquiry, and how these fields work
together to determine an overriding "spirit" of knowledge.

Lytard introduces this narrative into his text by using what might seem
like a surprising technique: he tells a story. This story of the development of the
speculative narrative contains a time of origin, 1807-1810, a location, Germany,
Berlin, and more specifically the University of Berlin, and leading actors,
including Fichte, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, and Hegel (PMC 32-33). Lytard
emphasizes at the same time that this is a long story, for these developments
have had a high degree of "influence on the organization of higher education in
the young countries of the world" (PMC 32), including, Lytard says a bit later,
the university system of the United States (PMC 34). This story even has the
elements of a catchy plot, with a government agency facing a choice between
two proposals ("a project conceived by Fichte and counterproposals by
Schleiermacher), a "minister's advisor thus fac[ing] a major conflict (Humboldt's
predicament), the invocation of the supernatural (the "Spirit" of knowledge), and
even an element of nationalism, in the difference between this, the German,
plan for legitimating knowledge and the French view of knowledge as
"embodied . . . in a State" (PMC 32-33). This narrative does more than just
provide the story for an operetta, however; it allows Lytard to trace the
development of a narrative structure to explain the resulting conception of
knowledge. Further, given Lytard's interest in the shift from narrative to other
sources of legitimation, as we will see, his narrative presentation of the
speculative narrative is not without its ultimate significance for the overall point
of The Postmodern Condition.

Turning to the actual elements of the speculative narrative, one first
needs to determine the subject of narration. Instead of a people or some other
easily-recognized topic, this subject is the abstract "synthesis" of what Lyotard labels "three ambitions, or better, . . . a single, threefold ambition":

'that of deriving everything from an original principle'

(corresponding to scientific activity),

'that of relating everything to an ideal'

(governing ethical and social practice), and

'that of unifying this principle and this ideal in a single Idea'

(ensuring that the scientific search for true causes always coincides with the pursuit of just ends in moral and political life). (PMC 33) (arranged for emphasis)

This ambition—indeed a better word than "three ambitions" for it emphasizes the connection and singularity of this idea—is "invoke[d]" by what Humboldt labels a "Spirit" and Fichte labels "Life." This Spirit is not what Lyotard labels elsewhere mere "positive knowledge," the conception of knowledge we have been using so far. No, the Spirit is a much broader concept, one that embraces knowledge and is what knowledge leads to. It is the subject, point, meaning, or significance of knowledge. It might be considered the result of knowledge raised to an ultimate degree, for it expresses a generalized, idealized significance for that knowledge. This Spirit is a concept that is of original importance, overwhelming, profound, yet simple and singular. It also speaks of something that transcends the world and humanity. It resides in the realm of ideas; it is abstract, not residing in mankind's "authorities, even indirectly. The subject of knowledge is not the people, but the speculative spirit" (PMC 33).

The notion of "speculation" is important for it is the process by which the narrative of the spirit operates. Through speculation, individual bits of learning are found to be related to knowledge; one might, in fact, regard speculation as
the major action that affects how knowledge seems to be constituted. It is also the process which legitimates science and knowledge, by connecting individual instances of knowledge to the speculative spirit. This process of connection is represented by the notion of the university and its goal of collecting all knowledge and categorizing it in appropriate ways to reflect the ambitions represented by the "Spirit." Lyotard emphasizes the importance of speculation when he discusses its role in the university:

Schools are functional; the University is speculative, that is to say, philosophical. Philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in the laboratories and in preuniversity education; it can only achieve this in a language game that links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of spirit, in other words, which links them in a rational narration, or rather metanarration.  

(PMC 33)

The speculative process is thus the narrative action leading to the narrative subject, the Spirit. It is a process that creates the university by linking its fields of study appropriately, linking them as "moments in the becoming of spirit," as individual instances that legitimate their knowledge, legitimate it because they connect it to the broader conception of the speculative spirit. It also produces what might be labeled a "metanarration," for it is a narration not of a concrete subject, but the narration of an abstraction that supports and elucidates this concrete subject. Thus, what I've called so far the "speculative narrative" is really a speculative "metanarrative," for it is one step more removed from knowledge. It is the narrative that explains how all of the narratives of individual fields of knowledge operate. And, most importantly, it is the narrative that gives
these individual subjects their legitimation, for it justifies their place in the speculative university.

Lyotard emphasizes one more narrative role, that of narrator. He does not emphasize such a role with the emancipation narrative, perhaps because the people serve as their own narrators. With this narrative, though, a distinct narrative position is important. Since this narrative is an abstraction, a metanarrative, Lyotard argues that its "narrator must not be a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, nor even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialities" (PMC 34). Instead, this narrator is "a metasubject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of the empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures" (PMC 34). This "metasubject" "inhabits the speculative University" (PMC 34); it is the connection of the knowledge of the university's fields, a connection that provides legitimation for individual subjects because they are involved in the act of becoming the speculative spirit.

Thus, the speculative narrative is, in a sense even more removed from concrete experience and individual facts and figures than mere instances of scientific or narrative knowledge are from the instances of learning that they legitimate. This is a narrative about how all of this knowledge is legitimated by being part of the speculative process that invokes the speculative spirit. Such a metanarrative to legitimate knowledge, has, it might be noted, a rather strange, distant relationship to that knowledge. There is the sense that it separates a form of knowledge from itself, separating knowledge from its significance as a useful theory for humanity. In the emancipation narrative, a certain principle of usefulness, of a connection to reality, was important. Knowledge could be used
to help humanity fulfill its aims, whether aims of organizing a just society or improving the efficiency of its living conditions. However, in the speculative narrative, knowledge is not legitimated by being useful to mankind or to the state. Knowledge "first finds legitimacy within itself, and it is knowledge that is entitled to say what the State and Society are" (PMC 34). This role occurs only after knowledge becomes more abstract,

ceasing to be simply the positive knowledge of its referent (nature, society, the State, etc.), becoming in addition to that the knowledge of the knowledge of the referent—that is, by becoming speculative. In the names "Life" and "Spirit," knowledge names itself. (PMC 34-35)

Thus, the speculative metanarrative emphasizes that knowledge that is true or valid is not the "positivist knowledge" of the world; it is the knowledge of that knowledge, the knowledge that is connected within the speculative spirit. It is the knowledge with which philosopher/scholars, residing in universities, concern themselves; it is a knowledge that everyday, practical people may not even know to exist.

This narrative thus emphasizes that subjects are important not for "their immediate truth-value" but for "the value they acquire by virtue of occupying a certain place in the itinerary of Spirit or Life—or, if preferred, a certain position in the Encyclopedia recounted by speculative discourse" (PMC 35). This metanarrative thus provides another extension of the hierarchy that Lyotard developed when distinguishing between learning and knowledge. If learning is composed of denotative statements of what is true or false, and knowledge is a judgment made about that learning, then the speculative apparatus is focused
on judging how that knowledge supports the Spirit, how it expresses it and fits within a category of the speculative university.

Because of these features, the speculative narrative focuses on education from a different perspective than does the emancipation narrative. It puts value on the university, not for the education of the teachers of the people, but for the service of the specialists studying the fields that form the speculative system. It is thus distanced as well from the social order, as it is part of a different social structure, composed of the "professional frameworks [of scientists] corresponding to their respective specialities" (PMC 34). The implication is that this structure is useful, as the university is useful, to sponsor research and investigation into the fields these specialists study, to extend the range of knowledge, to support the "becoming of spirit."

Relating to the project of this dissertation, this narrative suggests that the teaching of writing has importance within the speculative structure as it contributes information to this process of the "becoming of spirit," as it adds knowledge about knowledge. Such a focus for writing instruction has indeed become much more important in the last few years as writing instructors have become writing researchers; one might refer to the ideas of Maxine Hairston, discussed in chapter one. When composition scholars view themselves or—more importantly—when they are viewed as more important to the university and its system of scholars because of their work as researchers, then they are being legitimated through a version of this speculative narrative. Further, the form of teaching this dissertation will examine, because it occurs through a computer network that allows the event of the class to be saved as data, offers new possibilities for just this sort of legitimation effort, by offering potentially
limitless amounts of data to be used to develop learning, to lead to knowledge, to lead to legitimation as part of the speculative university.

The Delegitimation of the Grand Narratives

Although Lyotard may suggest that elements of these grand Narratives are still valid as legitimating structures, one of the most important assertions of his text, one even perhaps more important than that asserting the very existence of the narratives, is that in the period from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, these narratives have lost their power of legitimation. Lyotard expresses this situation in precise, emphatic terms:

In contemporary society and culture—postindustrial society, postmodern culture—the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (PMC 37)

This loss is a crucial moment for the text, for it is what allows Lyotard the ability to develop his later theories of the nature of postmodern knowledge. Lyotard also seems to suggest that this loss is definite, irrevocable, a loss to be spoken of with no introductory qualification or elaboration. . . only as "Delegitimation," the terse one-word title of the chapter focusing on this period, chapter ten.

Lyotard provides a separate theory for how each of the grand Narratives has lost its legitimation effect, but before he does so, he very briefly touches on two other causes, causes that he almost as quickly brushes aside with the
statement "Anytime we go searching for causes in this way we are bound to be disappointed" (PMC 38). The causes so easily disregarded? Both of them are related to technology and economics, each in its own way. The first is "the effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War," an event that has "shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means" (PMC 37). The second cause is the "redemption of advanced liberal capitalism," an event that has "eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services" (PMC 38).

With both of these causes, the societies of which Lyotard writes have grown, becoming more complicated, putting more strain on traditional structures, including those of legitimation. Lyotard rightly, I think, backs away from these issues, for to explain them as causes would require great effort "to detail the correlation between the tendencies mentioned and the decline of the unifying and legitimating power of the grand narratives. . ." (PMC 38), and such analysis could move his text beyond its scope as a "report." Still, that Lyotard chooses to avoid discussing these issues concerning the increased availability of technology, and the enhanced inclination of consumers to use it is interesting, given his ultimate point about the important role technology holds in the postmodern legitimation process. To be fair, Lyotard does discuss the relationship of technology in forming new legitimation structures, later, but then he's looking at the value, the significance and use of technology. His reference here is to a problem deriving from technology; it's a different kind of issue, one that he avoids analyzing.

Instead, he turns his analysis towards the grand Narratives and "the seeds of 'delegitimation' and nihilism that were inherent" in them (PMC 38), looking for elements in these narratives that deny their legitimating power by
demonstrating contradictions in their terms and problems in their processes of operation. In both cases, these contradictions and problems occur through the complicating web of language games.

The Delegitimation of the Speculative Narrative

Lyotard first examines the speculative narrative. As I mentioned earlier, the speculative system relies on the assumption that there are levels of knowledge: with the spirit and its connecting legitimation of all knowledge removed from the level of the knowledge of specific subjects, just as Lyotard has argued that knowledge is distanced from the learning that provides the data of the world to inform that knowledge. However, because the speculative structure suggests that real, true knowledge is only that represented by the speculative system, for only it has legitimacy, an odd thing happens: knowledge about specifics, "positive knowledge" is not really knowledge, for true knowledge would be at the speculative level only. Thus, a system that seems to provide or rather seeks to provide legitimacy to knowledge denies that legitimacy from knowledge. Lyotard expresses this situation as follows:

... the speculative apparatus maintains an ambiguous relation to knowledge. It shows that knowledge is only worthy of that name to the extent that it reduplicates itself ("lifts itself up," \textit{hebt sich auf}; is sublated) by citing its own statements in a second-level discourse (autonomy) that functions to legitimate them. This is as much as to say that, in its immediacy, denotative discourse bearing on a certain referent (a living organism, a chemical property, a physical phenomenon, etc.) does not really know what it thinks it knows.
Positive science is not a form of knowledge. And speculation feeds on its suppression. (PMC 38)

Speculation feeds on the suppression of knowledge, because knowledge, whether that of individual subjects or that of all subjects—if that is even possible to comprehend—is not what matters; what is significant is how that knowledge supports the speculative system, leading to the true subject of the narration, the "Spirit" or "Life." Still, an odd thing happens: a system that seems to have been designed to legitimate knowledge actually legitimates itself, denying legitimation to knowledge because knowledge is not legitimate until it has been raised to the next level. Scientific knowledge is in the same position that other terms Lyotard has examined are in, specifically "learning" and "vulgar narratives"; just as they are devalued because they are not at the more appropriate level of knowledge, scientific knowledge (in effect, here, standing in for knowledge itself) is not legitimate. And, since "a science that has not legitimated itself is not a true science," a strange situation has developed (PMC 38).

This process of one level of knowledge feeding on another is "fueled" (PMC 39) by a "presupposition" that "is indispensable to the speculative language game"(PMC 38). The presupposition works in the following way: a scientific statement is "knowledge" only if it is part of the speculative system. However, it can be part of this system simply by assuming, first, that the system exists and, second, that it is a part of that system. Thus, through the assumption of the speculative system, statements of knowledge can seem to lead to that system; the presupposition allows the system to seem to exist. Lyotard emphasizes the importance of the assumption by saying:
This presupposition is indispensable to the speculative language game. Without it, the language of legitimation would not be legitimate; it would accompany science in a nosedive into nonsense, at least if we take idealism's word for it. (PMC 38-39)

The last words of this quotation, referring to "idealism's" role in this process, are important, for they suggest again the power of assumption in preserving the speculative system.

It should be noted that, to a certain extent, Lyotard asks his readers to "take his word for it" as well, for he presents his argument about this presupposition very briefly, in one paragraph, with one example citing how a specific "speculative statement" ("A scientific statement is knowledge if and only if it can take its place in a universal process of engendering") contains certain assumptions. He does not offer any explanation of how the presupposition works or how it is a valid presupposition. A certain degree of support does come from Lyotard's assertive tone, one with some bravado:

The question is: Is this statement knowledge as it itself defines it? **Only** if it can take its place in a universal process of engendering.

**Which it can. All it has to do** is to presuppose that such a process exists (the Life of spirit) and that it is itself an expression of that process. (emphasis added) (PMC 38)

The words I've emphasized contribute to Lyotard's tone; he seems to imply that what he says is valid simply by the act of saying it.

To play a similar kind of game of presupposition, though, with **his** statements, one might argue something like this:

1. Lyotard argues that the speculative apparatus is legitimated by an assumption of its own legitimation.
2. Which he says it does.
3. All he has to do is to presuppose that such a legitimation process is based on an assumption of legitimation.

Just as Lyotard criticizes the statement for presupposing that the speculative apparatus exists, one might criticize Lyotard for presupposing that the apparatus is a presupposition. Why is saying that a statement seeking legitimation must presuppose legitimation sufficient proof that the statement receives legitimation only through presupposition? Such validation of presupposition seems the point of Lyotard’s argument, but he provides it with a leap as arching as that of a statement that is seeking legitimation by leaping to that legitimation. I realize that my argument here does seem to twist Lyotard’s ideas into a language game spiraling into nonsense, recalling the “nosedive into nonsense” that occurs if one views the legitimation process as based on a presupposition of its legitimacy), but I do think it is important that the key rhetorical structure that Lyotard uses to deflate the speculative narrative is similar to the rhetorical structure that he claims narrative uses to maintain itself: presupposition.

Still, Lyotard joins these two critiques of the speculative narrative, first that knowledge seems drained of legitimacy in this system and, second, that what is legitimate in this system seems actually to derive legitimacy only from assumptions of its own legitimacy, to a third, by pushing his presupposition further, viewing it from a different perspective. Lyotard says that

... we could say... that this presupposition defines the set of rules one must accept in order to play the speculative game. Such an appraisal assumes first that we accept that the "positive" sciences represent the general mode of knowledge and second, that we
understand this language to imply certain formal and axiomatic presuppositions that it must always make explicit. (PMC 39)

What Lyotard is doing is approaching the whole presupposition issue from a different direction, here assuming that there is a sense of innate knowledge present in the positive sciences, and a flip side: this presupposition defines the rules of the speculative game. Instead of criticizing the speculative narrative for destroying knowledge (or some sense of it) or for making huge leaps (to connect elements of knowledge to its apparatus) Lyotard is now implying that the whole system works as a game, with rules that must simply be accepted, whether they derive from truth or not. However, although this view of the speculative narrative as game does allow it to be viewed as still workable, it is a view that is oddly different from that that led to its formation. If it is just a game, then how is it legitimating? In a world that seeks legitimation from this narrative, wouldn't its presence as a "game" be slightly upsetting, disconcerting?

This brings Lyotard to the main value of this point, that the speculative narrative is a game, "not far removed, at least in this respect, from the idea of language games." Lyotard goes on to add:

What we have here is a process of delegitimation fueled by the demand for legitimation itself. The "crisis" of scientific knowledge, signs of which have been accumulating since the end of the nineteenth century, is not born of a chance proliferation of sciences, itself an effect of progress in technology and the expansion of capitalism. It represents, rather, an internal erosion of the legitimacy principle of knowledge. There is erosion at work inside the speculative game, and by loosening the weave of the
encyclopedic net in which each science was to find its place, it eventually sets them free. (PMC 39)

The speculative narrative is thus not, from this perspective, an ultimate statement of legitimacy. It is a game, one that has a certain set of rules that cause legitimacy to seem to be provided. Because of its existence as a game, it allows for the legitimacy it seems to project to be "eroded."

This notion leads to another effect, one with even more far-reaching consequences. Since the speculative narrative cannot, for the above reasons, be regarded as an absolute determinant of legitimation for all of the fields of positive knowledge that seemed to lead to it, then all of these fields, once regarded as connected in the "speculative university" are freed, since the "encyclopedic net" which connected them no longer has the absolute power it once did. As a result, the notion of just what is the university changes—and must change—to a new system Lyotard presents as follows:

The classical dividing lines between the various fields of science are thus called into question—disciplines disappear, overlappings occur at the borders between sciences, and from these new territories are born. The speculative hierarchy of learning gives way to an immanent and, as it were, "flat" network of areas of inquiry, the respective frontiers of which are in constant flux. The old "faculties" splinter into institutes and foundations of all kinds, and the universities lose their function of speculative legitimation. (PMC 39)

Thus, because Lyotard suggests that the speculative narrative cannot support itself, the order it imposed on knowledge vanishes, leaving a different order, a network of many fields of study, no longer arranged in a hierarchy. Notice that
Lytotard does not really argue that the narrative itself has completely vanished; it remains, but only as a game of language, not a support of legitimation (although as we shall see shortly language games have a role in legitimation according to Lyotard).

Before moving to Lyotard's explanation of the delegitimation of the emancipation narrative (which also relies on language games for its wrenching effect), I want to make one not-so-brief remark concerning Lyotard's idea that what remains after the collapse of the speculative narrative is new network of fields "in constant flux." Such a notion is very important for several aspects of the project of this dissertation, for it is an interdisciplinary project. A writing class taught over computer lines creates a field that is more than just "composition" and more than just "computer networks." Because composition is a topic whose teaching is so focused on basic issues of education, such as teaching conditions, personal relationships, and testing conditions, teaching writing through a computer network is part of a larger field, "teaching through a computer network." More importantly, though, for the immediate context of this dissertation as a dissertation in an English department, is the issue of the legitimation of composition (with the above related trailers) as part of that department's field of study. Since I'm trying to place that set of fields within the field of English, I'm aware that I'm approaching recognized parts of that field, "textual study" and "critical inquiry." One may view my project as creating a new field, placing those other fields with these aspects of the field of English. That this field also relates to the recognized field of "philosophy" extends the new field's direction even more, as do other relationships to fields I have not named.

Thus, although I have some doubts about Lyotard's displacement of the speculative narrative, as I've tried to suggest in the above section, I'm also
buoyed by its displacement, for to try to create a speculative hierarchy of the
above fields would be an impossible task (or at least one harder than I would
want to attempt after pursuing this endeavor). Viewing these fields as
interconnecting, in flux, as not in need of a hierarchical legitimation is
comforting, and, I think, elucidating for what they show not just about each one
of them, but about all of them. By the way, a careful reader might notice that
once again, I've inserted a narrative foreshadowing into my presentation of
Lyotard's narrative, so it's time to get back to the task at hand.

The Delegitimation of the Emancipation Narrative

While Lyotard's deconstruction of the speculative narrative focuses on its
entire apparatus, by directing its assault at its key points, his examination of how
the emancipation narrative has become delegitimated takes a different
direction. One might argue that this narrative is also based on a web of
assumptions, about such issues as whether "humanity [is] the hero of liberty,"
whether "all peoples have a right to science," or whether "the right to science
must be reconquered" (PMC 31). Take "all peoples have a right to science" as
one example. Who are these peoples—natives of developed societies of
which Lyotard writes, or the peoples of the rest of the world—one might suggest
the bulk of the world? Do not they too have a similar right to science? Or is this
a limited right? Are these people male or female? Since Lyotard's use of
personal pronouns is limited to versions of "he," that question seems to have a
ready answer. Even if the notion of "people" could be solved, what constitutes a
"right" and more specifically a "right to science"? And—why "science"? Is this
word meant in broad or narrow ways?
However, just as his initial discussion of this narrative covered its elements more quickly than his discussion of the speculative narrative, with its citation of a long history, his examination of delegitimation focuses on a precise issue, one initially raised in his extension of the emancipation narrative to society. One should recall that with this extension or analogy, humanity has a right, not just to the knowledge of "science," but to social justice, as promulgated by legislators who are of the people and thus speak the people's will. They issue prescriptive statements about what should be done in the society, and it is these statements which the system legitimates, not the denotative statements of scientific knowledge.

This difference between the denotative statements of science and the prescriptive statements of legislators leads to the very delegitimation of this emancipation narrative, according to Lyotard. Because these two kinds of statements are so different from each other, they are "incommensurate," having "no relation of consequence as defined in propositional logic" (PMC 40).

However, in the emancipation narrative, denotative statements provide the evidence to support prescriptive statements. For Lyotard, the flaw here is that there is nothing to prove that if a statement describing a real situation is true, it follows that a prescriptive statement based upon it (the effect of which will necessarily be a modification of that reality) will be just. (PMC 40)

He cites two examples, the denotative statement, "The door is closed," and the prescription, "Close the door," suggesting that "the two statements belong to two autonomous sets of rules defining different kinds of relevance" (PMC 40); thus, one cannot be used to legitimate the other. More specifically, the denotative statement "The door is closed" cannot be used as a legitimation tool to
legitimate the prescriptive statement "Close the door," for there is not sufficient connection between the rules for these two statements.

Before looking at how this lack of connection between these kinds of statements leads to a legitimation crisis, one should pause a moment longer to look at Lyotard's specific examples of denotative and prescriptive statements here, for to do so is to notice how Lyotard has chosen examples to emphasize the lack of discontinuity between denotation and prescription. Looking at the two statements, from a more common sense perspective, or even from a perspective closer to the time-sequencing of popular stories, one has trouble seeing how the idea of "the door is closed" could support "Close the door," for if a door is already closed, why would one close it again? When one first reads Lyotard's examples, they seem clear on the surface, for Lyotard wants us to read them as simple examples of denotative and prescriptive statements. However, when one considers how they would work together in this way, they seems like odd examples, veering, even, toward nonsense. Lyotard's point is that the linguistic difference between the two statements causes a problem, and by choosing two statements whose meanings cannot connect, he, in effect, bolsters his point. However, it is a support that is, at a certain level, merely a trick, for someone hearing "the door is closed" would not then close it; there would be no need. More importantly, because the example contains this trick, it suggests that Lyotard has played other possible tricks as well.

Still, focusing on the denotative/prescriptive difference alone, Lyotard argues that because of this lack of connection, the legitimacy of science is attacked. How? To provide the answer to this crucial question, Lyotard makes the following statement, one that opens as many problems as it solves, for it is one that refers to a key problem within the emancipation narrative:
The effect of dividing reason into cognitive or theoretical reason on the one hand, and practical reason on the other, is to attack the legitimacy of the discourse of science. Not directly, but indirectly, by revealing that it is a language game with its own rules (of which the a priori conditions of knowledge in Kant provide a first glimpse) and that it has no special claim to supervise the game of praxis (nor the game of aesthetics, for that matter). The game of science is thus put on a par with the others. (emphasis added) (PMC 40)

Recall that the aspect of the emancipation narrative that Lyotard emphasizes is focused on the right of justice, not just science. Such a focus is part of what Lyotard now calls "dividing reason into cognitive or theoretical reason on the one hand, and practical reason on the other." It's a division that leads to a crisis in legitimation, for the two kinds of statements are unrelated. In terms of the narrative, "science" cannot legitimate "justice." Because of this problem, science too is found to be delegitimated, indirectly, for it is not a support for the prescriptive game that seeks justice, for "it has no special claim to supervise" the social, political, and ethical game. It has indirectly lost its legitimation.

But—and this is an important concern—has such an indirect loss of legitimation for scientific knowledge led to a direct loss of legitimation? Remember that scientific knowledge is composed of denotative statements. In Lyotard's example of the lack of connection between denotative and prescriptive statements, he's not really showing how the denotative statements of knowledge are not legitimated due to this difference; he's showing how prescriptive statements to which that knowledge referred are no longer legitimated.
Thus, one might argue that he has not shown how the emancipation narrative's legitimation of the right to science, the need for science to be reconquered and the importance of universal education are delegitimated. What he is actually showing is how the social extension of this narrative, or rather the social analogy of it that allows political and social institutions to be legitimated, is not legitimate due to the lack of connection between what might be legitimated (i.e. science, he does not really say that it is not, at least not "directly") and what cannot be legitimated, at least from the system that has been set out. Thus, what Lyotard most suggests is that the social application of the emancipation narrative has lost its sense of legitimation, but there is at least still the possibility that the emancipation narrative in the initial formulation that Lyotard presented is still a legitimating structure.

Referring again to Lyotard's use of these ideas, one discovers a result of delegitimation that is analogous to, and even possibly related to the result of the delegitimation of the speculative narrative. In that narrative, delegitimation robs the university system and the speculative apparatus of its power to organize and categorize the fields of knowledge. As a result, instead of forming the past hierarchy of carefully segmented fields, knowledge is now part of a maze of interconnecting fields. A similar sense of a "maze" occurs when the emancipation narrative is delegitimated, for science is delegitimated, indirectly, because it cannot support the prescriptive statements of legislators; as a result, denotative science is put on a level analogous to that of other language games. This situation leads to what Lyotard labels an important current of postmodernity: science plays its own game; it is incapable of legitimating the other language games. The game of prescription, for example, escapes it. But above all, it
is incapable of legitimating itself, as speculation assumed it could.

(PMC 40)

The postmodern result of the delegitimation of the emancipation narrative? A maze of language games. "The social subject itself" created through the emancipation narrative "seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games" (PMC 40).

Lyotard then expands the effects of this wealth of language games, but before turning to this section, we need to reconsider a sentence I brushed over in the previous paragraph while I was focusing on Lyotard's main points. This sentence is the last one of the last block quotation: "But above all, it is incapable of legitimating itself, as speculation assumed it could."

This sentence is interesting, for it pushes Lyotard's ideas about delegitimation a bit further than he has so far, by adding another delegitimating element, but it addresses this major task in one sentence, a sentence not followed by other sentences examining this new extension. Lyotard instead begins his extensive focus of language games. What I find curious about this sentence is its two key elements, expressed by its main and subordinate clauses.

Let's take the main clause, "it is incapable of legitimating itself." Earlier, I suggested that Lyotard bases the delegitimation of the emancipation narrative on the inability for denotative statements to legitimate prescriptive statements, thus leading to a legitimation crisis for the social analogy of the emancipation narrative, and thus creating an indirect legitimation crisis for scientific knowledge. Here, though, Lyotard seems to be suggesting a more direct crisis, for "it," referring to "science," implying scientific knowledge, "is incapable of legitimating itself." One might ask how Lyotard has shown this point, presented in summary fashion, for if one reviews his previous argument one notices that
the delegitimation has been *indirect*, because science has been shown incapable of legitimating other language games. Such an emphasis is even more striking since the modifying phrase coming before this main clause, "But above all," makes this new assertion seem *most* important. However, how has Lyotard supported or explained it?

One might assume that Lyotard assumes that science's incapability to legitimate itself should be obvious to any observer, perhaps because legitimation requires a means to fit the discourse of science into an approved structure that science cannot give itself. Still, Lyotard provides some degree of explanation—in a surprising way—with his subordinate clause: "as speculation assumed it could." This clause suggests that Lyotard is appealing to his theory of the loss of the speculative narrative for support; because the speculative apparatus of narrative denies scientific knowledge its status as knowledge, the legitimization of scientific knowledge in the emancipation narrative is suspect at well. The result is an odd connection, mostly because throughout Lyotard's discussion of the two narratives, he has kept them separate, allowing them to harness different sets of actors, different plots and themes. He has not really suggested that they cannot be combined, but, then, he has not provided a mechanism to make the combination. It seems forced here, especially since it seems to substitute for an explanation of how science itself is not legitimated in the context of the emancipation narrative. It's a quick substitution, but almost too quick. It does help explain one aspect of its chapter, chapter ten, though. While Lyotard originally presented the emancipation narrative first (at least the basic idea), he presents the delegitimation of the speculative narrative first. One may view this order as suggesting the greater significance of the loss of that narrative, a perspective that is related to the use of that narrative to
legitimate the loss of the emancipation narrative: the emancipation narrative seems to feed on the loss of the speculative narrative.

Accepting, though, for the moment that Lyotard has supported the delegitimating of both aspects of the emancipation narrative, we turn to the new importance of language games, which Lyotard launches with an extended, vivid passage suggesting how these language games work, borrowing images from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

> The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules. Wittgenstein writes, "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses." (PMC 40)

This section is interesting, for it provides a result analogous to the freeing of the old fields of study provided by the delegitimation of the speculative narrative. Instead of a social bond arising from a clear distribution of roles that protect the right to knowledge and guarantee justice through the legislator's will, there is a social bond formed from a maze of language games and languages, formed when different threads, or streets of languages cross each other, forming what Lyotard elsewhere calls "nodal points' of specific communication circuits" (PMC 15), using a term from systems theory, rather than geography or sewing.

Lyotard suggests that this maze becomes more and more intricate as new languages, following new rules, become part of the field of knowledge. He lists several "new languages," such as "machine languages, the matrices of
game theory, new systems of musical notation, . . . the language of the genetic code, . . . and so on" (PMC 41), a list that amplifies a list he provides at the start of the text, a list of areas of knowledge affected by a growing interest in language:

phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their languages, problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage and data banks, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxaology. (PMC 4)

All of these languages suggest a social bond determined from an infinitely more complicated system than earlier. The rest of The Postmodern Condition examines how this complication is legitimated.

Although the "maze of languages" does recall "the breakdown of the fields of specialization, there is an important difference between the two concepts. In both delegitimation strategies, there is a sense of movement between, say, particles, but the metaphor used to describe that movement is different. With the speculative narrative, each field blurs into each other, as if the edges that formed their boundaries have become permeable. With the emancipation narrative, the metaphor implies a sense of separation of particles—not permeability, but interconnection—for each language game forms a separate thread and all of these threads interconnect, forming the maze of language, analogous to the town that Wittgenstein suggests. The overall effect may seem the same, for there may not seem much difference between interconnecting threads and intermingling fields. However, with the fields, the major action is destroying, while with the threads, the major action is creating.
This difference in Lyotard's metaphors to describe the delegitimation process of each narrative provides, though, one way of understanding his overall view of the delegitimation process. When the speculative narrative is lost, a structure, the speculative university system, is dismantled, allowing for new levels of movement; when the emancipation narrative is delegitimated, a new structure is created, the system by which language games form a social bond. Lyotard presents the delegitimation of the grand Narratives by emphasizing that one system is destroyed while another is created. This two-sided view of delegitimation is related to both a "pessimistic impression of this splintering," that Lyotard says "weaned" "Turn-of-the-century Vienna," and a more optimistic view possible after "the mourning process has been completed" (PMC 41). He argues that

This is what the postmodern world is all about. Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction. Science "smiling into its beard" at every other belief has taught them the harsh austerity of realism. (PMC 41)

In the rest of The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard presents new theories of legitimation of knowledge, theories that focus on language games just as Lyotard uses language games to deconstruct the old theories of legitimation.

Before turning to these theories, though, notice the following.

1. Although Lyotard's argument is that the grand Narratives are no longer legitimate, his explanation of this argument may be seen as suspect, as I've tried to show. He criticizes the narratives for problems in them due to their
misapprehension of the effects of language games, yet his use of the ideas of language games makes some major leaps. When I turn to teaching over a computer network, I will argue that grand Narratives—at least in a certain sense of the term—continue to function, even in a structure that seems replete with the elements of postmodernism that the delegitimation of such narratives allows. This may seem like a contradiction, but it is instead an extension of Lyotard's ideas. It is assisted, I think, by problems in Lyotard's dismissal of the grand Narratives, though.

2. The difference I mentioned between Lyotard's metaphors when referring to the "interconnecting fields of knowledge" left by the collapse of the speculative narrative and the "maze of threads or streets" left by the end of the emancipation narrative suggests more than simply past and future views of delegitimation. It raises the issue of whether postmodern knowledge is formed through a blurring of fields or from a series of distinctly different fields. Although related, the ideas are separate; they are also rich with possibility. When examining the effects of teaching over a network, for example, a key concern is what is the result? Do students and teachers face a blending of knowledge from their distinct fields? Or do they experience the course as composed of the intersecting, not blending, language games of all of their messages to each other? This last possibility suggests potential disjunctions from such a teaching and learning experience, while the first suggests the discovery of one or more new fields that the speculative apparatus could not have imagined. These possibilities are thus focal points for this dissertation.
CHAPTER 4: THE LURE OF PERFORMATIVITY:
ARGUMENTATION, EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY

In the previous chapter, I told my story of Lyotard's story of the grand Narrative's story. This is, I suspect, a fairly obvious point, but one that needs emphasis now. In that chapter, I followed a narrative structure, one that followed the time-line of Lyotard's story, following the time-line of the history of the grand Narratives and of the previous bursts of narration that came before them. Like a Cashinahua narrator, in my telling, I told the story "in my turn," but since "my turn," my desire of what to emphasize, is my desire, not that of Lyotard's, "my turn" was different from "Lyotard's turn." Thus, I emphasized certain problems in Lyotard's examination of the functions of narrative in the pre-postmodern world. My goal in this effort was to offer the teasing idea that maybe, just maybe, Lyotard does not actually dismiss the power of narrative as assertively as he seems, or claims, for maybe, narratives escape his reductions.

I used a narrative structure for this chapter because, frankly, it seemed the best technique. Lyotard relates grand Narratives as stories, following narrative form. Each story is distinct, fairly separate from the other, so that to talk of one a narrator needs to focus just on it. I even told the story of the delegitimation process in a narrative, even though Lyotard depicts it in a less narrative, more analytic way (he lists causes and effects, not firsts, seconds, thirds). Why? Because although he discusses the second of the narratives (the speculative narrative) first when discussing delegitimation, he does so, I asserted earlier, to allow it to lay groundwork for the delegitimation of the first narrative (the emancipation narrative). As I said in that chapter, "the emancipation narrative seems to feed on the loss of the speculative narrative."
Thus, to examine Lyotard's rhetoric, to emphasize its problems, I pulled it into my text, partly respecting its forms, but also allowing the gaps I think it contains to come to light, so that I could underline them here.

I'm making these riskily obvious points now to say this: things have changed. This is an important point, for it is a simple way of referring to what Lyotard discusses in the rest of *The Postmodern Condition*; it is also, relatedly, a way of referring to how he discusses it, and by extension, to how I am about to discuss it. While, before, I viewed myself as telling a narrative in a narrative way, now, although I'm still summarizing and analyzing, I'm not going to follow Lyotard's form as exactly, in the same order, for several reasons. Lyotard's form now seems to consist more of a series of scientific, denotative statements, not stories. Instead of covering specific "stages," he examines the elements which seem to compose such stages. Earlier the focus was on the stages; now, for reasons this chapter will examine, the focus is more on the elements, making the rest of *The Postmodern Condition* seem to be organized more around a metaphor of science, not one of narration as it was earlier.

Lyotard examines these more scientific elements through overlapping series of descriptive statements on the following general topics:

The Lure of Performativity
Changes in Research and Teaching
Changing Methods of Argumentation
Classical Logic—Formal Rules
Collapse of Formal Rules
New Features of Education
The Rise of Interdisciplinary Fields and Teams
Technology: A Better Means to Obtain Proof
Technology and the Transfer of Education
Legitimation Through Performativity
The Instabilities of Paralogy
Legitimation through Paralogy: Scientific Pragmatics
Legitimation through Paralogy: Social Pragmatics
and other topics depending on the terms one uses.

I've presented this list of topics partly in the order they appear in the text, but a completely accurate ordering would lead to great complication, for Lyotard refers to the same topics in different ways time and time again. To complicate things more, one might view the rest of the text—and the topics above—as the intersection of a variety of terms, such as

metaprescriptives
meta-arguments
universal metalanguage
metalanguage that is universal
    but not consistent
consensus
local consensus
performativity
efficiency
technology
paralogy
paradox
perfect information
agnostics
scientific pragmatics
social pragmatics
and, of course, others.

Although one can construct systems to connect these terms and topics, such systems would all be inexact, for Lyotard creates many possible overlapping connections. These terms seem to circulate around each other, going in one direction at one time, another a bit later. Earlier, Lyotard used a dialectical method for comparing and contrasting the different narratives; now, that dialectical method examines the interweavings of complicated matrices, making the overall flow of the text much more involved. For example, the term "performativity" appears in chapter eleven. Lyotard moves away from it, and dismisses it as a valid concept, but in chapter fourteen, the last chapter, he speaks of its advantages in a passage that might have come in chapter eleven, for this passage speaks of the benefits of performativity in a non-ironic, non-criticizing way, as if Lyotard is in favor of it (at least for a brief moment—see PMC 62).

If one tried to construct a narrative of these chapters, eleven through fourteen, it would be a narrative with much telling and re-telling. Thus, the narrative I would construct would be intricate, much more so, I think, than the original text because I would have to explain all of this re-telling, trying to give it an overall structure. When explaining problems in performativity theory, Lyotard himself provides an excellent example of why this narrative technique won't work now. He suggests how absolute adherence to "perfect" performance can lay waste to a system, just as in a story from Borges, a plan to make a "perfectly accurate map" of a country bankrupts the land, for all other productive activity shifts to "cartography" (PMC 55). I don't mean to assert that my re-telling would be so perfect, so perfectly accurate, but if I told the narrative of the rest of the
text, it would, I'm afraid, bankrupt this dissertation as well, making its text even more self-referential than I have just been.

Thus, this inability to use chronology to discuss the rest of The Postmodern Condition comes from an important feature of the text: it's not narration—it's instead a series of arguments and examples that may be connected in various ways. Lyotard has chosen one order; I have chosen another. Much of the strength of Lyotard's closing argument comes from a concept I listed in the above list of terms: "local consensus." This concept refers to the postmodern tendency for small groups of experts working on the same or related topics to choose different rules for how they should examine the topics. While one group would see a field one way, another could take a completely different approach. The classical to modern legitimation structures would see such variety as anarchy: it would throw the vandals out of the top floor of a nearby campanile. However, the postmodern perspective, as we're just about to examine, puts value on "local consensus," for it gives researchers a right to dissent from each other in the process of reaching agreements with subgroups of their members. Right now, in this chapter, I am following a different local consensus mechanism than does Lyotard; the rules I want to emphasize restructure his descriptive topics and terms. Referring to another of the above topics, one might say that Lyotard and I have each chosen our own "local consensus" as we "search for instabilities"—his search for instabilities in the theory of "performativity"; mine for problems in The Postmodern Condition.

As a result, this chapter is organized by a version of the topics I listed two pages ago, starting with the general topic of this chapter, "The Lure of Performativity." Notice first, though, the "The Lure of Performativity" is not the same as "The Legitimation of Performativity"; that comes in the next chapter.
The Lure of Performativity

For most of chapters eleven and twelve, but as early as chapter five and as late as chapter fourteen, Lyotard examines the theory of "performativity," approaching it from two categories, "research" and "education," much as he earlier examined scientific knowledge and the grand Narratives from the same two perspectives. It is interesting that he would divide performativity into these two parts, for in the later theory of legitimation, that of paralogy, the one that Lyotard ultimately supports, he doesn't really emphasize both aspects. The implication is that both aspects work the same way, or that one aspect, most likely research, takes precedence. However, arranging his introduction around the pole of research/education makes performativity first come to the reader as the earlier topics did, making it seem as if Lyotard is just handling a new subject but in the old familiar way. In fact, throughout parts of chapters eleven and twelve, Lyotard gives the sense that performativity is "the" theory of legitimation in the postmodern world, the one that works, the one that, possibly, he supports. However, this "sense" is a trick, a lure, for it brings the reader into a long discussion of the elements of performativity that, to a great extent, have more validity for the later theory, paralogy. Of course, the reader doesn't see this complication in chapters eleven and twelve. He thinks that Lyotard is following a rhetorical structure similar to that he has detected. Instead, Lyotard has tricked the reader into a long section of "instabilities."

Still, we should note how positive performativity seems, at least to a certain extent. Lyotard first touches on performativity in chapter five. In this first introduction, he speaks as if it is the assumed legitimation structure, in some way the desired one or the only resulting one of the postmodern period. Notice the following from early in the text:
One's mobility in relation to these language game effects . . . is tolerable, at least within certain limits (and the limits are vague); it is even solicited by regulatory mechanisms, and in particular by the self-adjustments the system undertakes in order to improve its performance. It may even be said that the system can and must encourage such movement to the extent that it combats its own entropy; the novelty of an unexpected "move," with its correlative displacement of a partner or group of partners, can supply the system with that increased performativity it forever demands and consumes. (PMC 15)

This passage appears in chapter five, whose title asserts that Lyotard is discussing "The Nature of the Social Bond: The Postmodern Perspective"; more importantly, it comes just after a section in chapter five in which Lyotard is reviewing the dissolution of the old systems that maintained social bond, the grand Narratives. As a result, this passage seems to be describing the new social bond. Further, as Lyotard later suggests, that bond is related to the legitimation effect; hence, he seems to be describing the way that legitimation actually works in the postmodern period as well, making this passage seem of great importance—it seems to refer to Lyotard's "working hypothesis" about how the postmodern world works (PMC 3).

The language of the passage suggests a certain efficiency in this new system, along with the related sense that this efficiency is good or potentially just, at least to the extent that "mobility . . . is tolerable," or that the system "encourage[s] such movement" of participants using the language games. This language suggests one of two possibilities to a reader: first, that Lyotard is
arguing that this is the new system, and second, that he is in favor of such a
system. He seems if not glowingly positive, at least *marginally* so.

However, Lyotard’s position is much more complicated, for performativity
is an interruption in the progress towards another, more complicated system.
As a result, Lyotard also subtly suggests problems within performativity. In the
paragraph I’ve just quoted, one notices that the seemingly positive elements
may be read as potentially threatening. The system contains limits to
innovation. These "limits are vague," but perhaps vague in an ominous,
paranoiac way. The "self-adjustments" taken to improve the system might not
enhance the full sense of language games. The displacement of players could
be like ostracization or banishment. The goal of improving performance could
be a goal that "demands and consumes" the life-blood of the system. Thus, the
seemingly beneficent system of language games, from the performativity
perspective, could produce a system that Lyotard later suggests produces not
"justice" but "terror." As a result, even in this early discussion of the new system
of legitimation, it appears to have its own problems, just as did the old system of
legitimation, narration.

But, just what is this system that seems to work but actually doesn’t?
What are its features? How does it work? And—why am I being so vague?
Partly to present performativity slightly differently than does Lyotard, to make my
reader wonder about the problems it contains, for, ultimately, its problems
contain the essence of two assertions that concern me. One is Lyotard’s, about
the rise of this other theory of legitimation. The other is mine, deriving from my
concern about what Lyotard avoids. What he overlooks I’ll avoid too for now,
but just one hint: it concerns one of the following topics, but I won’t say which
one, yet: "Changing Methods of Argumentation"; "New Features of Education"; or "Technology." These topics are the subject of the next sections.

The Wider Reach of Research and Teaching

One structural similarity does tie together chapters eleven and twelve; that tie is their introductory focus on research and teaching. Lyotard opens each chapter with a brief discussion of major changes in each of these areas. The change in research concerns how argumentation methods have intensified; the change in teaching concerns the new goals and the new students now part of education.

Changing Methods of Argumentation

Lyotard suggests that a crucial change in the production of research has been a change in the very method of argumentation, the process by which statements are viewed as legitimate. While at one time classical rules governed arguments, rules determining what kinds of statements might be made, those rules are now viewed as fictions or at least as incomplete. The result has been "a reformulation of the question of the legitimation of knowledge" (PMC 43).

Lyotard discusses the old system of rules from two perspectives, perhaps to emphasize that it no longer supports itself. He opens the discussion with a reference to how "Aristotle, Descartes, and John Stuart Mill, among others, attempted to lay down the rules governing how a denotative utterance can obtain its addressee's assent" (PMC 42). Immediately, in the next sentence, with the brusque tone he seems to use when an idea is so obviously wrong-
headed that it cannot be taken seriously, he adds, "Scientific research sets no
great store by these methods. As already noted, it can and does use methods
the demonstrative properties of which seem to challenge classical reason" (PMC 42), putting these three noted authorities' authority in question.

However, Lyotard does not just brush aside the possibility of effective
rules for argumentation. No, what he does is go back to this possibility with
great intensity. Since "languages are not employed haphazardly," he discusses
how each language, about a particular argument or field must follow a
"pragmatic" principle, in which each must "formulate its own rules and petition
the addressee to accept them" (PMC 42). The result of this process is an
"axiomatic" that must have the following qualities:

\[
\ldots \text{a definition of symbols to be used in the proposed language, a}
\text{description of the form expressions in the language must take in}
\text{order to gain acceptance (well-formed expressions), and an}
\text{enumeration of the operations that may be performed on the}
\text{accepted expressions (axioms in the narrow sense).} \quad (PMC 42)
\]

This "pragmatic" acceptance of rules through the "axiomatic" creates a set of
"formal conditions" that in turn relies upon a "metalanguage" to explain how a
given argument satisfies these conditions. In the burst of a short coordinating
clause at the end of the paragraph mentioning the need for this metalanguage,
Lyotard names it: "that metalanguage is logic." Logic, then, becomes the
governing body for the axiomatics that examine science.

Just as specific axioms had to meet certain qualities, Logic is also subject
to conditions to ensure that it meets high standards; these conditions or
"properties" are
consistency (for example, a system inconsistent with respect to
negation would admit both a proposition and its opposite),
syntactic completeness (the system would lose its consistency
if an axiom were added to it), decidability (there must be an
effective procedure for deciding whether a given proposition
belongs to the system or not), and the independence of the
axioms in relation the one another. (emphasis added)

I've listed all of these qualities, both of the axiomatics that legitimate the
language of discussion and of the metalanguage that legitimates the axiomatics
to touch on two points. First, Lyotard emphasizes how the logical system seems
to be built from the bottom up, from potentially haphazard languages that lead to
rules (the pragmatic conditions) to rules about the rules (the axiomatics) to rules
about those rules (logic). This sense of the importance of building from the
bottom is intensified by a brief "clarification" that Lyotard makes, that whether
one establishes an axiomatic first, or "begins by establishing and stating facts"
the two ways of constructing an argument are the same; the difference is not
"logical" but "empirical" (PMC 42). Although this clarification has other value, it
does re-emphasize the idea that this is a system that comes out if its users.

The second reason to examine the levels of this system is to recognize
that they are indeed levels, that there is a hierarchy at work, connecting lower
levels of information to higher levels. This sense of a hierarchy, combined with
the idea that the hierarchy works from the bottom up, creates a startling
situation: the system of logic that Lyotard describes is both strikingly similar to
and different from the legitimation system of the speculative narrative. This
narrative posited "positive knowledge" about certain referents as below the
level of "speculation," with, of course, this positive knowledge being higher than
learning, the facts and figures that supported it from below. However, at least
from one perspective, the whole point of the speculative system was to
legitimate from the top down. As I've suggested, "positive knowledge" was not
important unless it could reach up to the speculative apparatus. Only at the
speculative, the all important higher, level did knowledge have meaning,
significance, and legitimation. From his discussion of logic, though, Lyotard
implies that it is a system built up from the discourse of science, from the levels
of the researchers, the users and tinkerers, not from the philosophers.

What is the significance of this similarity between logic and the
speculative apparatus—and why is the difference between aspects of the two
systems important? Lyotard introduces the system of logic for a reason: he is
about to point out its crucial faults, how it doesn't support the scientific
statements the way he says it does. This point is of course very similar to one
we've already seen: that Lyotard criticizes the speculative system for its lack of
support. As we'll see in a moment, there is even a similarity in the way that
Lyotard dismisses formal logical systems as ultimate authorities, through the all-
powerful effect of "presupposition." Thus, one might assert that the similarity
between the two systems could help a reader understand the problems with
logic; he would notice that a similar system has already shown crucially similar
faults.

The difference between the two systems raises, though, even more
interesting ideas that call to mind the whole issue of Lyotard's dismissal of
narratives as legitimation structures. Although classical logic was developed
through narrative means (and I realize that I'm skipping over a vast body of
information, but my concern is with Lyotard's use of the idea of logic, not the
entire field and history of logic itself), Lyotard's discussion emphasizes it as a more scientifically-based structure. In his previous chapter, Lyotard has made valiant efforts to dismiss narrative. Now, he is just about to dismiss a similarly inclusive scientific system. The point will be to support an argument about new changes in postmodern argumentation, new changes in science. Since narrative alternatives are discredited, Lyotard attacks the "scientific" alternative, logic. One can view this attack in two ways. The easy, obvious way is simply as a further argument, dismissing similar ideas. Another view, more interesting for the project of this dissertation, is that by dismissing a scientific structure, after already dismissing a narrative structure, Lyotard is able to posit his new structure as at an even later stage of science, making it even more in tune with the reality that scientists discover in their many fields.

Thus, one might view the examination of logic and its dismissal as Lyotard's way of making the following syllogism:

1. Classical logic is more scientific than narration.
2. The new structures of logic are more scientific than classical logic.
3. The new structures of logic are more scientific than narration.

I will accept that this argument is very possibly a stretch, perhaps a long one, but it helps emphasize for Lyotard that narration has lost its power. It also helps emphasize the lengths to which Lyotard will go to emphasize this loss.

Meanwhile, Lyotard's immediate use of this discussion of logic is to lead into its problems. He cites two examples that suggest that "all formal systems have internal limitations" for they allow for statements that "fail . . . to satisfy" certain of their conditions. He mentions a specific example, Gödel's
"incompleteness theorem," suggesting the possibility of an "arithmetic system [that] fails to satisfy the condition of completeness" and a more general one, that logic, a "metalanguage" uses "natural" or "everyday" language which "is not consistent with respect to negation—it allows the formation of paradoxes" (PMC 43). These inconsistencies lead to Lyotard's argument, or rather, his assertion that logic does not provide legitimation for scientific statements, leading to "a reformulation of the question of the legitimation of knowledge" (PMC 43). One might again note a parallel with the delegitimation of the narratives, for as with them, the presence of one contradiction in the presumably strict rules they are obliged to follow—and that they oblige their users follow—leads to the collapse of the entire system.

The collapse of the logical system is both a major event and merely a kind of minor eruption. The collapse means that logic is no longer as all- encompassing, as "universal" as it once was. Before the evidence of its "limitations," the metalanguage of logic seemed to promise total understanding. However, even once flaws are detected, it still can function, but only as a shadow of its former self. It functions as a different kind, a different order of metalanguage; Lyotard labels it a "metalanguage that is universal but not consistent" (PMC 43). How is this label appropriate?

The answer comes in how the experts involved in a certain field address the problem. Instead of following an already created set of rules (the universal metalanguage), they create rules through consensus:

When a denotative statement is declared true, there is a presupposition that the axiomatic system within which it is decidable and demonstrable has already been formulated, that it is known to the interlocutors, and that they have accepted that it is
as formally satisfactory as possible. . . . [New statements] owe their status to the existence of a language whose rules of functioning cannot themselves be demonstrated but are the object of a consensus among experts. These rules, or at least some of them, are requests. The request is a modality of prescription. (PMC 43)

Thus, legimitation comes about not on a grand scale, but on what Lyotard later labels the level of "local consensus" (PMC 61). Experts determine the rules governing argumentation for specific situations at specific times. Later, in a discussion of "local consensus," Lyotard will emphasize the complications and the disagreements involved in a truly local view of a topic, but for now, when the idea is introduced, he is emphasizing that in such a structure the extraordinary thing is that experts create the rules—they do not get them from on high. The logical system works because of a "presupposition" that the rules of argumentation have been arranged to control the growth of "limitations." The classical view of logic that Lyotard presented earlier did seem to derive from the bottom, but this new view of the system emphasizes this direction even more. The logical system is not just something that is; it is something that is decided.

Thus, this presupposition allows for another view of the hierarchy of the logical system: "The argumentation required for a scientific statement to be accepted is thus subordinated to a 'first' acceptance (which is in fact constantly renewed by virtue of the principle of recursion) of the rules defining the allowable means of argumentation" (PMC 43). This "acceptance" is the presupposition" that the system works. This presupposition also leads to a system that is very flexible. It allows for a "plurality of . . . languages," or many different possible arguments about many topics. It also allows for both "new
moves (a new argument) within the established rules" and "the invention of new rules, in other words, a change to a new game" (PMC 43).

One might note, again, that Lyotard's language here recalls the language he used when discussing the presupposition that delegitimated the speculative apparatus. That presupposition flaunted the legitimacy of the narrative, for a grand Narrative could not be based on an assumption. It, theoretically at least, found its grounding at a higher level, and since the higher level was an assumption, its entire apparatus crumbled. However, the crucial thing about this postmodern system is that the "acceptance," the "presupposition," and the "consensus" they create occur through "a contract drawn between the partners," not from some higher truth. The result is a new kind of legitimation system. Lyotard concludes his examination of this system by writing that

... a major shift in the notion of reason accompanies this new arrangement. The principle of a universal metalanguage is replaced by the principle of a plurality of formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements; these systems are described by a metalanguage that is universal but not consistent. What used to pass as paradox, and even paralogism, in the knowledge of classical and modern science can, in certain of these systems, acquire a new force of conviction and win the acceptance of the community of experts. (PMC 43-44)

This system values the contract, values the intervention of the players; it is a view of the "presupposition" that is positive, life-giving, that "takes us in the direction of postmodern culture" (PMC 39).
It is also a view that emphasizes that significance of a scientific frame of mind, that seems to push narrative legitimation even further from culture.

**New Features of Education**

For the moment, I will move to the next chapter, chapter twelve, and its examination of education. Just as Lyotard suggests how argumentation has experienced new levels of complication, he suggests how education has expanded its scope further too, in three areas. Lyotard's immediate point at the start of this chapter is "to describe how . . . education . . . is affected by the predominance of the performativity criterion" (PMC 47), how education helps the social system further its goals. Even if ultimately this is a system that Lyotard criticizes, his ideas about education here have wider relevance. As I touched upon in chapter one, much of what he says helps describe the constitution of a class operating over a computer network.

Lyotard approaches education not from the point of view of a narrative ensuring the freedom of humanity or preserving the speculative spirit, but from the perspective of the following questions:

- Who transmits learning? What is transmitted? To whom?

He argues that "a university policy is formed by a coherent set of answers to these questions" (PMC 48). Since his immediate objective is to examine how education assists performativity, he examines how the goal of increased performance affects these questions.
A main effect lies in the goals of education. Since the overall "desired goal" is the "optimal contribution of higher education to the best performativity of the social system" (PMC 48), two goals seem important. The first, intended to help the social system "tackle world competition," leads to the production of the "experts and high and middle management executives" in the fields that will be most important in the international market; thus, "any discipline with applicability to training in 'telematics' (computer scientists, cyberneticists, linguists, mathematicians, logicians . . . ) will most likely receive priority in education" (PMC 48). The second goal, which calls to mind part of the results of the emancipation narrative, would direct education to furnish "the social system with the skills fulfilling society's own needs, which center on maintaining its internal cohesion." The goal here is to train "so many doctors," "teachers," "engineers," and "administrators." Along with a parallel to the emancipation narrative's direction comes a clear contrast with the speculative narrative's goals: "The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions" (PMC 48).

I have, of course, touched upon the idea that Lyotard does not completely endorse the performativity criterion. If that is so, then what are we to make of these goals? Are they still the goals for education? Do they still describe the nature of education today and in the future? Lyotard provides opposing evidence in his discussion of two topics that relate to the "plurality of languages" that a universal-but-not-consensus form of argumentation allow. These topics are the changing nature of students and the growth of interdisciplinary studies. In both areas the focused, performative goals are affected by broader changes
in society and knowledge, changes that seem to correspond to a new sense of "plurality."

Lyotard suggests that "higher education is, in fact, already undergoing a major realignment, dictated both by administrative measures and by social demands (themselves rather uncontrolled) emanating from the new user"; as a result, two groups of students are approaching university education. The first consists of the "young of the liberal elite" who attend school to gain the "competence judged necessary by each profession" (PMC 49). They are thus influenced by the performativity criterion, since they are no longer concerned with the great task of social progress, understood in terms of emancipation" (PMC 49). The second group also approaches college due to a performative-based need for "job retraining and continuing education" (PMC 49); these are different kinds of student than the kind the traditional university embraced. They are older, "either already working or expect[ing] to be," and they attend classes in hopes of "improving their skills and chances of promotion" (PMC 49).

However, they also have other goals, goals that call to mind the kinds of complications or glitches or paradoxes that tumbled classical logic (or the grand Narratives). Although they are directed towards college from a performativity perspective, they have their own goals; they hope that college will "help them acquire information, languages, and language games allowing them both to widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience" (PMC 49). Such goals lead these students to ask for more than the performative-based goals would support. Such students might seek a widened education, leading to "experimentation in discourse, institutions, and values (and the inevitable 'disorders' it brings in the curriculum, student supervision,
and testing, and pedagogy—not to mention its sociopolitical repercussions)"
(PMC 50).

Performative education would reject such tendencies for they are "regarded as having little or no operational value and [are] not given the slightest credence in the name of the seriousness of the system" (PMC 50). As a result, "it is safe to assume that responsibility for [such experimentation] will devolve upon extrauniversity networks"—the implication is that such goals are of a lesser kind ("devolv[ing]" as they are). Still, they are goals that part of the educational system does meet, even if it is not the elite part of that system.

What is the significance here? Even if a society desiring enhanced performance brings students into its educational system to help further its own goals, it must still consider the more uncontrollable goals of those students, for those goals are part of the educational process as well. The "experimentation" that is the result of the students' goals seems to offer just an "escape from functionalism," but it "should not be dismissed lightly since it was functionalism that pointed the way" (PMC 50). Thus, what seems to be a rejection of performativity has actually come into being because of performativity's prodding. Lyotard's language here recalls the language we just saw in his discussion of the broadening of methods of argumentation. Just as a controlling system there, the system of logic, allows for paradoxes and paralogical actions, this other controlling system, performativity, also lets those it seems to be controlling (by directing them towards better serving the system) to slip through its fingers. They may be destined for lesser institutions (the devolving ones), but even that action is part of a structure set up by performativity itself. Thus, performativity seems to contain an element of its opposite within itself.
One sees a similar issue of how performativity leads to something much wider than it had intended when Lyotard examines the rise of interdisciplinary studies. After discussing the role of technology in education (which I will examine more directly in the next section), Lyotard refers to how both technology and the new rules of argumentation come together; in the process he introduces a new term, "perfect information"; it refers to technology's ability to allow a user complete access to all information at any given moment—it is an ultimate sense of connection to all of a data bank's data, "the sense that the data is in principle accessible to any expert: there is no scientific secret" (PMC 52). Lyotard suggests that "as long as the game is not a game of perfect information," players "who [have] knowledge and can obtain information" are in control" (PMC 51)—this is the case before technology infiltrates education.

However, technology seems to allow for this state of perfect information; as a result, referring to the new rules of argumentation, Lyotard writes that "the best performativity cannot consist in obtaining additional information in this way. It comes rather from arranging the data in a new way, which is what constitutes a 'move' properly speaking" (PMC 52-3). Such new moves come from "connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent," a process that "can be called imagination" and, more importantly, a process that is enhanced by the "speed" which technology promises. As a result, "extra productivity depends . . . in the final analysis [on] 'imagination,' which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game" (PMC 52).

This approach recalls the fall of the speculative apparatus which guarded fields from each other and provided for their connection or collaboration only "on the level of speculation, in the heads of the philosophers" (PMC 52). Now,
however, collaboration seems to occur throughout the educational process for, potentially, all users in the system have access to a sense of "equal competence" due to the principle of perfect information. Lyotard contrasts this position to that of the subjects of the speculative system:

The relation to knowledge is not articulated in terms of the realization of the life of the spirit, or the emancipation of humanity, but in terms of the users of a complex conceptual and material machinery and those who benefit from its performance capabilities. They have at their disposal no metalanguage or metanarrative in which to formulate the final goal and correct use of that machinery. But they do have brainstorming to improve its performance. (PMC 52)

One really should be wary whenever Lyotard refers to the "old" system, the one that collapsed when it was shown to be based on assumptions. Although the postmodern system seems to recognize its assumptions, it too takes itself fairly seriously, leading to its own potential collapse; this is the significance of the last line of this quotation, "But they do have brainstorming to improve its performance," for although "brainstorming" seems intended to enhance performativity, the very concept of brainstorming, as a new move within a field or a move between fields, is much more revolutionary. It carries, even if ever so mildly, the possibility that it could work against the performance system.

Lyotard suggests related potential problems for performativity when he says that this interdisciplinary approach could lead to a broadening of what education teaches, "not just for the reproduction of skills, but also for their progress," leading to the idea that the "transmission of knowledge should not be limited to the transmission of information, but should include training in all of the
procedures that can increase one's ability to connect the fields jealously guarded from one another by the traditional organization of knowledge" (PMC 52). Thus, students should learn how to make moves strong enough to see the connections between fields, leading to moves that could disrupt the fields. Lyotard later suggests that such training could lead to "two aspects of didactics—'simple' reproduction and 'extended' reproduction." This differentiation would lead to "earmarking" fields or institutions "either for the selection and reproduction of professional skills, or for the promotion and 'stimulation' of 'imaginative' minds." Simple reproduction could "be simplified and made available on a mass scale"; extended reproduction could be on a "smaller scale in conditions of aristocratic egalitarianism" (PMC 53).

Lyotard is describing here a system that is in operation after the speculative apparatus has folded, but such a rigidly enforced hierarchy recalls the older system's segregation. The performativity system suggests that it must bracket the potentially disruptive "moves outside of fields"; thus, interdisciplinary studies seem important to the performativity system in only a limited way. A certain amount of bending in the fields is useful, perhaps to eliminate dead, old ways of thinking, but too much bending could work as the too-personal goals of the new breed of students work: it could disrupt the system. As a result, this more "imaginative" interdisciplinary approach must be kept away from the masses; it seems as separate from the masses as the level of speculation was to positive science and actual learning.

Another example of this tension between the interdisciplinary approach and performativity comes when Lyotard examines "teamwork." Lyotard suggests that "teamwork" is useful for "improving performativity within the framework of a given model, that is, for the implementation of a task"—a
situation that recalls the idea of a "new move within the game." However, the advantages of teamwork "seem less certain when the need is to 'imagine' new models." As a result, Lyotard suggests the possibility—and I will admit to pushing the idea here—that interdisciplinary examination could lead to situations that would disrupt the leader's dreams of enhanced productivity. Just as the collapse of the speculative hierarchy lead to a sense of destruction in its "'flat' network of areas of inquiry, the respective frontiers of which are in constant flux" (PMC 39), the performative emphasis on teamwork to prod the different fields to work together to improve performance carries in it the seed of its own destruction: new moves that would be so revolutionary that they would disrupt the system—not, obviously, the goal.

Thus, the interdisciplinary approach contains another side, for it also seems to contain within it the possibility that instead of merely a new move within the performativity system, examination of different fields can "change the rules of the game" (PMC 52), an event that the performative system tries to prevent by segregating kinds of "movers." Interdisciplinary study has the potential to disrupt the performance principle, just as the personal objectives of the new breed of students offer possibly disrupting results to the system.

Technology: A Prosthesis Prophesied

In the previous sections I examined how enhanced means for argumentation along with changes in educational directions give research and teaching new possibilities in the postmodern world. Some of these possibilities could fly in the face of performativity, denying it the enhanced performance it seeks for the value of experimentation, new moves, new structures, disorder.
Although these possibilities seem quite powerful (and, actually, for the overall force of *The Postmodern Condition* they are), they are presented, as I've mentioned *in passing* in chapters of Lyotard's text that at last tacitly seem devoted to "performativity," a principle I've played with but never really examined or explained in depth so far.

This odd situation is part of the reason why I've chosen to discuss this section of *The Postmodern Condition* using my own structure, not Lyotard's, to emphasize that although he is in *theory* discussing performativity, he is *actually* discussing contradictory ideas as well. In fact, one might argue that those contradictory ideas seem to have more power than do the ideas that more directly support performativity! These opposing ideas are crucial to the text, as they are important to society, and later when Lyotard examines paralogy they have their more brilliant chance to blossom.

But still, the question remains—just how are they tied to, fused to, *yoked* to "performativity" when they seem so different from it? The answer lies in technology—and its power. The power of technology is an important point, for Lyotard displays a preference for and belief in technology throughout the text. At the risk of jumping ahead too much, let me suggest this: Lyotard believes in technology as much as he doesn't accept narrative.

**Technology: A Better Means to Obtain Proof**

In chapter eleven, just after Lyotard explains how argumentation has changed, he switches to the other change that is affecting the production of research, the "rising complexity level in the process of establishing proof" (PMC
41). This complexity results from the growing linking of "proof" with "technology."

Lyotard begins the discussion by referring to the idea of argumentation, for proof "is in principle part of an argumentation process designed to win acceptance for a new statement (for example, giving testimony or presenting an exhibit in the case of judicial rhetoric)." However—and this is a crucial distinction—proof is tied to reality, not just language and its games, for to serve as proof, "the referent ('reality') is called to the stand and cited in the debate between scientists" (PMC 44). Thus derives a basic problem for proof: since proof is based on reality, on how the scientists have perceived that reality before they constructed their arguments, "proof needs to be proven." Lyotard suggests the problems in this need when he writes,

One can begin by publishing a description of how the proof was obtained, so other scientists can check the result by repeating the same process. But the fact still has to be observed in order to stand proven. What constitutes a scientific observation? A fact that has been registered by an eye, an ear, a sense organ? Senses are deceptive, and their range and powers of discrimination are limited. (PMC 44)

Lyotard is thus suggesting a major gap in the argumentation process; for it to work, its basic focus, the reality that it describes in its series of denotative statements, must be seen, weighed, measured, and shaken around. If human beings are not reliable instruments, what then?

Lyotard's answer comes immediately, with a certain drama in its first sentence:
This is where technology comes in. **Technical devices originated as prosthetic aids for the human organs or as physiological systems whose function it is to receive data or condition the context.** They follow a principle, and it is the principle of optimal performance; maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process). Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency: a technical "move" is "good" when it does better and/or expends less energy than another. (emphasis added) (PMC 44)

I've emphasized part of this quotation, but I really would like to emphasize it all, or rather print it here in 24 point, bold, underlined type, for this is a crucial section of *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard shifts away from the actual focus of this paragraph in his next paragraphs, for there he discusses the history of the growth of technology and its relation to capitalism and society in general. Here, though, he is showing what he considers the essence, if you will, of technology: that it is an extension of humanity, that it allows humans to compensate for weaknesses in their powers of force or perception. Just looking at the terms of this discussion shows just how important Lyotard feels technology is. The opening sentence creates a fairly dramatic context; it is as if technology has arrived as humanity's savior, to help it in ways it can't help itself. This help comes through "prosthetic aids for the human organs or as physiological systems." Both concepts suggest that technology makes up for something that human beings lack, either as a better processing system to examine data better than humans can or as a tool to provide a service humans can't provide for themselves, because they don't have the right body parts.
One thinks of dialysis machines and artificial limbs. In both cases, the technology may provide the only means for the affected human to lead a recognizably "normal life," for without dialysis, a human might die and without an artificial leg a human might not be able to compete as effectively as all of his or her two-legged competition. This role of technology is strikingly evident to me right now, for I'm writing this paragraph on a computer, a system that, I think, is allowing me to process the data I'm spewing from my mind more quickly and more efficiently than I could if I used my bad handwriting on a legal pad. I am also wearing the prescription spectacles that correct my mild case of astigmatism; without these glasses, reading all the papers sitting around me and the words on the computer screen would leave me with a headache, making this writing painful, if not impossible eventually, for it would lead to my losing attention, making more mistakes, and then losing interest because the act of writing would be so onerous, even more than it is, of course, already.

I mention these examples of technology because they are forms that have been created to help humanity survive more easily. This kind of technology is of the order of power plants, printing presses, automobiles, conveyer belts, but also vegetable steamers, tweezers, and even masking tape. These are objects that serve technological functions that make the day-to-day activity of living more efficient. They contribute to what Lyotard calls "maximizing output" while "minimizing input": they allow us to do more, to be more efficient.

In the process they introduce another element, of a different order I think, into the mix of games Lyotard has presented in *The Postmodern Condition*. While denotative utterances focus on a true/false distinction in their reference to reality, and prescriptive utterances focus on a just/unjust distinction by calling to
attention whether they are "fair" or "good" or not, technology is organized around the poles of efficiency/inefficiency. As Lyotard says, a technical "move" is "good" when it does better and/or expends less energy than another. "Move" here can be seen as having many meanings—perhaps a new device, or a new use for an old device, a re-orientation or a minor re-adjustment. Although technology suggests the external world of objects, machines, and matter, "move" recalls the language games Lyotard has been describing, most recently the way language games re-orient the methods of argumentation leading to new moves with established rules. The implication is that although one set of moves is in language and another is in technology, they are related, at least in the sense that they have some effect on society.

Following this introduction of technology, Lyotard examines its history briefly, focusing on how although "technical competence is a late development," moving from an issue "as much or more concerned with the arts (technai) than with knowledge" with inventions, the "product of chance research," coming in "fits and starts," to a more important position when "the need for proof becomes increasingly strong as the pragmatics of scientific knowledge replaces [sic] traditional knowledge or knowledge based on revelation" (PMC 44). As this need for more efficient proving of proof develops, Lyotard suggests that a new "problem appears":

- devices that optimize the performance of the human body for the purpose of producing proof require additional expenditures. No money, no proof—and that means no verification of statements and no truth. The games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which whoever is wealthiest has the best chance of
being right. An equation between wealth, efficiency, and truth is thus established. (PMC 44-5)

This "new equation" thus provides another level between humanity and the determination and the proof of "truth": not only is technology required; one must also have the wealth to buy the technology.

This equation is heightened because it goes in two directions. Not only is wealth required for technology, but technology is required for wealth to be produced: "A technical apparatus requires an investment, but since it optimizes the efficiency of the task to which it is applied, it also optimizes the surplus-value derived from this improved performance" (PMC 45). Because technology leads to what Lyotard later calls "the best possible input/output equation" (PMC 46), it improves performance and increases wealth: the "surplus-value" is "realized" as "the product of the task performed" is "sold" (PMC 45). My spectacles might serve as a brief example. I had to have a certain amount of money to afford to purchase eye-glasses made with a doctor's prescription that also cost money. However, by having these glasses, I am better able to market my services, for I am a more efficient producer (of whatever) than I would have been without the glasses. My increased productive ability is the "surplus-value" I can sell.

Lyotard extends this economic system further, by suggesting that it is "sealed" because "a portion of the sale is recycled into a research fund dedicated to further performance improvement. It is at this precise moment that science becomes a force of production, in other words, a moment in the circulation of capital" (PMC 45). I'm pushing the point, I think, but the profit I reap from having the technology of my spectacles helps me better support my life, making me better able to live as I choose.
One could also imagine other, more major examples. Having a certain level of wealth allows a company to develop a certain machine. This machine increases the company's wealth because it makes the company more efficient, and the company can sell more of whatever the machine produces. Some of this profit is put back into machine-building research; it provides the wealth that allows for refinements (new moves in the old process) or new machines (new games altogether). Lyotard has thus structured "technology," "capital," and "scientific research" into a system in which one feeds the other. I mentioned "moves" and "games" a moment ago to emphasize the connections of this technological/economic system to the argumentation/knowledge system. Technology and capital support the forming of proof and the argumentation process that presents it to experts. They allow for innovation and experimentation to make new and better devices to produce more profit to make new and better devices (through innovation and experimentation), and so on.

Thus, these elements are wedded in a system; this is the genesis of the "performativity criterion" that Lyotard is discussing when he discusses technology and that I've been avoiding directly talking about—until now. Lyotard expresses key ideas of this system as follows:

The production of proof, which is in principle only part of an argumentation process designed to win agreement from the addressees of scientific messages, thus falls under the control of another language game, in which the goal is no longer truth, but performativity—that is the best possible input/output equation. The State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the
only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power. (emphasis added) (PMC 46)

With the word "power," Lyotard has extended the basic issue, the production of proof," even further. Technology, originally intended as an extension of a human, a way to compensate for losses or inabilities and thus occupying a powerful position on that fairly local level (of a person's observations or actions), thus has a much more powerful position. Technology is part of a "sealed" system in which it, science, and wealth lead to power. This is a power that is above the level of the personal power of a prosthesis; it is an a higher position in a hierarchy of power, since it supports the entire system, not just one human.

I mention this hierarchy of power because it recalls the old hierarchies of the narrative, especially those of the speculative narrative. Lyotard now suggests a new hierarchy, but one can't help wondering if it will contain similar problems, perhaps similar presuppositions. One gets a taste of a possible presupposition if he considers this: the "power" of technology has been made "exterior" to humanity. It does not exist at the personal, inner level of connecting a person to the world. Instead, it exists at a higher position, one that informs society, one that has undergone what Lyotard elsewhere calls "exteriorization" with respect to humanity.

**Technology and the Transfer of Education**

Technology has a similarly powerful position in education, one that is analogous to its position as a "prosthesis." Just as a technological aid can help humanity perform some function, technology can help education perform its
mission too. Earlier I've discussed the goals the performativity criterion would establish, as I've discussed certain disruptions in these goals due to new groups of students and the interdisciplinary approach. When Lyotard begins examining education and technology, he focuses on "the narrowly functionalist point of view" that "an organized stock of established knowledge is the essential thing that is transmitted" (PMC 50). This image of "established knowledge" recalls Lyotard's examination of education when he introduced the pragmatics of scientific knowledge, in chapter seven. Then he wrote, "there are statements for which the exchange of arguments and the production of proof constituting the pragmatics of research are considered to have been sufficient, and which can therefore be transmitted through teaching as they stand, in the guise of indisputable truth" (PMC 25).

The implication is that education consists of merely transferring information to a student, as if it were a pair of gloves lent to a friend or a stockpot full of gumbo brought to a party. There is the sense, though, that Lyotard is criticizing this view, in his reference to it as "narrowly functionalist" and in the phrase "the guise of indisputable truth" which implies that it's an appearance that belies its interior, as if its, say, "exteriorization" is incorrect. As I've also suggested, Lyotard does suggest the existence of a more interactive educational structure, the interdisciplinary teams, but one should note now the discussion of those teams comes after Lyotard examines the role of technology in education.

Just what is this role of technology here? The basic role is its transfer of information into "data banks":

The application of new technologies to this stock [of established knowledge] may have a considerable impact on the medium of
communication. It does not seem absolutely necessary that the medium be a lecture delivered in person by a teacher in front of silent students, with questions reserved for sections on "practical work" sessions run by an assistant. To the extent that learning is translatable into computer language and the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal. (PMC 50)

Lyotard is presenting what may seem a radically different view of education: a class would not occur in the sense that we generally think of it occurring at a certain time and place, for example in Room 109, Rayzor Hall, on Tuesday- Thursdays from 9:30-11:00 a.m. Instead, a class—no longer a transparent term—or course would consist of the combination of "memory" and "data" banks, which would contain information that had been "translated" into computer language.

One might question what Lyotard means by "translatable." At the start of *The Postmodern Condition*, he makes a brief reference to the idea that "learning is translated into quantities of information" and how "we can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language" (PMC 4). Lyotard also mentions, in passing, that "Research on translating machines is already well advanced" (PMC 4). However, he does not really address here what he means by "translatable."
Perhaps he means that information in one code, such as writing, would have to be re-presented by another code, such as numbers. There's a sense of this in the way that computers represent information through their codes of one's and zero's. He might mean a kind of "translatable" coming from transferring text in one form to a different form, rearranging the order, changing the notion of sequence, as a written, published text could be translated into the computer text form we currently label "hypertext." Perhaps he means the transfer of files created by a word processor, containing a variety of "control codes" that determine how the text looks on the printed page into a "text-only" form with no control codes, a form that may be sent over a computer network that bridges different kinds of computers using different kinds of software. Perhaps he means the process and software that allows a printed page to be "scanned" into a computer without retyping, or the process in which one can "talk" to a computer since it has capabilities to recognize a human voice. Perhaps, though, Lyotard really means none of these options, for in the late seventies when he was writing The Postmodern Condition, such options didn't exist.

Still, for now, the implication is that this information will be transferred or translated into computerized form and will thereby be of use to the students. Lyotard emphasizes the importance of this development with an emphatic statement:

Data banks are the Encyclopedia of tomorrow. They transcend the capacity of each of their users. They are "nature" for postmodern man. (PMC 51)

Because the data banks contain this translated information, they serve the purpose in the postmodern world that the speculative University and its
encyclopedic unification of the fields of "positive knowledge" did for the classical and modern world. Also like this speculative apparatus, the data banks "transcend" the everyday level of "the capacity of each of their users. One recalls a similar distancing between technology as something for one user and the larger concept of technology as power. Here, the data banks that Lyotard intends are massive, all-encompassing affairs, wedding "traditional memory banks" (all of the information in all of the libraries everywhere?) to other computer data banks created by experts. No one user can comprehend any one of them. They are at a higher position, one of more power, one of a higher, more encompassing level of knowledge—again, the puissant concept of a "hierarchy" rears its head again. These data banks are part of a new hierarchy, under which they are at the top, as a sort of ultimate referent and broadest concept; after all, they are "nature."

Lyotard does not just leave education in the pre-translated hands of computer data banks, though. I've discussed the role of interdisciplinary teams and how they can lead to disruptions in the surface of the educational structures (as opposed to the transfer of "established knowledge in the data banks"). Lyotard does suggest other continuing roles for teachers, even though he also argues that the above changes are "sounding the knell of the age of the Professor" since "a professor is no more competent than memory bank networks in transmitting established knowledge, no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games" (PMC 53).

In the system that Lyotard describes, "Professor" becomes "teacher," holding a position, in effect, that is marginal to the machines:

Pedagogy would not necessarily suffer. The students would still have to be taught something: not contents, but how to use the
terminals. On the one hand, that means teaching new languages and on the other, a more refined ability to handle the language games of interrogation—where should the question be addressed, in other words, what is the relevant memory bank for what needs to be known? How should the question be formulated to avoid misunderstandings? (PMC 50-51)

Immediately, one might notice two opposing qualities of this position. First, it seems, in an official, traditionally-oriented view, less important that the position of the lofty "Professor" (who is so lofty that he deserves a capital letter). However, this "teacher" is involved in the thick of the actions of the language games that Lyotard has argued are re-structuring postmodern society. Just as argumentation has become a language game of creating new moves in a field or creating new fields, the teacher is involved in similar activity: he helps students learn new fields—with new languages—and he helps them learn more about the fields to which they are apart. I used the word "marginal" above on purpose, to suggest the importance, from a deconstructive point of view, held by the teacher. He is crucial to the success of the course offered through the data banks because he tells the students how to use them, how, in fact, to use "nature."

Thus, one can see that Lyotard plays with the notion of performativity, leading the reader one way and then another. At the start of this chapter, I suggested that Lyotard is no longer using a predominantly narrative strategy. I still feel the same, but looking at the ways he moves the direction of his
arguments, one still notices an element of drama, in the surprises the
discussion of performativity takes. As a result, although the two chapters of *The
Postmodern Condition* that this chapter has examined in the most detail,
chapters eleven and twelve, are titled in such a way as to suggest that they
concern performativity, they really concern much more complicated, more
important issues of postmodernism. Performativity is the lure, but legitimation is
not so simple.
CHAPTER 5: LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES: PERFORMATIVITY/PARALOGY

Legitimation, one might recall, is the process by which a topic, a field, an institution, or some other entity is viewed as important or valid by some group of experts. It's a serious process, for it has great weight in the world. It determines whether a researcher will receive respect in academia, whether a political party will be allowed on the ballot, whether a research lab will receive funding to allow it to discover the cure for x, y, or z. Legitimation thus commands respect, power, money—and whatever other forms of "praise" humanity has to offer.

Lyotard in his discussion of performativity has indeed some praise to offer—but not too much. As we saw in chapter four, he examines issues that would suggest performativity as a legitimate tool for the legitimation of knowledge and society. However, at the same time, many of these examples suggest the opposite idea as well, that performativity is inappropriate or incorrect or at least based on the wrong kind of evidence. The conclusion is that performativity is not legitimate because it doesn't support science or society well enough. It seems to lack the kind of accuracy, oddly enough in its pursuit of accuracy, that Lyotard finds in the concept of paralogy.

Still, although Lyotard ends his text opposed to performativity, and even suggests, as we shall see, that it is connected to terrorist tendencies in society, it is important to see how he both supports and criticizes it—but especially how he supports it. Why? Because even after Lyotard sends the superstructure of performativity to the junk-yard, he keeps around a crucial element of it, its basis in technology.
The Problematic Legitimation of Performativity

Lyotard first introduces the mechanism through which the performativity criterion acquires legitimacy in chapter eleven, just after he has emphasized how technology enhances the production of proof by making humanity more efficient. At this point, technology is fused to performativity; they almost seem to be the same thing. This connection is crucial, for in his discussion of the process through which performativity achieves legitimation, Lyotard plays with two options: he both speaks of this legitimation in a positive way (to a point) and criticizes it (however mildly or subtly). Such a technique allows Lyotard to suggest problems in the overall tendencies of performativity as he protects an aspect of it—technology.

One sees a striking example of this double technique and what it emphasizes when Lyotard constructs an argument to show how efficiency (along with its related terms power and force) achieves legitimation in postmodern culture. One may view this argument as a series of overlapping assertions; the question of how they connect to each other remains open, however. Notice Lyotard's explanation:

But the fact remains that since performativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right: the technical criterion, introduced on a massive scale into scientific knowledge, cannot fail to influence the truth criterion. The same has been said of the relationship between justice and performance: the probability that an order would be pronounced just was said to increase with its chances of being implemented, which in turn increase with the performance capability of the prescriber. (PMC 46)
What are these assertions, introduced as they are with the temptingly assertive "But the fact remains . . ."? One might list them as follows:

1a. Performativity increases the ability to produce proof.
1b. It therefore increases the ability to be right.
2a. Performativity allows one to implement an order effectively.
2b. It therefore increases the chance that the order is just.

Lyotard seems to maintain a divided relationship between these two sets of assertions. With the first set, between performativity and truth, he is fairly emphatic ("the technical criterion . . . cannot fail to influence the truth criterion."). He thus suggests that technology is unquestionably important. However, with the second set, Lyotard is more vague, using the passive voice ("The same has been said. . . ." and " . . . was said to increase. . . ."), implying a more critical stance. He mentions the idea that "performance improvement . . . can pass for a kind of legitimation." Lyotard ends the argument with the phrase "De facto legitimation," implying possibly that legitimation has been achieved, but more likely that it has only assumed such a position (PMC 46).

Lyotard criticizes, however subtly, the second line of reasoning, but with the first, the connection between technology and truth, he seems to agree. After all, this argument is the same as his argument earlier in the chapter, when he introduced the whole concept of technology as an aid to deliver efficient proof. He implies that because technology allows one to "master" games such as those of argumentation by providing a player with enhanced information about the "reality" on which those games depend, it allows one to "master" reality also. The new complexity in argumentation is part of this performative system, for the new rules require "greater sophistication in the means of obtaining proof, and that in turn benefits performativity" (PMC 47). Lyotard discusses a self-
reinforcing, self-legitimating structure in which performativity or power
"legitimates science and the law on the basis of their efficiency, and legitimates
this efficiency on the basis of science and law" (PMC 47). This is a similarly
recursive structure to the technology/wealth/knowledge loop that Lyotard also
discussed earlier.

Along with this protection of one aspect of the performance criterion
comes a series of other criticisms, working in various directions. To show how
this criticism develops, we need to back up one paragraph, to the point at which
Lyotard introduces the discussion of legitimation. He indicates a somewhat
skeptical position: "The question is to determine what the discourse of power
consists of and if it can constitute a legitimation" (PMC 46). Lyotard seems to be
raising the issue of whether legitimating performativity is even possible. Part of
this seeming lack of possibility derives from "the traditional distinction between
force and right, between force and wisdom—in other words, between what is
strong, what is just, and what is true" (PMC 46).

From this perspective, performativity seems an impossible focus for
legitimation; it seems to be of a different order of knowledge, and it seems too
different from the other choices. Lyotard is referring once more to three different
classes of statements that form language games: denotative utterances about
the truth, prescriptive utterances about justice, and technological utterances, or
rather—equations—about efficiency. Elsewhere, he has emphasized their
"incommensurability." One might recall how the inability of prescriptive
utterances to legitimate denotative utterances led to the dismissal of the social
aspects of the emancipation narrative.

Further, in Lyotard's reference to the traditional incommensurabilities, he
has made a crucial substitution, making the question of legitimacy here even
stranger. Instead of using "efficiency" or "performativity" and thus recalling the role of technology that led to these terms, he uses "force," a word that complicates things a bit. One can approach "force" as a straightforward component of an efficient use of technology—machines are efficient if they conserve force while producing the greatest possible benefit. There's the sense, though, that Lyotard means "force" and the related concept of "power" in more ominous ways. The terms do not just connote efficiency and productivity; they also imply cruelty, savagery, totalitarianism, and terror. These concepts may be seen as close allies to "force" and "power," but they do not seem as close to "technology"—unless the technology is the technology of torture chambers, and that's not what Lyotard has implied. Using such potentially negative terms as "force" and "power" allows Lyotard to suggest, however gently, that efficiency, already at a distance from truth and justice, is also related to such threatening concepts. Thus, it should have no place in a realm of legitimacy, for that is a place for statesmen, not hoodlums.

However, in this early examination of its legitimation, Lyotard distances performativity from such negativity, from the world of terror. He sets performativity (and force and power) aside from even a remote connection to "terror" by making the following statements:

I am excluding the case in which force operates by means of terror. This lies outside the realm of language games, because the efficacy of such force is based entirely on the threat to eliminate the opposing player, not on making a better "move" than he. Whenever efficiency (that is, obtaining the desired effect) is derived from a "Say or do this, or else you'll never speak again,"
then we are in the realm of terror, and the social bond is
destroyed. (PMC 46).

Lyotard is thus appealing to an argument that terror is part of an entirely
different game and that efficiency emphasizes the winning power of "better
moves," not coercion; it does not rely on terror. This distancing of efficiency from
terror is interesting here, for it helps to keep technology away from this terror as
well.

Besides the argument of his that I used to begin this section, Lyotard
provides other assertions of performativity's legitimating power throughout The
Postmodern Condition. One of the most interesting examples of this positive
discussion of performativity comes very late in the text, in chapter fourteen, after
Lyotard has argued against performativity. As part of a rhetorical strategy to
lead to even a greater condemnation of performativity, Lyotard discusses the
"advantages" of the performativity criterion. He mentions concerns such as

[The performativity criterion] excludes in principle adherence to a
metaphysical discourse; it requires the renunciation of fables; it
demands clear minds and cold wills; it replaces the definition of
essences with the calculation of interactions; it makes the "players"
assume responsibility not only for the statements they propose, but
also for the rules to which they submit those statements in order to
render them acceptable. It brings the pragmatic functions of
knowledge clearly to light, to the extent that they seem to relate to
the criterion of efficiency: the pragmatics of argumentation, of the
production of proof, of the transmission of learning, and of the
apprenticeship of the imagination. (PMC 62)
These are advantages that focus on how performativity organizes and directs the social, language games of these participants, encouraging them to use "cold wills" to "assume responsibility" for their acts as they are apprenticed to the wills of the system. One might also note that Lyotard sees an advantage in performativity's "renunciation of fables" and exclusion of metaphysics and "essences." Thus, he emphasizes that performativity has passed his test of avoiding these remnants of the era of the grand Narratives; it is at least scientific.

Lyotard cites as another "advantage" a more cynical issue: the system's "severity":

Within the framework of the power criterion, a request (that is, a form of prescription) gains nothing in legitimacy by virtue of being based on the hardship of an unmet need. Rights do not flow from hardship, but from the fact that the alleviation of hardship improves the system's performance. The needs of the most underprivileged should not be used as a system regulator as a matter of principle; since the means of satisfying them is already known, their actual satisfaction will not improve the system's performance, but only increase its expenditures. . . . the system seems to be a vanguard machine dragging humanity after it, dehumanizing it in order to rehumanize it at a different level of normative capacity. (PMC 62-63)

In this paragraph, one sees the direction of Lyotard's strategy, for the alleged "advantages" of performativity have led to a pretty dismal situation, one that denies justice and denies humanity. A few paragraphs later, Lyotard concludes that in practicing such behavior as above (and other possibilities), performativity
is "terrorist." He describes terror as the "efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened" (PMC 63-64).

These examples of performativity's "advantages" and related hardships clearly emphasize that while Lyotard will play with seeming to endorse performativity, whether in chapter five or eleven, he is opposed to it for its totalitarian aspects. Apparently, its only saving grace is its rejection of narrative! What is also striking about this section is not so much what Lyotard criticizes, but what is missing. He criticizes the power and force that performativity exacts on society to fulfill its quotas and maintain its tension. Earlier I suggested that Lyotard implied problems with force and power when he introduced the subject of performative legitimation. Then, though, he emphasized that performativity did not follow the principles of terror ("I am excluding the case in which force operates by means of terror"). Now, he states that the system does not just contain elements of terror, but that it is "terrorist"—an apparently more powerful assertion. One might argue that Lyotard's meaning of "terror" is different in each case. The first time, "terror" seems to imply physical brutality; now terror seems more psychological or metaphorical. Still, the shift in terminology, from embracing it with all of its forces to denying the use of the term, is interesting.

What else is interesting about this concluding praise/attack on performativity? The most striking thing is what is missing: technology. Although technology was the force that led Lyotard to the whole idea of efficiency, the input/output equation, and performativity earlier in the text, the concept seems to have vanished from a list of performativity's advantages. One might argue that there are elements of technology in these later passages, but if
so, they are only elements; Lyotard does not talk of technology directly. He does refer to a kind of a machine but it is a "vanguard machine dragging humanity after it," hardly the sort of technology that Lyotard meant earlier. Just as one might argue that the terror is metaphorical, this machine is metaphorical also. The advantage, for technology, is that it has appeared to separate itself from the rest of the theory of performativity; Lyotard can criticize performativity, but technology escapes the criticism. Technology is not "terrorist"; no, performativity is.

Thus, in these last paragraphs, Lyotard is accomplishing a remarkable feat: he praises performativity by citing its stand against narrative and essence, but as he seems to criticize its central features, its essence—what led the entire principle into being—escapes his grasp: Narrative 0; Technology 1.

Disruptions in Performativity: The Instabilities of Paralogy

When Lyotard emphasized how the speculative apparatus lost its power because it relied on a presupposition of its own existence, he referred to this position as a "process of delegitimation fueled by the demand for legitimation itself" (PMC 39). He traces a similar situation with the performativity criterion. In some ways, one can find striking parallels between the delegitimation of this method and the delegitimation of the narratives. Both are systems that rely on hierarchies that separate lower levels of knowledge, lower groups of people, or lower institutions from higher ones; in both, something is always, seemingly clearly, more important than something else. Similarly, both systems allow for, or fuel, the process of delegitimation in the way they are unable to support or admit all parts of the systems they represent. The speculative system was
maintained only by ignoring the presuppositions that allowed it to exist. Performance theory tries to lead education, research and society towards certain goals, but it has to ignore the much more complex goals, procedures and processes that fight against those goals, that point out its lack of control as it loudly asserts its power.

In chapter thirteen, Lyotard examines both performativity's need for control and the scientific forces that make such control impossible. The chapter opens with Lyotard's reference to two contradictory problems in the performative system. First, it exists in the postmodern world and thus follows the more complex rules of argumentation that rely on experts determining the rules through consensus. As a result, argumentation can lead to "new 'moves' and even new rules for language" (PMC 53). Although such a concept might have seemed disruptive earlier, Lyotard did not emphasize such problems. The reference then (in chapter eleven) to a universal metalanguage that is not consistent seemed to contain within it the idea that once a consensus was created, it had the force of law—although Lyotard indicated that the new universal metalanguages such a system would create would not be consistent across the system (as the former metalanguage of logic had tried to be), Lyotard emphasized the moments of consensus, not the inconsistency between them.

The hypothesis underlying this force, the hypothesis, in fact "upon which legitimation by performativity is based" is "determinism" (PMC 53-54). This hypothesis suggests the following:

. . . since performativity is defined by an input/output ratio, there is a presupposition that the system into which the input is entered is stable; that system must follow a regular "path" that it is possible to
express as a continuous function possessing a derivative, so that an accurate prediction of the output can be made. (PMC 54)

The focus of chapter thirteen is to discredit this notion of the stable system, as Lyotard presents the argument that "a number of prominent examples" illustrate how "Science does not expand by means of the positivism of efficiency. The opposite is true" (PMC 54).

Earlier, I argued that once Lyotard moves into his discussion of the postmodern period, he veers from a narrative re-telling of his topic to a form of rhetoric that seems more analogous to science. This chapter is a prime example of such a technique. Lyotard has constructed it from a series of experiments and principles that he claims help explain the "search for dissent" that characterizes the sciences. The chapter is an example of scientific argumentation. He cites the proof of experts, describing their experiments or their conclusions. He avoids telling "histories" of the developments that lead up to each of the examples; instead they are included for their value as proof, not as interlude. He speaks as if he is uttering scientific truth: verified, arguable.

This focus on science is also interesting from a slightly different point of view. As I mentioned earlier, The Postmodern Condition alleges to be a report, an overview of a broad topic. As part of this topic, Lyotard argues that narratives have lost their power as legitimating forces. Part of the point of this chapter is to emphasize how a new form of legitimation rises from the processes of science. What better way to emphasize such an idea than in this, easily the most specific, most exampled chapter of the text? While other chapters of the text seem filled with abstraction, presented in a repetitive language that may require several re-readings to be understood, filled with only a shadow of possible examples, this chapter is, to risk sounding simplistic, much easier to understand even though it
is talking about very complex examples. Here, though, the important thing is that Lyotard actually has examples; he actually has specific cases and results and incidents to examine. He brings the battery of science, and its ability to bring out "prominent examples," serving as "exhibits" (PMC 54) into the the text, to prove its structure. It is as if Lyotard is providing an example of the importance of scientific knowledge and of the discourse about science *in his method* as well as in his examples.

As I mentioned above, Lyotard suggests that the problem with determinism is its basis in a stable system; he later suggests instead that science is the "antimodel of a stable system" (PMC 64). Lyotard develops this argument in three stages. First, he discredits the system underlying performativity, determinism. Lyotard gives one example of an hypothesis based on stable system theory, an example named, marvelously enough (since Lyotard wishes for his reader to view it as discredited and old fashioned), "Laplace's fiction of the 'demon.'" This example provides Lyotard the opportunity to emphasize the assumption of stability that underlies the system; as elsewhere in *The Postmodern Condition*, such an assumption is in for hardship. Lyotard emphasizes that this "fiction" suggests that the "demon"

knows all of the variables determining the state of the universe at a moment $t$, and can thus predict its state at a moment $t'$. This fiction is sustained by the principle that physical systems, including the system of systems called the universe, follow regular patterns, with the result that their evolution traces a regular path and gives rise to "normal" continuous functions. (PMC 55)

Lyotard presents this case as opposed to that of determinism.
Such a theory of a "fiction" is tied by Lyotard to the very notion of the possibility of determining an input/output equation, for such a notion is "based on the principle of a relation, which is in theory always calculable, between heat and work, hot source and cold source." Such a relation implies a "highly stable system" and the ability to predict the "evolution of a system's performance" if one can determine "all of the variables" (PMC 55). However, Lyotard has already suggested, before this example, that

Science does not expand by means of the positivism of efficiency. The opposite is true: working on a proof means searching for and "inventing" counterexamples; in other words, the unintelligible; supporting an argument means looking for a "paradox" and legitimating it with new rules in the games of reasoning. In neither case is efficiency sought for its own sake; it comes, sometimes tardily, as an extra, when the grant givers finally decide to take an interest in the case. (PMC 54)

Science here means looking for disruptions, not assuming that a stable system exists and supports a series of hypotheses. As a result, Lyotard creates a neat trick. He doesn't argue against the fiction of the demon; it comes after he has given the theoretical argument for discrediting it. Lyotard seems to assume that his reader will see the obvious nostalgia draped around this example; one might suggest that if Lyotard argued against it, he would have given it more credibility than it deserves.

After this counterexample, Lyotard moves into two levels of examples showing the instability of science, and implying the impossibility of the notion of a system. One should notice that before Lyotard begins discussing these examples, he makes a reference again to Gödel's theorem. One should recall
that Lyotard referred to this theorem to argue that classical logical is not able to explain all it seems to explain. At the time Lyotard made this reference though, he seemed to be leading into the support of what became performativity. Now, the focus is on erasing the very foundations of performativity.

The first level of Lyotard's attack examines the area of "quantum mechanics and atomic physics," suggesting how the controls a system seems to live by are actually counterproductive. The basic idea is that "a complete definition of the initial state of a system (or all the independent variables) would require an expenditure of energy at least equivalent to that consumed by the system to be defined" (PMC 55). Earlier, I cited an example that occurs here, of a story by Borges suggesting that drawing an extremely exact map of a country, a "complete definition" would bankrupt this country. Lyotard points toward "the conclusion that the idea (or ideology) of perfect control over a system, which is supposed to improve its performance, is inconsistent with respect to the law of contradiction: it in fact lowers the performance level it claims to raise" (PMC 55). Thus, Lyotard, as earlier with the speculative narrative and classical logic, is pointing out presuppositions that hide inconsistencies; he suggests that the idea of a system is similar to the discredited notion of an "ideology." He extends this example to the social system with a statement that recalls the bureaucratic nightmare of Borges' example: "This inconsistency explains the weakness of state and socioeconomic bureaucracies: they stifle the systems or subsystems they control and asphyxiate themselves in the process" (PMC 55-56). "Asphyxiate" here is such a marvelous word, for it provides a physical, hard, seemingly scientific image of the negative results of control.

This first example, although damaging to the functioning of a stable system, does not really eliminate or erase it. After all, one can imagine many
bureaucracies functioning with no productivity at all, destroying their societies, but still plodding stultifyingly along; I'm writing in an election year, so cries about such structures are especially evident. Instead, in this second, closer level of analysis of what he views as the function of science, Lyotard shows how, from the examples of "quantum theory and microphysics" there comes the idea that

The quest for precision is not limited by its cost, but by the very nature of matter. It is not true that uncertainty (lack of control) decreases as accuracy goes up; it goes up as well. (PMC 56)

Thus, Lyotard introduces the notion that will become "paralogy," the new view of science and systems, the "antimodel of the stable system." Lyotard cites an example from Jean Perrin suggesting that "Knowledge about the density of air thus resolves into a multiplicity of absolutely incompatible statements; they can only be made compatible if they are relativized in relation to a scale chosen by the speaker" (PMC 57). He suggests that "the relation between the scientist's statement and 'what 'nature' says' seems to be organized as a game without perfect information," without the very ability to offer control (PMC 57). Notice the phrase "perfect information." As earlier, it suggests the possibility of control, or understanding, the possibility of assuming the very existence of a "highly stable system" that could be perfectly controlled. Lyotard thus seems to discredit this idea (although, as we will see, it will reappear).

Lyotard does raise the argument (to oppose the one he is developing) that although science might have such features of indeterminacy, they do not necessarily transfer to the social order. He mentions the notion that "nature is an indifferent, not deceptive opponent" and how this basis determines "the distinction" between "the natural and the human sciences" (PMC 57). In science, "nature" is "the referent—mute but as predictable as a die thrown a
great number of times—about which scientists exchange denotative utterances constituting moves." However, in "the human sciences," "the referent (man) is a participant in the game, one that speaks and develops a strategy (a mixed strategy, perhaps) to counter that of the scientist: here the kind of chance with which the scientist is confronted is not object based or indifferent, but behavioral or strategic—in other words, agnostic" (PMC 57).

Lyotard is leading to the notion that the "problems concern[ing] microphysics [i.e. Science] . . . do not prevent the establishment of continuous functions exact enough to form the basis of probabilistic predictions for the evolution of a given system" (PMC 57). The idea is that the two areas of knowledge are separate, that the indifferent rules of science that Lyotard introduced with the Perrin example are inapplicable to social pragmatics, and, thus, inappropriate potential principles for legitimation. Lyotard mentions that this argument against the connection between the two realms "is the reasoning systems theorists—who are also the theorists of legitimation by performance—use to try to regain their rights" (PMC 57-58). However, Lyotard asserts that this argument is defeated by "a current in contemporary mathematics that questions the very possibility of precise measurement and thus the prediction of the behavior of objects even on the human scale" (PMC 58).

For a moment, I would like to step back from all of this to emphasize, again, the scientific nature of Lyotard's method. In this chapter, he is setting up cases and defeating them, moving from a position from which the stable system is questionable (because of its excessively draining cost) to one in which it is limited by the nature of matter (because of non-predictable uncertainties). He then throws in a counter-possibility that all of his examples criticizing the notion of a system, however interesting they might be, are not applicable to a human-
scale system, due to the differences between science and society. Lyotard is building to his last set of examples, examples that suggest that the indifference of science is evident, in a sense, in society. Earlier, he suggested how in scientific argumentation one must define the rules to play the game. With each distinction, Lyotard is redefining the rules, to make the fiction of the stable system stronger and stronger.

To erase the sense of legitimation of this system, finally, Lyotard focuses principally on the work of two researchers, Mandelbrot and Thom. He cites Mandelbrot's suggestion that though "The functions with derivatives . . . are the simplest and easiest to work with, they are nevertheless exceptional. Using geometrical language, curves that have no tangent are the rule, and regular curves, such as the circle, are interesting, but quite special" (qtd. in PMC 58). This idea leads into examples of how "the contours of a floccule of soapy, salinated water present such irregularities that it is impossible for the eye to draw a tangent to any point on its surface" (PMC 58). Similar examples occur if, for example, we wish to make a precise measurement of the coast of Brittany, the crater-filled surface of the moon, the distribution of stellar matter, the frequency of bursts of interference during a telephone call, turbulence in general, the shape of clouds. In short, the majority of the objects whose outlines and distributions have not undergone regularization at the hands of man. (PMC 58)

Lyotard suggests that Mandelbrot "shows that data of this kind describe curves similar to those of continuous functions for which no derivative exists"; which he labels "fractals" (PMC 58).
Lyotard then moves to the work of René Thom, who even more "directly questions the validity of the notion of a stable system, which is a presupposition in Laplace's determinism and even in probability theory" (PMC 58). In passing, one might note that such a statement is interesting here as a further example of this chapter's position as "scientific discourse," for it recalls Lyotard's earlier suggestion that the pragmatics of scientific knowledge has "a memory and a project" (PMC 26). Lyotard is emphasizing here how his arguments fit within this memory and project of science.

The focus is on Thom's construction of "a mathematical language allowing a formal description of the discontinuities that can occur in determined phenomena, causing them to take unexpected forms." This construction leads to "catastrophe theory" as a model (or anti-model) of science. He cites "aggressiveness as a state variable of a dog: it increases in direct proportion to the dog's anger, a control variable." If a "dog's anger is measureable," at a "certain threshold" an attack ensues. However, a second control variable, "fear," is at work also; "when it reaches its threshold it is expressed as flight." If these two controls are absent, "the dog's behavior is stable." However, when they come together, "the dog's behavior becomes unpredictable and can switch abruptly from attack to flight, and vice versa. The system is said to be unstable: the control variables are continuous, but the state variables are discontinuous" (PMC 59). This example leads Thom to a postulate:

The more or less determined character of a process is determined by the local state of the process. (PMC 59)

This postulate suggests that "determinism is a type of functioning that is itself determined: in every case nature produces the least complex local morphology compatible with the initial local circumstances" (PMC 59). The focus on "local"
issues is crucial, for against the notion of a system that is able to unite the newly complicated notions of argumentation and the non-consistent, really non-universal metalanguage of logic, Thom—and Lyotard—present a view that the only control is local control, that the "metalanguage that is universal but not consistent" allows for many different points of view. Earlier, Lyotard emphasized this metalanguage as part of the system; now it seems to deny the possibility of a system.

Increasing his number of examples, Lyotard even cites one he indicates is "admittedly weak"—"the research of the Palo Alto school, especially in its application of paradoxonology to the study of schizophrenia" (PMC 59). Lyotard admits to "merely not[ing] the connection," but it allows him to explain "how research centered on singularities and 'incommensurabilities' is applicable to the pragmatics of the most everyday problems"—to the pragmatics of society, not just of science (PMC 60).

There are two results of this series of examples attacking the notion of the stable system, results which Lyotard presents with great power. After all, they are results that lead into the system of legitimation he favors, the system of paralogy. First, he suggests that

The conclusion we can draw from this research (and much more not mentioned here) is that the continuous differentiable function is losing its preeminence as a paradigm of knowledge and prediction. Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, "fracta,' catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is
changing the meaning of the word *knowledge*, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy. (PMC 60)

One should notice several features of this paragraph. First, Lyotard is emphasizing his presentation of scientific examples, along with the tempting possibility that there are "many more" examples that he could have mentioned! He also is referring to science from the postmodern view that it recognizes that it chooses its rules, that it is "theorizing its own evolution." However, instead of recognizing the lack of "divine," always true rules but still creating a pseudo-divine system (of performativity), science focuses on its own idiosyncrasies, on its discontinuities. From such a perspective, and after the emphasis of the examples, performativity seems drained of its potential power. Not only does it assume problems that would cause it to be inefficient, but more importantly, it seems drained of any power it might hold. It no longer appears to be a relevant option. As Lyotard emphasizes: "systems theory and the kind of legitimation it proposes have no scientific basis whatsoever; science itself does not function according to this theory's paradigm of the system, and contemporary science excludes the possibility of using such a paradigm to describe society" (PMC 61).

Lyotard also emphasizes, though, a notion that earlier he seemed to abandon, with the delegitimation of the grand Narratives. Since the perspective of science values the undecidable, it also values the production of ideas, or, from the perspective of language games, the production of denotative statements to describe reality and prescriptive statements to establish the rules of a certain moment. As a result, Lyotard cites P.B. Medawar's idea that
"having ideas is the scientist's highest accomplishment," that there is no 'scientific method,' and that a scientist is before anything else a person who 'tells stories.' The only difference is that he is duty bound to verify them." (PMC 60). Lyotard thus suggests that from this new paralogical perspective, a version of narrative comes back into the picture. It is not the narrative of old, a narrative that gave meaning and legitimacy; instead, it is a narrative that allows scientists to cite cases, suggest possibilities. Lyotard calls it the "little narrative," the "quintessential form of imaginative invention" (PMC 60). It is the means for scientists to try out new possibilities and suggest new hypotheses, but it does not legitimate them, for legitimacy is inscribed in the game, in the way that groups of experts create their own rules.

**Legitimation through Paralogy**

Thus, we come back to legitimation, this time through a means that seems strikingly unlike previous notions of legitimation. Earlier forms of legitimation either so assumed the notion of consensus that it seemed to be inscribed into the structure as if it arrived before mankind (the narratives) or else it was seen as a goal to be reached (performativity). With paralogy, "it is now dissension that must be emphasized," for "consensus is a horizon that is never reached" (PMC 61). This focus on "dissension" does not lead to total disorder, for "there are classes of catastrophes," and there is a focus on "locally determined" consensus (PMC 61). Consensus cannot be broad enough to embrace an entire system. Instead, it is determined in small groups of experts in certain fields at certain times.
The Legitimation of Science and the Inclusion of Narrative

Lytard explains how this process legitimates science in a paragraph that I have used in pieces throughout the previous chapters:

To the extent that science is differential, its pragmatics provides the antimodel of a stable system. A statement is deemed worth retaining the moment it marks a difference from what is already known, and after an argument and proof in support of it has been found. Science is a model of an "open system," in which a statement becomes relevant if it "generates ideas," that is, if it generates other statements and other game rules. Science possesses no general metalanguage in which all other languages can be transcribed and evaluated. This is what prevents its identification with the system and, all things considered, with terror. (PMC 64)

Thus, as the previous examples have shown as well, science operates not from a position of assuming that the denotative statements it utters must fit in to an already inscribed set of prescriptive rules; instead, a scientist utters statements which are remarkable because of their difference; science responds by inventing other statements and other rules for the game. These rules have validity and legitimation on a local level only, for other statements can come along to challenge them and deny them. Still, such limited legitimation is legitimation in this non-system-like system. It is a legitimation that depends on the "revisable consensus" that is "in force at a given moment" (PMC 65).

This system relies on elements of narrative, for narrative composes the little stories of science—the descriptive, denotative statements and the locally-determined prescriptions that give certain of these statements themes and plots
for the moment. However, unlike the previous uses of narration, in which science was used to service narrative goals, the form and process of narration is used now to support the richness of science. In the process, an essential element of narrative knowledge for Lyotard, its ability to connect a society from the beginning to end is miniaturized. "Beginning" and "end" are not so far apart if the little narrative one scientist tells about one experiment is followed by a different, contradictory story from another scientist, a story that upsets the previous story. Earlier, scientific knowledge was contained in a structure of narrative; now, narrative knowledge is supported by a scientific, free-floating, non-prejudicial structure. The result? Not the massive, hierarchies of narration, but, more, a series of smaller fields.

This new use of narration by science emphasizes the tensions between the two concepts that flow throughout The Postmodern Condition. Throughout this dissertation, I've made references to these tensions. At the end of his text, Lyotard may make claims for the importance of narrative, but, more importantly I think, he emphasizes that whatever importance narrative has is subordinate to the importance of science. One might recall the extensive effort Lyotard made to argue for the delegitimation of the grand Narratives, an effort that seemed at the time directed to taking away whatever power narrative once held. One might also recall how he leads into the discussion of performativity, basing its method of argumentation on scientific principles curiously similar to the narrative principles he had just dismissed, but, more importantly, principles that seemed more valid because they were scientific, not narrative.

The rhetorical structures of the book also emphasize this opposition. As I've most recently suggested, when Lyotard is examining the postmodern world, and especially when he is presenting the new scientific basis for legitimation,
he does so using a technique that corresponds to his discussion of the pragmatics of science: cross-cutting examples, little stories, verifiable proof. When he discusses the classical and modern worlds, though, he uses a more narrative structure, emphasizing elements of what comes first, second, third. He is also much more vague, offering many fewer examples. When discussing the structure of the grand narratives, Lyotard does provide some examples, but to a certain extent, these examples emphasize major cultural prejudices (French emancipation versus German speculation) that could be the themes of the traditional narratives of these two peoples.

One might even detect Lyotard's highly critical view of narration from his introductory chapters on the pragmatics of narrative and scientific knowledge, chapters six and seven. Although narrative comes first (a potentially powerful position), Lyotard does not discuss it with nearly the amount of detail he uses in the section on science. Also, in the section on science, he sets up a comparison/contrast between narration and science, an opposition that seems to emphasize what narration lacks, and what science has. One should also consider what he says about narration. Earlier, I examined his points, so I won't repeat them all here, but recall that his view of narration revolves around the pragmatic posts of language games (the sender, the receiver, the referent), and that much of Lyotard's discussion focuses on the traditional narrative structure (of the Cashinahua).

At the time I discussed these features, I treated them fairly straightforwardly, but consider this, now: these are not "typical" or even the only ways to approach narrative. Lyotard does establish his method as that of "language games," so he asserts his right to refer to narrative in his way (but notice that in his establishing this method he is also asserting his own locally
consistent, scientific set of prescriptions). However, he might have chosen other methods of local consensus. Most narratives that most people know (and that most scholars of narrative in literature departments study) are not of the order of the Cashinahua. These modern narratives are "print-based," not oral, so they do not necessarily have the "remembering" quality of these older stories. Further, one may approach narrative from other positions than those of senders, receivers, and referents. Other scholars on narrative look at such seemingly common-place but rich features as plot, theme, characterization, setting, and so on, or at the different genres of narrative, the novels, and stories, and narrative poems, and autobiographies what provide structures to narratives. One could also imagine other methods to examine narrative structures, such as Barthes' series of codes in S/Z.

However, from his right as a representative of local consensus, Lyotard does not take such positions. As a result, his examination of narrative is flat compared to his discussion of science. Science seems, quite simply, more interesting and more complicated.

I've overlooked one of the most intriguing aspects of the tensions between science and narration—until now. This is the relation of science and narration to the alleged topic of The Postmodern Condition: knowledge. When Lyotard opens the text of The Postmodern Condition, he seems to be talking about knowledge, all knowledge, in general; one should recall his hypothesis: "... the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age ...". However, by the second paragraph of the text an odd substitution has occurred. Instead of referring to all of knowledge, Lyotard has divided the field; he mentions that "Scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse." From this point on in this chapter, Lyotard
has created the possibility that his reader will assume (making that dreaded presupposition!) that when Lyotard says "knowledge," he means "science." Only in chapter two, after he has established the "field" or topic does he mention narration. When he does so, he emphasizes that scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative in the interests of simplicity (its characteristics will be described later). I do not mean to say that narrative knowledge can prevail over science, but its model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium and conviviality next to which contemporary scientific knowledge cuts a poor figure.

(PMC 7)

At this point, Lyotard doesn't make narrative take the dominant role ("I do not mean to say that narrative knowledge can prevail over science") but he does imply it has a strength that science lacks: "its [narrative's] model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium and conviviality next to which contemporary scientific knowledge cuts a poor figure." Later, at the end of chapter seven, after examining narrative's characteristics in the cursory way I suggested above and examining science's in more detail, Lyotard suggests that each of these two forms of knowledge is crucial: "the former's [i.e. narrative's] existence is no more—and no less—necessary than the latter's [that of science]" (PMC 26).

What should one make of this treatment of narration and science? If one views the two forms of knowledge as in conflict, then one can see Lyotard's treatment of them as his way of orchestrating the battles. His introduction of the two suggests that he favors science, by mentioning it first and allowing it to seem to substitute for all of knowledge, and by allowing it to triumph in the form
of paralogy. This prejudice leads to the sketchy treatment of narrative, for Lyotard does not want it to assert its full power within his text. By presenting it as most powerful in a decrepit system and by constructing his discussion of that system in a narrative to re-emphasize its decrepitude, Lyotard emphasizes narrative's marginal position. Science's ability to take the place of narrative is then realized when Lyotard starts discussing logic, for the history he recounts of logic is curiously like the history he had just told about speculation, only now couched in a network of scientific terms. When he comes to the position of including elements of narrative in his new scientific-based system, he seems to be a defender of narrative, but he may also be seen as having found a way to deflect and control narrative: it is useful, seemingly most important, but only in the ways that the tendencies of science dictate.

One may view paralogy as a new legitimation system for science and as a way to relegate narrative to an inferior position, possibly relieving the anxiety felt by science.

The Legitimation of Society and the Power of Technology

After Lyotard explains, briefly, the form legitimation of science through paralogy would take, he shifts to the problem of society, questioning what is the relationship between the antimodel of the pragmatics of science and society? Is it applicable to the vast clouds of language material constituting a society? Or is it limited to the game of learning? And if so, what role does it play with respect to the social bond? Is it an impossible ideal of an open community? (PMC 64)
Lyotard addresses these and other questions, by shifting, as he has done earlier, to the realm of language games. Although science has classically depended on denotative statements, "its postmodern development brings a decisive 'fact' to the fore: even discussions of denotative statements need to have rules. Rules are not denotative but prescriptive utterances, which we are better off calling metaprescriptive utterances to avoid confusion. . ." (PMC 65). What is the value of these metaprescriptions for society?

Lyotard answers this question by first referring to how society is a "monster formed by the interweaving of various networks of heteromorphic classes of utterances (denotative, prescriptive, performative, technical, evaluative, etc.)"(PMC 65). Thus, Lyotard argues for the complication involved in determining the "metaprescriptives" that could organize the social game, in the process providing it legitimacy:

There is no reason to think that it would be possible to determine metaprescriptives common to all of these language games or that a revisable consensus like the one in force at a given moment in the scientific community could embrace the totality of metaprescriptions regulating the totality of statements circulating in the social collectivity. (PMC 65)

Lyotard thus uses two trends of his overall argument to suggest that a performativity-based legitimation structure is illegitimate here: first, that the conscious creation of rules widens the possible number of statements in the argumentation process, and second, that the social set of statements is even wider and wilder than the scientific set, making any pretence of overall consensus illogical and unsupported.
As a result, Lyotard argues that "consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value," implying that society is legitimated by the activity occurring in its language games, activity creating new prescriptions legitimating and guiding shifting, changing aspects of its existence. However, Lyotard does not just leave this application of paralogy for society here. Instead, he suggests a means for this activity to occur, a means that raises issues as strained, though, as are those between science and narration.

Lyotard follows his condemnation of "consensus" with a statement of praise for "justice":

But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus. (PMC 66)

Justice could come from several directions. One direction is "the heteromorphous nature of language games" that lead to a "renunciation of terror" because they deny leaders the kind of control they would need to impose terror—or performativity—on the populace. Another direction is the focus on local consensus, to ensure that the "present players" have created the rules that guide them. Lyotard suggests that this "temporary contract" is "supplanting permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family, and international domains, as well as in political affairs" (PMC 66). Because of these two tendencies, a third direction appears: "knowledge of language games as such and the decision to assume responsibility for their rules and effects" (PMC 66).

From these two directions, Lyotard leads to his final points about the ways in which "computerization of society" affects these directions. Unlike performativity's view of computers as "'dream' machines for "controlling and
regulating the market system," possibility leading to terror, computerization could "aid groups discussing metaprescriptives by supplying them with the information they usually lack for making knowledgeable decisions." Thus, they would be in better positions to control their lives, because they would be better able to make the prescriptions that guide their language games.

How, though, would these benefits of computerization follow? From the following crucial direction:

The line to follow for computerization to take the second of these two paths is, in principle, quite simple: give the public free access to the memory and data banks. Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment. But they would also be non-zero-sum games, and by virtue of that fact discussion would never risk fixating in a position of minimax equilibrium because it had exhausted its stakes. For the stakes would be knowledge (or information, if you will), and the reserve of knowledge—language's reserve of possible utterances—is inexhaustible. (PMC 67)

This passage is crucial, and complicated, for it suggests that computers will enhance the tendencies of paralogical language games—the need for "free access" and local conditions "at any given moment," without focussing on ultimate points ("non-zero-sum games") and without trying to establish universal metalanguages ("never risk fixating in a position of minimax equilibrium because it had exhausted its stakes").

However, Lyotard's argument about computerization contains one oddity, best expressed by the line "Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment." Although this statement implies that local
conditions exist, it uses the term "perfect information," a term associated with performance theory, earlier. "Perfect information" is the kind of controlled information that the technical criterion seemed to promise. Its presence here raises the issue that ultimately, as a legitimating apparatus for society in the age of paralogy, Lyotard is relying on technology. One can argue that from the brief way that he has expressed the idea, technology seems to function with positive connotations; it allows the free-floating language games to float through the computer, allowing users—students, teachers, rule makers, etc.—to have better information with which to make decisions.

Still, Lyotard has spent a fair amount of effort connecting technology to a principle that he later refutes, performativity. Technology, one might recall, was in a sense the very source of performativity. It implied efficiency, and from a performativity point of view, truth and justice as well. I've noted that even though Lyotard dismisses the performativity apparatus, technology seems to escape the net of criticism. Thus, Lyotard is able to drop it in as the capstone of the paralogical non-system system; it promises the "performance" necessary to allow groups to be more efficient in their locally-controlled search for prescriptions. Technology would thus work against old notions of itself, leading to a situation that would "respect the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown," the last line of The Postmodern Condition (PMC 67).

One must question, though, how this role of technology is possible. Is it not possible that technology could impede the discussion of local prescriptions? Could not technology lead to controlling effects that would deny the heteromorphous nature of the language games? Further, how would technology relate to and coexist with these language games? Although Lyotard talks of the language game of technology, it is a game that is different from the
games of denotation and prescription. How would the play of language fit within a technological structure?

Lyotard does not answer such questions, for his process is one of sketching possibilities, of writing a report. These questions are, though, addressed when one examines how computers are used to constitute a course, when we turn to the next chapters.
CHAPTER 6: COMPOSITION THEORY: STRUCTURES AND STORIES

The reader may recall that I approached the previous chapters on Lyotard through the loose analogy that I was using both narrative and scientific structures, that I was both re-telling Lyotard in his way (especially in my third chapter) and analyzing him in my way (especially in my fourth and fifth chapters). Part of the value of this analogy, I thought, was that it would allow me to elucidate Lyotard's themes by presenting them in a way sympathetic to the methods he uses to present them. At the risk of scandalizing the reader, as Lyotard might say,¹ I would like to present another analogy, one more in keeping with some of my more imaginative examples in these chapters. Let's say this then: that the previous chapters form . . . a fork.

One prong of this metaphorical fork is plunged into Lyotard's arguments about the vast changes in legitimation that western, industrialized nations have faced; that is the prong that he would recognize, perhaps the only one he would see, for it forms the surface text of *The Postmodern Condition*. If Lyotard would accept using my cutlery metaphor, he would most likely modify it. He might, in fact, argue that the text is more of . . . , say, . . . a knife, a much more powerful, much more direct, much more singular article of tableware.

However, the fork metaphor is still possible, for throughout my "narration" of Lyotard a certain amount of "analysis" has emphasized two more prongs as constituting this fork of the text. One prong is plunged into narration, a feature of the pre-postmodern world that Lyotard both tries to banish (as a force of legitimation) and resurrect (as a tool of scientific argumentation in his new world

¹ Chapter 14, paragraph 9, sentence 1, *The Postmodern Condition*. 
of paralogy). This narration prong would emphasize that narration is still around and is still potentially powerful. Another prong would spear technology, a topic that seems to Lyotard to be able to ward off all spears, for although part of what it supports, the whole notion of performativity, is found to be discredited and terrorist by Lyotard, somehow technology remains un-besmirched.

I use this fork metaphor for more than just humor. It allows, I hope, a way to see the complications of the text, for although Lyotard presents his main argument with power and authority, he does not fully dispense with narration or, for that matter, fully support technology. The continued role of narration and the possible problems within technology are thus issues that still need to be considered—and there lies the focus of the rest of this dissertation.

The fork metaphor is also useful because, often, forks are parts of sets of forks, sets that are in the same pattern. So is the case here, for to show how Lyotard's notions of narration and technology are complicated and problematical, I would like to present three more forks in the following chapters. One spears composition, a field with a long history, part of which I will examine as I look at a complicated set of present issues. The next fork focuses on the use of computers to teach writing. This is a field that is not as old as composition, but it does reflect similar problems and concerns. The third fork? Well, that one is formed by the data of one writing class taught through a network. This fork may seem, compared to these other subjects, different, even less valuable and less significant, as if they are sterling and it is stainless. However, this fork holds its own by emphasizing trends and tendencies that the others exhibit as well.

Before I leave this fork metaphor forever, let me emphasize its importance just one more time. In each of the fields I'm approaching, I'm
looking, really, at different versions of the same topics. The fork metaphor helps here, I think, for each field spear[s] the same three concerns: the structure of legitimation, the issue of narration, and the use of technology. Some of these concerns are more important for some of the fields than for others, but as we approach the final field, that of the class, we'll see that they provide a useful way of understanding how Lyotard's text and composition theory intersect, and more specifically how the data from this class can present complimentary evidence to corroborate the problems and issues I've already argued as present in *The Postmodern Condition*.

**Composition: Legitimation Strategies**

When one turns from *The Postmodern Condition* to composition, especially to its recent history, one notices a striking parallel in terms of the history that *The Postmodern Condition* and composition theory each reflect. *The Postmodern Condition*, of course, examines a series of legitimation strategies. With three of these strategies, the two narratives and the performativity criterion, Lyotard cites sources that suggest that various other experts (besides him) view these as legitimating strategies also. The emancipation and speculative narratives have long-range, documentable, *citable* historical data on their side, and Lyotard connects performativity to the ideas of Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. Lyotard's final theory, that of paralogy, is "proven" through scientific data, but the theory seems to originate (in a sense) from Lyotard's own interpretation of the previous strategies—although it is a theory that brings to mind ideas of other poststructuralist philosophers, such as Derrida or Foucault in its rejection of strict senses of efficiency.
One may approach composition theory from three perspectives as well, corresponding to the three versions of rhetoric that have dominated composition in the last century: classical rhetoric, modern rhetoric, and collaborative learning. These three pedagogies are loosely tied to historical periods, but just as the legitimation strategies seemed to overlap, these rhetorics have also been valid at the same time. Further, just as Lyotard's strategies contained elements of each other (even if the terminology Lyotard used to describe them differed), these rhetorics may seem to blur into each other. For example, classical and modern rhetoric put emphasis on the singular act of creation, while modern and collaborative rhetoric focus on the writing process. This blurring of times and focal points may be illustrated by a personal example. I have taught composition for about eight years at Houston Community College, a school which has, in the past, mandated a "standard syllabus" for freshman composition courses. This syllabus was created by a committee and then revised and revised (once even by me). As a result, the composition courses have become melting pots, blending elements of these three methods. Further, we have adopted textbooks that have this blending effect also.

Still, although these rhetorics may seem to blend, they are actually separate entities. Because understanding their features will help understand the effects of teaching over a network, we need to examine them, even briefly.

**Classical Rhetoric**

One might view classical rhetoric from the brief perspective suggested by Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede in their essay "On Distinctions between Classical and Modern Rhetoric." Classical rhetoric is, of course, much more
complicated, as these authors acknowledge, but for the purpose of this
dissertation, the following survey is useful.

First, a classical rhetorician would view man as a "rational animal" who
dealt with problems of the world primarily through logic or reason and who lived
during a time characterized by stable values, social cohesion, and unified
cultural ideals" (Lunsford and Ede 38). Because of this focus on reason,
classical rhetoric also relies on "logical argument—deductive reasoning in
particular" (Young, Becker, and Pike 6). Along with this use of logic would come
a resulting focus on persuading adversaries. Thus, the writer would focus
"manipulative, antagonistic, one-way or unidirectional communication" towards
this potentially adversarial audience (Lunsford and Ede 39, 38), leading to what
I.A. Richards has called "the theory of the battle of words . . . dominated by the
combative impulse" (qtd. in Lunsford and Ede 39).

In the introduction to their Rhetoric: Discovery and Change, an important
textbook of modern rhetoric, Young, Becker, and Pike suggest that there is (at
least in 1970) "The Need for a New Rhetoric" due to the changing forms of
communication and changing value-structures, leading to the requirement for "a
rhetoric that has as its goal not skillful verbal coercion but discussion and
exchange of ideas" (8).

Of all of Lyotard's legitimation strategies, classical rhetoric seems at least
mildly close to the speculative narrative (though I do not want to push this point),
both in its features and in its "delegitimation." The speculative apparatus
required a hierarchy that differentiated "positive knowledge" of specific subjects
from the more superior level of "speculative knowledge" of the relationship of all
subjects. Such a hierarchy provides a sense of order to the realm of
knowledge—all (that matters, that is) fits together neatly. Classical logic
similarly suggests order—order between relationships, order in society, order even in the positions of opponents. Such order leads to the rules and regulations of classical rhetoric governing such topics as methods of invention and structures of proof (including deductive syllogisms). Further, just as speculation was deemed delegitimate from the language games that framed it with assumptions, classical rhetoric was affected by rapid changes in society and communication.

**Modern Rhetoric (and Current-Traditional Rhetoric)**

Lunsford and Ede's contrast of classical and modern rhetoric also suggests crucial features of modern rhetoric. Man in this system is a "rhetorical" or 'symbol-using' or 'communal' animal who constitutes the world through shared and private symbols." As a result, this rhetoric "stresses emotional (or psychological) proofs." Further, the "new rhetoric" emphasizes a "cooperative relationship" between writer and reader, "one based upon "empathy, understanding, mutual trust, and two-way or 'dialogic' communication" (Lunsford and Ede 38). Thus, instead of considering how to persuade hardy rivals, this rhetoric focuses on communicating to one's listeners (Lunsford and Ede 39).

Young, Becker, and Pike position this rhetoric as different from both the classical rhetoric and from what they call "a much less systematic and sophisticated approach" of the nineteenth century, an approach concerned with "language rather than content—on matters such as clarity of statement, emphasis, coherence, and correct usage" (5). This "new" rhetoric embraces a new focus on understanding potential readers and the process through which
one contributes to these readers: ". . . the discipline of rhetoric is primarily concerned with the control of a process. Mastering rhetoric means not only mastering a theory of how and why one communicates but mastering the process of communication as well" (Young, Becker, and Pike 9). Linda Flower has extended the notion of the importance of this process and of the reader by arguing for an understanding of the difference between what she labels "Reader-Based" and "Writer-Based" prose:

    Reader-Based prose reflects the *purpose* of the writer's thought; Writer-Based prose tends to reflect its *process*. Good writing, therefore, is often the cognitively demanding transformation of the natural but private expressions of Writer-Based thought into a structure and style adapted to a reader. (20)

Such a transformation would mostly also occur through a series of stages, labeled various ways by various authors. Linda Flower in her *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writers* suggests five recursive stages. Young, Becker, and Pike suggest that the stages would include "Preparation," "Verification," and "Editing" (xvii-xx). Other theorists might address the process as "pre-writing," "articulation," and "post-writing" (Gebhardt 620). Whatever the labels or the number of stages, the point is this: a writer should consider the importance of the stages and should not view writing as merely determining a thesis and presenting an argument following already determined rules.

    Sharon Crowley, in her deconstructive reading of what she calls "current-traditional rhetoric," seems to collapse this "new rhetoric" with the "less sophisticated" rhetoric of the nineteenth century, mentioned above. In fact, she both quotes Richard Young (of Young, Becker, and Pike) about the features of "current-traditional" rhetoric—"the analysis of discourse into words, sentences
and paragraphs . . . the strong concern with syntax . . . and with style" (Methodical 13) and refers to Young, Becker, and Pike's Rhetoric: Discovery and Change as part of this same movement (Methodical 181).

Whether the movements are connected or separate, for our purposes, Crowley's arguments lead to explanations of how "modern rhetoric" seems to have become "delegitimate" as a writing pedagogy, at least to some observers. Crowley argues that "the current-traditional theory of invention usurps students' authority over their discourse" by both suggesting to them the importance of understanding process and stages and recognizing their readers but then denying to them the full range of writing choices such recognition might lead them to find. As a result, although "modern thought subscribed to the notion that discourse is self-authorizing; that is the very existence of a well-formed discourse was supposed to validate its writer's claims to have discovered something about the world," students are much more contained and controlled in their possibilities (Methodical 150-151). This kind of system is one that "privileg[es]. . . a single authorial mind, rather than community wisdom"; it thus leads to "intellectual poverty . . . stand[ing] in for writing . . . shift[ing] discursive authority away from students and onto the academy" and the sense of how its authorial mind would read the rules (Methodical 12 & 13).

The issue of "control" might be viewed two ways here. One might recall the phrase "the control of a process" in an earlier quotation from Young, Becker, and Pike. There is the sense here that "control" suggests that a writer will be able to use the process to his or her advantage; however, as Crowley suggests, that "control" also controls the writer, allowing him or her only aspects of all the possible processes available. Robert Brooke, in an article examining the issue of control in Linda Flower's work from a Derridian perspective, suggests the
need for a "reconsideration of 'control' as the guiding metaphor for our field" (406). He argues that "the explicit rhetorical purpose" of Flower's "texts is to help teachers and students 'control' their writing processes, yet the processes she describes are dynamically beyond 'control'" (407). Thus, the promises of this modern rhetoric may seem to be paradoxes, for they are not fully realizable choices. Richard Gebhardt gives another view of this paradoxical view of process when he suggests that "the very presence of contradictory, partial formulations—each presented as a theory of the whole writing process—suggests that our field lacks unity. It also lets teachers choose descriptions of the writing process that fit their personal experiences and biases, and teach them to students as if they were the truth about writing" (624).

The focus on writing as a form of liberation, as writers try to understand readers and communicate to them and as writers divide their tasks into series of more manageable stages, does have some affinity to the emancipation narrative of legitimation, in the sense that this process seems designed to free writers from past, more rigid constraints. However, one should notice that the same sense of paradoxical inconsistency that delegitimated the narratives is at work. The message is something like this—one should experiment, but not too much; one should use the theory to control all possible actions, as the theory controls the possible choices in a much more threatening sense.
Collaborative Learning

Within the last ten years, a third form of rhetoric has appeared, one that addresses the solitary aspect of writing in either the classical or modern forms. This rhetoric shifts the focus from the writer to the community to which he belongs. Kenneth Bruffee, a leading spokesperson for this rhetoric, suggests its different directions by posing the following questions:

How would practical rhetoric look if we assumed that writer and reader were not adversaries but partners in a common, community-based enterprise? How would it look if we no longer assumed that people write to persuade or to distinguish themselves and their points of view and to enhance their own individuality by gaining the acquiescence of other individuals? How would it look if we assumed instead that people write for the very opposite reason: that people write in order to be accepted, to join, to be regarded as another member of the culture or community that constitutes the writer's audience? ("Collaborative" 651)

Collaborative learning flows from this notion of a community and the related "social construction" of one's knowledge based on a "consensus arrived at for the time being by communities of knowledgeable peers" (Bruffee, "Social" 777). These peers converse with each other either in conversation or in "a technologically displaced form of conversation," writing (Bruffee, "Collaborative" 641). Through these conversations, writers explore the parameters of their groups, developing their ideas and refining their skills.

Collaborative learning is especially important for this dissertation because, time after time, it is the theory that is emphasized by writers discussing
the use of computers to teach writing. Articles with titles such as "Computer Conferencing and Collaborative Learning: A Discourse Community at Work" (Schiriner and Rice 1989) and the collection of essays in *Computers and Community* (ed. Handa, 1990) suggest how important collaborative learning has become to composition and computer theory. Why? Partly because computers allow writers to correspond in writing, making this notion of "displaced conversation" the main form of conversation.

To see some potential problems in this use of collaborative learning, we need to trace its operation in other fields briefly. Collaborative learning may be said to derive from several sources, dating from as early the 1960's, when M.L.J. Abercrombie published her findings of how medical diagnosis, "the art of medical judgment and the key element in successful medical practice, is better learned in small groups of students arriving at diagnoses collaboratively than it is learned by students working individually" (Bruffee, "Collaborative" 636). Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of the Scientific Revolution* is another main source. Bruffee fits Kuhn into collaborative learning by suggesting that to Kuhn Knowledge is identical with the symbol system (i.e. the language) in which it is formulated. The community of knowledgeable peers constituted by that symbol system constructs knowledge by justifying it socially, that is, by arriving at a sort of consensus. Knowledge ceases to be knowledge when the community disbands or its members die. (emphasis added) ("Social" 779).

Looking at the field of literature, one notices a similar voice in Stanley Fish's argument for the importance of "Interpretive Communities" in *Is There a Text in This Class?*. 
In each of these other fields, collaboration operates within a realm, to some extent, of experts or at least of their trained apprentices. These experts must, to use the sort of language Lyotard uses in *The Postmodern Condition*, rely on the language games that surround them, to reach a sense of local consensus. They thus seem to be poised in the postmodern language, social, and knowledge conditions that Lyotard presents. The question then, from Lyotard's perspective, is whether the system that collaborative learning and the social construction of knowledge create is one of performativity or of paralogy? Is the goal the very local moments of local consensus (paralogy) or is there a goal for control, from a "vanguard machine dragging humanity after it" (performativity)?

In a sense, both are possible. Further, this choice between the two ways to view collaboration will be important when we turn to teaching with computers, for there the problems that a performativity version of collaboration lead into are possibly more pronounced.

To see some of these problems, we need to turn to how collaboration came to be presented as an attractive theory of teaching writing. Both Kenneth Bruffee and John Trimbur refer to the increased numbers of poorly-prepared students who entered American universities in the early 1970's. These students had "not learned the behaviors expected of students in traditional educational systems" (Trimbur 90); some of these students had been "poorly prepared" for college, but many of them "had on paper excellent secondary preparation." Still, they seemed unable to practice the "traditional or 'normal' conventions of the college classroom" ("Collaborative" 637). Collaborative learning, with promises of bridging groups as they engaged in "social construction" of
knowledge or participated in "interpretive communities," seemed a possible solution to these structural problems.

These students needed what Bruffee (and Richard Rorty before him) call "normal discourse," here the language of academia, the language their professors would expect their students to write. Normal discourse is supported by a "social context" of educated peers reading and sharing each other's work; thus, collaborative learning suggested a way to bridge students into this discourse. The problem, though, was this: these students, although arguably peers of each other, were not peers of the guardians of "normal discourse." Although they could participate in a "discourse community" when they collaborated with their peers, they would not be participating in the "discourse community" that actually supports "normal discourse."

Bruffee argues that such students would be able to "pool" the resources that they bring from the various discourse communities to which they already belong ("from canoeing to computers, baseball to ballet"). Each of these individual communities may not form an effective bridge by itself to the normal discourse of academia, but together, something such as the following happens:

... pooling the resources that a group of peers brings with them to the task may make accessible the normal discourse of the new community they together hope to enter. Students are especially likely to be able to master that discourse collaboratively if their conversation is structured indirectly by the task or problem that a member of that new community (the teacher) has judiciously designed. ("Collaborative" 644)

Thus, through the judicious assistance of the teacher, the collaborative groups previously without a voice in normal discourse learn how to create one.
It's here that the issue of control raises its head again, for this "judiciously
designed" task is also a controlling mechanism. Bruffee's textbook on
collaboration, *A Short Course in Writing*, suggests that if students are unable to
achieve consensus, they need to be assisted by the teacher serving as
"referee." Giving an example of an exercise that asks students to find words
within a paragraph that connect to each other (a feature, of course, of the "good"
writing of normal, academic discourse), Bruffee suggests the following
procedure if students are unable to reach consensus, here unable to determine
these connecting words. After the various groups involved in this task have
presented their findings,

. . . the teacher could assume that the students who were unable to
find any connecting words would have already learned something
about connecting words from the students who were able to find
some. So the teacher could begin to referee a discussion
that organized the groups' discoveries in a more orderly
way and that helped students see that some of the words they
discovered do make connections (verbs and subordinate
conjunctions), but within sentences, not to other sentences that
precede or follow. The teacher could represent the larger
community of writers by telling the class that good
writers use connecting words all the time to make their
paragraphs hold together. (emphasis added) (*Short* 17)

The rules allow for discussion and for the consensus of peers to rule, but in the
classroom, the consensus of the students' peer groups is not what ultimately
matters; their consensus is superseded by the consensus of the more
knowledgeable peer group to which the teacher belongs.
The importance of control in a collaborative learning environment seems best emphasized by Harvey Wiener's argument in his article "Collaborative Learning: A Guide to Evaluation." Wiener approaches the topic from the perspective of a supervisor who is required to evaluate a teacher's performance. When a teacher is using collaborative techniques, he might even "read . . . papers or . . . leave . . . the class during small group discussions" (58). However, such a teacher may be evaluated by how he has set up the collaborative environment: what instructions he has provided, how he has divided the task to be accomplished, what the goals of the activity are, etc.

I realize that in criticizing the notion of control in education I am trampling on fairly sacred ground. The obvious argument for control might be something like this: without it a classroom would be a scene of anarchy, and no learning would occur. And—I would view that argument as reasonable. After all, I'm talking about teaching, not personal conversations in which control is, perhaps, less crucial as a tool of social regulation. Lyotard suggests that personal communication can be constituted from "questions, requests, assertions, and narratives . . . launched pell-mell into battle. The war is not without rules, but the rules allow and encourage the greatest flexibility of utterance" (PMC 17). Conversations as part of the teaching environment would more likely "always require. . . supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its bounds" (PMC 17). Further, "Bureaucratization is the outer limit of this tendency" (PMC 17).

What I do find interesting, though, in the theory of collaboration and in the constraints that it establishes, is that one may criticize it from a similar perspective to that used by Sharon Crowley when she criticizes current-traditional rhetoric. The collaborative system sets the discourse community of
peers as the emphasized position (just as the authorial voice or the individual writer would be privileged in classical and modern rhetoric). However, this position is simply not emphasize-able enough, for there is a superior position, the better peer (better because he belongs to a better peer group of teachers and scholars and insiders)—the teacher. Just as current-traditional rhetoric could lead to a denial of the voice of the individual student writer, collaborative learning could lead to a denial of the collective power of the collaborative group, or could lead to a false emphasis on the importance of consensus, at whatever cost. John Trimbur, when talking about the rise of collaborative theory, cites it as an "alternative to bureaucratized educational institutions" (93); within collaborative theory, though, lie seeds of bureaucracy as well.

Thus, collaborative theory, as a policy to be enacted in classrooms, a policy designed to encourage students to assist each other reach consensus, but with a referee to guide them to the desired consensus if dissent is in the air, may be seen as following similar lines to the performativity criterion. Both systems rely on language games for their fuel, but both praise consensus. Both also praise performance and efficiency of the system. Several times in his "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing," John Trimbur refers to collaboration (and its sources and its effects) from a perspective of performance enhancement. For example, he cites the value of "feedback," "a term drawn from cybernetics, information science, and systems theory" (97) and he quotes Mina Shaughnessy's reference to the inefficiency of inexperienced writers ("the rate at which they reach closure upon a point"), an inefficiency that Trimbur suggests collaboration can help eliminate (qtd. in Trimbur 98).
Thus, when reading a statement such as the following from Kenneth Bruffee, one begins to see collaboration in less of an alive, active, giving light, and more in a controlling vein. Bruffee suggests that collaboration involves demonstrating that they know something only when they can explain it in writing to the satisfaction of the community of their knowledgeable peers. To teach this way, in turn, seems to require us to engage students in collaborative work that does not just reinforce the values and skills they begin with, but that promotes a sort of reacceptation. (emphasis added) ("Collaborative" 652)

Although these students might write to peers, aspects of collaborative learning suggest the presence of even more knowledgeable peers. The word "reacceptation" is a packed term. As it seems to be intended (a risky supposition, yes), it seems to refer to the integration of students into the social order they aspire to join—a good thing. However, it can be read more ominously, as a result that stifles the volleying of groups, locking participants into the same old academic structure, in effect leaving collaborative rhetoric in a position similar to classical, modern, and current-traditional rhetoric.

Composition: Narration (and Technology)

In the introduction of this chapter, I suggested that I would also discuss the issues of narration and technology in relation to composition theory. Well, I was both being truthful and not so truthful, for although both topics are important, I am about to favor one, narration, at the expense of the other. The reason lies in two areas.
First, there is the actual issue of technology as it applies to composition instruction. Whether one follows classical, modern, or collaborative theory, or practices them all at once in a show of contradictory bravado, there is one unifying feature in traditional education: the classroom. Courses occur in these spaces. For the students, such spaces contain desks, or tables, or—in really swell environments—padded, theater-style seating. The teacher’s position may vary also, but in the classroom, he preserves the right to sit or stand at the front of the class. Such a position has affected the architecture of classrooms around the world, for whether there is an actual platform, or a lectern, or a special, grander desk at the front of the room, and whether the room is flat or constructed like an amphitheater, the teacher has a powerful position.

Even in collaborative classrooms, in which a teacher might be absencing himself from this focal point, he would still retain it, for most likely he would be teaching in a room that has been constructed under the assumption of the importance of such a focal point. As the students would leave this class and go to their next one, they might encounter other teachers at the front of other rooms down the hall. Students have watched teachers operating at the front of classrooms since they entered kindergarten; they are unlikely to wipe out such memories after having a collaborative experience (especially one in which the teacher from time to time exerts his control as referee).

This positioning of people, furniture, and architecture is one way to view the technology of education, in Lyotard’s sense of technology as a prosthetic device. Technology aids teachers in presenting themselves as their teacherly authorities. That’s why the desk at the front is so powerful—a teacher sitting third row back, second seat in, or sitting way in the back would not a teacherly teacher make. I’m reminded of conversation I had with a fellow teacher about a
room with no windows. She loathed teaching in this room; the lack of sunlight made talking and thinking there tedious. I, on the other hand, loved the room. It helped emphasize me, for there were no trees, no cars, no future loved ones walking outside. The students had no choice but to look at me. In both cases, though, we are talking about an element of technology—the man-made tools that help us perform our job with more efficiency.

Of course, I'm neglecting all of the smaller bits of technology, the chalk and blackboards, the staplers, paper-clips, "post-it" notes, the textbooks, workbooks, and xeroxed essays we examine in class. All of these objects—and more to even more imaginative, dedicated teachers (video players, stereos, pictures, etc.)—are forms of technology in the sense I'm discussing. I will admit to slighting this area, for it's an area that is quite complicated. For our purposes now, though, the reference to the classroom and its paraphernalia is enough, for this is the area of educational technology that computers change, sometimes dramatically.

However, the second reason I'm just touching on technology and focusing the rest of this chapter on narration is because narration is, I think, just much more interesting for this topic. Previously, I've talked about composition theory as if it were composed just of discrete theories of rhetoric, as different language games connecting writers, readers, and topics. However, much written about composition forms—or seems to form—a narrative. The rest of this chapter will provide examples to suggest that narrative is still a potent force.

One should recall, of course, that Lyotard consigned narrative to merely a supplementary position as a source for the "new stories" that allow for continued scientific debate. Narration for Lyotard is a language game that both supports science (if its hypotheses are judged reasonable) or is abandoned for
new language games (if its evidence is judged specious). Lyotard suggests that narration still may seem to have power as a legitimating factor only in the "crude" stories of scientists when they announce new discoveries "on television or are interviewed in the newspapers" (PMC 27). Although these narratives of discovery may seem to provide meaning and significance to what scientists are about to relate, Lyotard suggests that the real effort of legitimation is carried on elsewhere, in performative or paralogical activities.

When one looks at the ways theorists discuss composition, and teaching generally, it is clear that they use narrative means, in the sense that they create the roles of "sender," "addressee," and "hero," as they tell how students and teachers act in various situations. At the same time, though, these stories also seem to have at least some of the power of the old legitimation narratives, for they establish structures that explain, elucidate, and empower the narrative roles. In the examples that follow, the writers have created narratives that help to justify or legitimate the ideas that they want their readers to believe.

**Jane Tompkins' Narrative of Liberation**

One of the most vivid pieces of narration as legitimation published in recent criticism about teaching has been Jane Tompkins' "Pedagogy of the Distressed." Although her specific topic is teaching literature, the method she discusses is applicable to the teaching of composition, and, further, it raises issues that are often raised in composition studies. Tompkins proposes an altered view of what the teacher's role might be, and in the process, she tells a narrative of liberation and emancipation. The hero of the story is the burdened
teacher, afflicted with the "performance model" of teaching, a model that is "coercive," and "destructive of creativity and self-motivated learning" (654). This model and the system that has produced it are, in a sense, the villains in Tompkins' piece, for they thwart the freedom that the teacher aspires to experience. How? By playing on deep-seated, childhood needs and fears (what villainy!): performing teachers were once performing children who used performance to cover up their childish desires and wishes. Now, the teacher exists in an evil kingdom (my word, not Tompkins', but appropriate I think) in which

Having covered up our true childish selves, we have ever since been afraid of being revealed as the unruly beings we actually are. Fear of exposure, of being found out, does not have its basis in any real inadequacies either of knowledge or intelligence on our part; but rather in the performance model itself which, in separating our behavior from what we really felt, created a kind of false self. (654)

The performance model, in terms of the fairy tale language I'm using to describe this article, could also be an enchanted, mysterious, evil forest or a drippy dungeon that keeps the hero-teacher denies from the true self.

Tompkins, as rabble-rouser, sounds a cry of liberation in her presentation of her own way of overcoming these chains of oppression: she gave up the performance model, bringing another cast of characters into the narration, the students. Now, the students are the performers, but almost in an enchanted way in this article, they are not victimized by performance. No, they relish it: "The students have more to say in every class, more students take part in the discussions, students talk more to each other and less to me, and the intensity
and quality of their engagement with the course materials is higher than usual" (657).

Tompkins now assumes the voice of the newly liberated teacher-hero. Is she free? Yes! Is she more productive? Yes, generally. Are her classes improved? Yes—but improvement carries with it new complications. At times, days in the classroom lead her into spells of sickness—"migraines after every class before long . . . huge misunderstandings, factions, discussions at cross purposes, floundering, a sense of incoherence, everything that one might have feared" (659). At the same time, the evil structure of the performance model also continues to exert its spell; the teacher-hero also feels "guilty about this. Partly because somewhere along the way [i.e. the path of her teacherly journey] I got the idea that only back-breaking work should produce good results" (657). It is almost as if another past source of oppression, the Puritan work ethic, with another narrative of legitimation, has complicated the scene further.

However, overall, the experience also produces "the most exciting class I've ever been in"; here, the teacher-hero has a new role, that of citizen participant in a class led by student-teachers. The results? Tompkins paints them as follows: "Apart from a series of stunning self-revelations, wonderful readings added to the reading list by the students, and reports whose trajectory came as a total surprise, we were led, as a class, by various reporting groups into role-playing, picture drawing, and even on one occasion into participating in a religious ceremony" (659). Tompkins refers to "our true childish selves" (654) and her experience as seeming "child-like" (658) elsewhere. From the language describing the positive side of the experience, a sense of childishness stands out: by teaching this way and renouncing the adult-imposed performance model, Tompkins as teacher-hero can be less of a hero
and more of a child, leading to infinite pleasure based on "the teacher's treatment of and regard for him or her self" (660).

I may seem to exaggerate the tone of this essay, but, interestingly enough, the two comments printed in *College English* since the essay was first published also bring to mind the notion of narratives of legitimation. Michael Carroll comments through a narrative of the oppressed, opening with images of how Tompkins' essays "made its way to our mailboxes in about the fifth week of the semester, just as many of us are beginning to feel the heat—a heat that we hope is not the onset of full-blown teaching burnout" (599). Carroll sketches the story of the teacher as slave, controlled by the professional message that "to put time into . . . teaching [is to] do so at [his] own risk." Tompkins' narrative of liberation from the ill effects of performance is actually part of this institutionalized chanting of control: it "is just one more in the chorus that chants the slogan of contemporary academia: 'just say no' to putting time into your teaching" (601).

Tompkins' narrative also ignores the needs felt by Carroll's students; these "less privileged students in the lower divisions in public institutions need the attention of their teachers. . . . the vast middle—including what goes on in the average college English classroom and its attendant conditions-of-labor—has been excluded" (599-600). Thus, Tompkins' narration of liberation is a mask for another narration of oppression. To use Lyotard's terms, the two narratives are "incommensurable" because they are the separate narratives of two separate groups at the same time. Tompkins feels liberation; Carroll feels the whip further. Her narrative, as it ignores the narrative of oppression felt by Carroll and his students, even, eventually, seems to play a role in that narrative, for it helps legitimate the actions of Carroll's oppressors: "I'm sure some of
these budget-conscious administrators would just love some confirmation from our ranks that complaints about the workload are just a lot of belly-aching. 'Read Tompkins' essay. You see, all you need do is go in there and let them discuss it. In the light of Tompkins' discovery, it is apparent that you're not overworked, you're underworked! Let's make your 4/4 course-load 6/6'' (601).

A second comment, from Marcia Bundy Seabury, on Tompkins' narrative takes a different tack: here the writer allies herself with the performance model. She tries to "plan decentered classes, participate in decentered faculty workshops, and assent to articles like Tompkins'"—she tries to follow the lead of the rabble-rouser—but she feels doubts: "I sometimes feel I am denying something in myself?" (714) She argues that although "Tompkins still feels guilty, though she struggles against it, about her student-centered classes; many of us now feel just as guilty if we oppose a new orthodoxy and sometimes let out the teacher-performer in us" (716). Seabury sets herself up in the role of the conciliator, the arbitrator of opposing positions, ending with an appeal to her readers, bringing them into the essay as almost a choral stamp of approval: "Let's face it, performing in the classroom has become unfashionable, but it too can remain one part of the rhythm of good teaching" (717).

Tompkins' essay and the two responses work as conflicting narratives of legitimation, for in each, the writer is trying to establish a narrative position that gives meaning to his or her professional career. Each narrative, further, contains sub-narratives referring to the roles of other characters (the students) in the main narrative, as if one narrative is embedded in another.
Mary Kupiec Cayton's Narrative of Marginalization

Mary Kupiec Cayton, in "Writing as Outsiders: Academic Discourse and Marginalized Faculty," examines a different oppressed group, the plight of part-time teachers in colleges and universities, the one that Tompkins ignores and Carroll touches upon. Although less overtly narrative than Tompkins' essay, Cayton's argument has aspects of a narration, one that legitimates herself (and by extension the part-time instructor) in the academy. Before Cayton cites the numbers and kinds of part-time teachers, she includes a quotation from Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a reference to a source that Tompkins cites as well. Both authors use the reference to Freire as a sort of political banner, to emphasize the strength of their positions. Cayton describes the oppressed, marginalized part-time teacher as suffering a "litany of problems" that "by now ought to be familiar." The complaints include the following:

We are the last hired and first fired. Because we are generally hired as cheap labor by the institution, we have heavy teaching loads, not only in numbers of students but also in courses we must teach for the first time or responsibility for those courses no one else is willing to undertake. We often receive our course assignments at the last minute, leaving us without sufficient preparation time. Many of us are dedicated teachers—why else would we stay in a profession where our work often earns no benefits and pays less than a living wage?—and we are often unwilling to cut corners at the expense of our students. (648)

This oppressed teacher-hero seems both weighted down by responsibility and at the same time noble, selfless, unconcerned with the injustices thrown her way as long as she can treat her students honorably. The passage also
suggests two other main characters: the oppressive, capitalist, plantation-like bosses of the institutions and the more innocent, deserving students. The oppressed teacher-hero stands outside the main connections between the institutions and the students, doing the best she can.

Cayton emphasizes that this oppressed role has severe personal implications: "the strains of outsiderhood surfaced in the form of a formidable and persistent writing block" (649). The strains of suffering the role of being only an outsider led her to silence: "From years of living with the professional understanding that I was not an equal participant in the life of the profession, my university, or my department, I internalized the notion that I did not yet know enough to be able to speak with any authority about any subject" (649)

Although Cayton has thus presented this oppressed position as one focused on employment and personal forces, she intensifies the narration by suggesting that the true subject or force of her story is language, the academic discourse that keeps both her students and herself outside the official structures. This discourse is the "private language" that indicates the "members of the professoriate" (651). Students and apprentices learn this language—that is part of the plot of the profession. However, teachers on the outside are in a sort of non-position between the roles of student and professional:

In American academic culture today, there is no middle ground in the conversation between the apprentice and one who holds the status of full participant. The part-time or temporary academic who has moved out of a formal apprenticeship position lives in limbo. Coming of age means a continuing academic appointment and/or a string of significant publications. She typically has neither.

(655)
This outsider is unable to devote time to developing this string of publications, and, further, its purpose seems remote from her day-to-day position. As a result, the outsider "stands on the sidelines, muddled and perplexed, trying to guess what will gain her access to a conversation whose worth and value is far from evident to her" (656). The outsider-hero, this kind person who cares for her students even when she hasn't the time, is thus presented as the victim.

However, just as Tompkins allowed the rabble-rouser to become the hero of the narration, Cayton adopts the position of the political visionary: She argues that instead of outsiders feeling the burden for their marginalization, they should question the "needs the existing conversation serves, and at what cost" (657). She concludes her essay by urging her fellow outsiders to take definite political action: "we need to think, speak, and write about these contradictions, informed as many of our colleagues at the center cannot be about the experience and implications of marginalization. And we must do so with the full knowledge that such talk may well not always be welcomed by those whose legitimacy and authority it threatens" (657).

Although perhaps not as overtly revolutionary as Tompkins' ideas of immediate revolution, Cayton's position of the outsider-teacher-hero being controlled by the villain of the institution and its language, but then using its language to attack the villain, is a narrative also. It is perhaps more cautious, less flamboyant, but possibly ultimately more powerful for it appeals to its addressees from the point of view of its logic, its carefully-drawn explanation of the position that the sender, Cayton, and the addressees, other marginalized teachers, share. Cayton ends her essay with reference to another story, a classic story of political oppression:
In the old fable, it was finally only a child, who had no vested interest in denying the obvious, who was able to say what everyone else knew. In this case, the Emperor may not be entirely without clothes, but he is more scantily clad than he is willing to admit. (658)

This concluding image suggests that Cayton's essay is also a political fable, almost a children's tale, with an innocent victim, one with "no vested interest in denying the obvious," but with the hidden power to undo the wrong that afflicts her.

Robert Brooke's Narrative of Underlife in Education

Robert Brooke's essay "Underlife and Writing Instruction" provides a narrative that suggests dual narratives; unlike the previous two narratives, Brooke's position is more detached. He does not present himself as a sender who could also be the addressee of the narration. Instead, he presents dual heroes since both the teacher and the student can fulfill the position as "underlife."

Importantly, this is a very interesting position to fill; it is one of great activity since it is designed to "undercut" the traditional roles of the American educational system. When students and teachers play underlife roles, they position themselves differently than traditional educational policy (the seemingly controlling but ultimately ineffectual foil in this narration) would position them. Notice the following:

. . . students disobey, write letters instead of taking notes, and whisper with their peers to show they are more than just students
and can think independently of classroom expectations. . . .
writing teachers develop workshop methods, use small groups,
and focus on students' own "voices" in order to help students see
themselves as writers first and students second. Both sets of
behaviors are underlife behaviors, for they seek to provide
identities that go beyond the roles offered by the normal teacher-
as-lecturer, student-as-passive-learner educational system. (141)

These kinds of positions create a much different kind of plot than we saw in the
previous two narratives. Instead of a grand drama of liberation or a quieter story
of political activism, we have here almost a Shakespearean role reversal play in
which the two characters have met in the forest of the classroom to play tricks on
each other. It is these tricks that make underlife an important concept in
education.

The sense that the essay is like a play is intensified two ways. First,
Brooke cites a "play within the play" when he refers to Erving Goffman's
concepts of "disruptive" and "contained" underlife; as he does so, he gives vivid
examples that introduce other characters and other vivid actions into the text; for
example, notice such actions as "dumping dinner in the garbage and having a
friend who works in the kitchen smuggle out a plateful of boiled eggs" (143).
These examples, although not part of the main plot, help a reader/observer
understand it better. Second, Brooke emphasizes that the examples he uses
"all come from a semester-long participant-observer study of a freshman writing
class in spring 1986" (144). Thus, Brooke was, in a sense, part of the audience
of the original play that he is re-telling to his reader. In a sense then, although
Brooke is not positioning himself in the position of a potential addressee, as are
Tompkins and Cayton, he does imply that at least at one time, he was the addressee, when he watched the original play.

Much of Brooke's essay consists of scenes from this play of the underlife, for we see snippets of conversation such as the following:

Chuck: Did you bring your paper?
Ben: That damn thing—
Chuck: Pretty "damn," huh?
Ben: It's so "damn" I keep forgetting it. (147)

Examples such as this show how underlife provides the major action that runs throughout the classroom, here allowing students to "assert one's fundamental distance from the classroom rules" (147), elsewhere allowing students to comment "on the roles people were taking in the classroom, or the roles the classroom was asking them to take" (143). Brooke presents such examples of underlife as "contained," meaning that they do not "disrupt the functioning of the classroom," but instead "provide the other participants in the classroom with a sense that one has other things to do, other interests, that one is a much richer personality than can be shown in this context" (148).

As I mentioned above, the role of hero is double here: not only is it inscribed in the student, but it is also in the teacher. Brooke presents the teacher's role as underlife with a little more drama, though with fewer specific examples. The teacher as underlife hero is involved in an active process of disruption, "as engaged in the process of changing classroom rules" in a position of "struggle" (148). Because the teacher wishes students "to see themselves as writers rather than as students," teachers adopt the underlife position to "change the classroom to help students extend their identities" (149).
Although much of Brooke's discussion of the underlife position of the teacher surveys a series of articles and books focusing on the importance of underlife behavior for students, the point of the essay is to lead teachers to a role that allows them to be the hero. They must see themselves as having interests different from those of the schools employing them, thus positioning themselves as adversaries, leading to the "greatest conflict with the existing educational system" (152). The essay concludes with a focus on this active role of the teacher as underlife encouraging the student to practice his own underlife behavior:

Writing, in short, is "about" autonomy and action—to really learn to write means becoming a certain kind of person, a person who accepts, explores, and uses her differences from assigned roles to produce new knowledge, new action, and new roles. The concept of underlife shows us this process, a process at work in every classroom and at the core of our discipline. It suggests we think carefully about the identities we have, the identities we model, and the identities we ask students to take on, for the process of building identity is the business we are in. (152)

Thus, by the end of the essay, Brooke is arguing that instructors and students should identify with their roles as underlife.

This identity is important for our discussion now, for it allows us to view Brooke's two roles not just as two parts in a play with elements of a narrative, for simply being told in narrative form does not make a narrative have the legitimation effect I am implying. In that case, the narrative could be used as a mere example of some idea, analogous to the "little narratives" that are part of scientific discoveries. Instead, Brooke suggests that these roles function in
legitimating ways: they prescribe certain roles and responsibilities for each of their heroes and they explain the importance of education for each of them.

Narratives of Legitimation—a Comment

In the previous examples, I have tried to suggest how the authors of these articles have established narratives of legitimation to explain the roles that students and teachers should take and that teachers should hold in their institutions. These roles are not just part of mere stories, part of "little narratives" of the players in the language game of education, for in each of them, the authors seem to have invested the stories with legitimation power. By seeing oneself as part of a legitimating narrative, whether Tompkins' narrative of protecting oneself, or Cayton's narrative of asserting one's voice and altering the system, or Brooke's narrative of intersecting roles in the classroom, there is the sense that narrative means of legitimation have power in composition and education theory.

This is a point that seems to fly in the face of Lyotard's arguments about the delegitimation of the grand Narratives, suggesting, as I did in chapter three, that although Lyotard seems to present the narratives as delegitimated, his evidence is not as strong as it might seem.

Still, the question is this: how should we regard the notion of "grand Narratives," or "metanarratives," or at least "narratives of legitimation"? Are they still functional in a world surrounded by language games? One might notice that although the previous authors create forms of narratives, they also rely on the complications of language games, the arbitrariness, the intersections, as they explain the positions of their heroes and characters. How, then, should one
regard this postmodernism and this seeming vestige of the world before postmodernism?

One argument that I find especially powerful for this project lies in an essay offering a feminist analysis of the issue of metanarratives. In this essay, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson suggest that although Lyotard has dispensed with the grand Narratives that anchored the metaphysical world, the possibility for other narratives still exists. They, in effect, create the possibility for these narratives by shifting the focus of the argument, from "philosophy" to "social criticism." With this shift comes the possibility for new narratives of legitimation, narratives that don't claim to have the breadth and scope of the classical narratives, but narratives still with elements of the same power of legitimation.

Since much of my analysis of teaching through a network relies on this concept of narrative legitimation, we need to examine Fraser and Nicholson's theory in a bit more detail. Before presenting their theories of narratives, they summarize major points about Lyotard's system, suggesting that "in Lyotard's view, a metanarrative is meta in a very strong sense," since it refers to concepts of "Truth and Justice as they really are in themselves independent of contingent historical social practices." Therefore, a metanarrative's "claim to meta does not hold up" under scrutiny (87). What matters most to Fraser and Nicholson, however, is the effect on "social criticism":

... Lyotard's postmodern conception of criticism without philosophy rules out several recognizable genres of social criticism. From the premise that criticism cannot be grounded by a foundationalist philosophical metanarrative, he infers the
illegitimacy of large historical stories, normative theories of justice, and social-theoretical accounts of macrostructures that institutionalize inequality. (89)

Fraser and Nicholson argue that in this action of eliminating all metanarratives, Lyotard presents a postmodern social criticism that "is neither entirely self-consistent not entirely persuasive":

[Lyotard] goes too quickly from the premise that philosophy cannot ground social criticism to the conclusion that criticism itself must be local, ad hoc, and untheoretical. As a result, he throws out the baby of large historical narrative with the bathwater of philosophical metanarrative and the baby of social-theoretical analysis of large-scale inequalities with the bathwater of reductive Marxian class theory. (90)

Fraser and Nicholson provide a system to bring back this baby of social criticism.

They argue that the genres rejected by poststructuralists—such as, possibly, metanarratives—are necessary for social criticism. They support these genres by choosing "another starting point for reflecting on postfoundational social criticism. Suppose one began, not with the condition of philosophy, but with the nature of the social object one wished to criticize. Suppose further, that one defined that object as the subordination of women to and by men" (91). Fraser and Nicholson suggest that such an object should be studied with more than "the meager critical resources" that Lyotard leaves them. Instead, they would need "an array of different methods and genres," including "large narratives about changes in social organization and ideology" (91).
It is this notion of other forms of legitimating narratives that Fraser and Nicholson use to discuss theories of their social object (the subordination of women to and by men). Such theories include Nancy Chodorow's positing "mothering . . . as the relevant object of investigation" (95), or Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre's theory of "sex-affective production"; Nancy Hartsock's notion of "reproduction"; or Catharine McKinnon's ideas about "sexuality" (97). Fraser and Nicholson refer to such ideas as "large social theories, theories of history, society, culture, and psychology, that claim, for example, to identify causes and/or constitutive features of sexism that operate cross-culturally" (92). The authors do suggest that these grand theories fall victim to a similar fate to that of the grand Narratives, though, for these new narratives go too far and try to be too universalizing. Still, Fraser and Nicholson see them as valuable, as steps in a process toward a "postmodernist-feminist theory [that] would be nonuniversalist" (101).

One way to view this continued interest in large theories, a way with value for the project of this dissertation, is to consider the following, from the conclusion of their essay:

How can we combine a postmodernist incredulity toward metanarratives with the social-critical power of feminism? How can we conceive a version of criticism without philosophy that is robust enough to handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its "endless variety and monotonous similarity"?

A first step is to recognize, contra Lyotard, that postmodern critique need forswear neither large historical narratives nor analyses of societal macrostructures. This point is important for feminists, since sexism has a long history and is deeply and
pervasively embedded in contemporary societies. Thus, postmodern feminists need not abandon the large theoretical tools needed to address large political problems. (100-101)

Such a need to re-address Lyotard's dismissal of narrative—or of other "analyses of societal macrostructures" is also important when approaching composition. Although I do not wish to argue that the grand Narratives have returned, I suspect that smaller narratives of legitimation have remained. These are related to the more localized focus of postmodern interaction through language games, so the narratives do not explain major tendencies of culture or knowledge.

They do, though, explain the way that specific writers see themselves, providing a sense of the self that they present to other readers. As in the above examples, these selves can be complex, as can be the ways that they intersect with other selves. The result? Perhaps chaos. Perhaps consensus. Perhaps, though, some combination that makes social interaction endlessly complicated. When that interaction is structured through a computer network, it leads to a situation that puts Lyotard's sense of "perfect information" to the test.
CHAPTER 7: BETWEEN PREFACE AND CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with a preface advising my readers that I viewed them as comprising three possibly separate groups based upon their interests in poststructuralism, composition, or composition via computers; I have tried to speak to each of those audiences (without neglecting the others) in the previous chapters. I mention this preface now, for I would like each of these readers to pretend that all that they have read has been a preface, a long preface, yes, but a preface still. This complicated preface has investigated ideas of a certain poststructuralist, found certain key features in these ideas and found certain omissions. It has also examined, more briefly, possibly connected ideas in composition theory and touched on several recent narratives of composition.

What follows in the shorter number of pages remaining in this dissertation is, in effect, the dissertation of this dissertation, what I've been hinting at all along. All of the previous pages, although I would wish you to see them as interesting or even provocative on their own, are in this dissertation to prepare you to read this much shorter section. In it, you'll read a narrative, or rather a narrative broken down into its constituent parts: sort of a narrative analyzed scientifically.

This narrative concerns the various narratives that I see running through a class I taught over a computer network. These narratives occurred over the course of a semester, a contained but long period; they occurred in time. However, because they occurred over a network, they were able to be captured, preserved as the physical text of this class. Even before I started graduate school, I was able to view a narrative . . . in a text . . . as forming a story—or
a novel, or a play, or at least a long, complicated poem. And, although I realize that I'm pushing a point that may seem strange to those not familiar with computers and their ability to allow us to create pages and pages of text in a moment (if not from our creativity, than from our ability to cut and paste and hit the "return" key), I wish to argue that the text of this class has elements of such works of fiction. It has what might resemble the common-place elements of fiction such as characters (the teacher and the students), setting (the computer network and its procedures which dictate the shape and scope of messages), and plot (the rising and falling action of deadlines leading to the ultimate climax—the completion of the course).

However, I will refer to the narratives of this text more from the direction that Lyotard establishes, from the positions and roles of language games: the "sender," the "addressee," and the "referent"—or "subject" or "hero." This structure is very similar to the basic, surface structure of this text, for it consists of numerous messages from senders to addressees concerning various subjects; computer networks tend to support many "moves" in language games. The teacher as sender sends announcements, assignments, and graded papers. The student as sender sends completed assignments, essays, and questions. Both sets of senders send personal messages concerning their problems and perceptions. Further, both sets of senders have to send to somebody else, so they all become addressees as well. These messages would constitute the "subject" of the class—they certainly lead, in their bits and pieces, to the ultimate subject or "referent" of the class, in this case "freshman composition"; together they compose that subject as it appears to these senders and addressees.
What About Lyotard?

Lyotard would not, I think, refer to such a class as composed of "narratives"; in fact, even with the very use of such a term I am coloring this discussion, so let me step back for a moment and review some of Lyotard's arguments. Lyotard suggests, in the last paragraph of *The Postmodern Condition*, that "the computerization of society" will assist groups of experts by providing them with information—"perfect information," he calls it—that they "usually lack for making knowledgeable decisions." These experts would be involved in various fields of study, and since they are living in an age in which fields are no longer connected by the speculative apparatus, these fields could overlap in dizzying ways. They are also not operating in a system that, according to Lyotard, leads to universal consensus as its goal.

Instead, these experts must search for consensus on a more local level, on an aspect of their field (a field that is the jumbling of the old set fields). They reach such a local level of consensus only by deciding on particular "metaprescriptive"s to use. These metaprescriptive are the rules that determine the rules these experts will use to make statements; in effect, they determine what statements will be allowed within a certain game on a certain topic by a certain number of experts. Computerization assists this formation of metaprescriptive by providing these experts, in the form of the "memory and data banks" of computers, with the information they need. If these experts had the freedom to use these banks of data "at any given moment," then the metaprescriptions that they use this information to form could be based on "perfect information"—since potentially the computers could contain a range of data not usually available for this decision-making process. Because of the possibility of perfect information, when these experts take the role of "sender,"
they could make statements that would not be as controlled as they would have been under the regimes of the grand Narratives or of the performativity criterion. The possibilities of their statements would be "inexhaustible."

Thus, instead of referring to the "text" produced by a computer network as a "narrative," Lyotard might refer to it as a "data bank"—full of perfect information to allow for the better creation of metaprescriptive rules which allow us to talk about the topic of local consensus at hand. In some ways, that is what I'm doing. In this dissertation, I have assumed the position of "expert" writing to other experts about a topic or a field that is, I think, evocative of the blurring of field boundaries caused by the collapse of the speculative apparatus: sort of philosophy/computer/composition. I'm using the "data" to form my own metaprescriptions—admittedly forming such rules by myself, but since I've been trying to draw you as readers into the discussion, I am pretending as if you are involved in the establishment of these rules as well, as if we form the "local consensus" of experts. These metaprescriptions allow me to make a variety of statements about the intersections of this field, as I will in the chapters that follow.

However, as interesting and as valuable as these ideas are, I think they miss the activity that the text/data bank of this class represents. Lyotard writes of data banks from the position of the addressees. We as users of data banks are, in a sense addressed by them, we receive their messages. But—who are the senders? Where is this part, this role of the language game? For a philosopher so concerned with language games, creating a text that bases its "method" (in his third chapter) on language games, Lyotard allows a strange thing to occur: it is as if there is no sender, or as if the sender has been erased. I've suggested that with the concept of "perfect information" Lyotard assumes
that once learning and knowledge become the text of data banks and technology that they can be processed in the same way that technology processes other objects, as if ideas were car parts or chicken thighs or electronic components. We can imagine how such objects became the processed parts of assembly lines, but how do words become part of a data bank? Lyotard writes as if they are simply "translated into quantities of information," a process that was, when he wrote, already assisted by the "well advanced" research on "translating machines" (PMC 4). Such machines suggest the efficient transferring of information that would allow the performativity criterion to thrive (of course, except for the fact that Lyotard argues it does not thrive). Such machines also eliminate, in effect, the language game role of the sender. Computers appear able to provide perfect information to addressees forming metaprescripives to determine how they will function as senders later because these computers filter out the messiness of senders, the messiness of language games and the role-playing of denotative, prescriptive, performative, evaluative, and other possible kinds of statements.

One should recall that Lyotard contrasts his desired view of how to use technology (based, of course, on paralogical "laws") with the use of computers under the performativity criterion. In that system, the computer would appear to be the ""dream"" machine, "extended to include knowledge itself"—the computer would seem to contain that knowledge; knowledge would be legitimated simply by being included within the computer data banks. In Lyotard's view, though, knowledge is legitimated by the groups in local consensus using the computer to determine better rules for particular concerns. Lyotard seems to rule out the technocratic dream of computers containing knowledge. Instead, he suggests that computers will help us better determine knowledge. However, the crucial
complication here is that Lyotard is using a method that seems to come out of or at least seems to support the notion of performativity (in its efficient transfer of information into computers eliminating the complicating role of the sender). It is as if Lyotard is operating under pre-poststructuralist rules, as if, unlike Derrida, he is not using the Saussurian notion of the "signified" and the "signifier" to suggest the complication of determinism, but is instead assuming that with technology the "signified" of knowledge can be represented by the "signifier" of information in the computer, so well represented that it is . . . perfect.

Where's the Class?

In a data bank formed by the data that a class over a network produces, the role of sender is crucial. It is a role that all who participate in the class are aware of, and it is a role that those of us who read the text of the class must notice. There are many senders. In a simple sense the number of senders corresponds to the number of participants. In a class, this would mean the teacher and the students. However, senders play language games, and as a result, they change roles. Sometimes a sender would have one game in mind, sometimes another. Such a shifting of positions and roles certainly seems possible under Lyotard's poststructural banners, for part of his goal is to provide a better means for the senders to be able to make many new statements and belong to many new games; that is, in effect, the postmodern condition.

However, one can approach this text and all of these senders (and their addressees), as I suggested above, from another perspective, that of narrative. In a narrative the positions of language games work together in certain ways. Because the teacher and the students are changing positions so often in the
text of a class, they do seem to be enacting narratives on the order of those of the Cashinahua: present addressees become future senders; being a sender (at least after that first message) implies that one has been an addressee already. Of course, the "subjects" of these narrations are not the major myths of the culture, although within the narrow confines of the class, these messages are important as myth-making entities. Besides just giving the addressee the information (leading to the subject of "freshman composition") that the sender intended (as if "receiving" and "intending" were such simple moves in the postmodern world of intersecting and intermingling language games!), these messages have more uses and lead in more directions. They are the means through which the senders say who they are in the class, in which they say how they feel, what they think. These messages allow senders to tell addressees how they want to be viewed: they are the stories that the senders tell.

The addressees then are able to view these messages also. Their ideas lead a teacher to form impressions of the students (Are they diligent? Are they good writers? Are they people he would not mind running into at the Galleria?) And they lead a student to form impressions of the teacher (Is he a tough grader? Is he easy to talk to? Would I like to run into him too?). These messages thus may be seen as forming the social bond of the class, for they provide the evidence that all of the addressees use to understand the class in which they become senders; this is, of course, a sort of non-traditional social bond in the non-traditional world of the computer network.

This "evidence" allowing these addressees to form "impressions" is very similar to the notion of "information" allowing for "metaprescriptives." This is an important parallel, for when the addressees form impressions, they are really establishing rules to decide what sort of rules are controlling the language
game that they play with the senders. If the senders have many stories to tell, then each time they send messages to addressees, the addressees may determine different rules. These rules determine what they will send back, as senders later. They determine the direction of the new language game that begins anew.

What I'm arguing is this: although the computer network allows for efficient passing of information from sender to addressee, that efficiency is complicated by two factors:

1. In their messages, senders tell stories that reflect narratives of legitimation. These stories can vary in the way that language games can vary.

2. Addressees determine metaprescriptives (rules) from the messages. These rules determine the game that follows.

Lyotard's notion of "perfect information" ignores, I argue, point number one. It assumes that although experts tell stories (the little narratives) that these stories are somehow blocked out of the computer network through the miracles of translation. It also assumes that these stories have no legitimating power. These notions seem to me vestiges of an assumption of performance efficiency, a notion that Lyotard criticizes harshly, and of the dismissal of the grand Narratives, which Lyotard does not fully support. What I am proposing is a more two-way flow of language games, in which one's role as a sender and one's role as addressee cause a player to react in complicatingly different ways to messages—information—he or she receives. Thus, although technology can connect these users and seem to allow for their efficient transfer of information, that technology also allows for the conflicting motives, needs, desires, and
aspirations, and images of legitimation of the users to be introduced into the system, in the text of their messages.

We've already seen that in composition (and education more generally) certain theorists speak of their teaching as forming narratives, from Tompkins' narrative of overthrowing shackles, Cayton's narrative of assuming a stronger position, and Brooke's narrative of students and teachers' counter-culture roles. Imagine a culture composed of such narrators as Tompkins, Cayton, and Brooke, all talking of similar topics, but telling different stories, in different ways. In each of these narratives, the "referent" or "subject" of narration would be a "hero," the various heroes of each story, some telling a story of the teacher as hero; some the story of student as hero. In their current form, separated into their separate articles, in separate publications, these narrative voices each tell a different, separate story, but if their words were turned into "information" and that information were part of the same data base, they would form crosscutting narratives, arguing different dominant positions. These positions would be like the "threads" of language that Lyotard, referring to Wittgenstein, discusses. However, because they are all talking about a similar concept, the concept of "the hero," they would effectively blur and complicate that concept, making it seem to go into different directions. In a sense, all of these different language games would create a new field, the field that is the combination of all of their moves.

The situation I am sketching here is a way of seeing the seeming contradiction I suggested in chapter three, between the "interconnecting fields of knowledge' left by the collapse of the speculative narrative and the 'maze of threads or streets' left by the end of the emancipation narrative" (quoting myself). The different voices make the notion of what a class should be and
who the hero is seem complicated. It's not that the voices combine into a
definite interconnection; it's more that all of their legitimating threads become
part of the texture of the class.

This is the case, I think, in a class conducted over a network. In it, there
are students and a teacher, sending messages, using other's messages to form
rules to help them create more messages. From their own messages, these
senders present their positions, complicated by the positions of the other
senders, and, of course complicated by many other factors that aren't contained
in the network. In these positions, these senders show how they view the class,
how they view its structure and its control. They show how they view the roles
of the players, who is the hero, who is not. All of these positions combine to
form the legitimation of the class.

The . . . End?

In a sense, then, what you've just read, coming after a 200 page or so
preface is the conclusion of this dissertation, for it states what I want to argue
against Lyotard, what evidence I found by studying a network's operation.
However, of course, I cannot stop quite yet. Partly because more pages are
already written (as I write these words). But also, I need to re-emphasize
another theme of my dissertation, the theme of legitimation. If I ended now, I
might seem clever, but I'd most likely not seem legitimate. For legitimation, one
needs proof, and since proof in the postmodern age of language games comes
from how one assembles the moves of language, I have some assembling to
do, starting with the next chapter.
CHAPTER 8: COMPOSITION THROUGH COMPUTERS

Earlier, I suggested that Lyotard privileges technology, and by extension computers. Although he implies that the efficiency promised by technology is not really possible, he still indicates that computers in their ability to bring "perfect information" to their users will allow those users to make better decisions. His notion of these "dream" machines may thus be different from the notion that is held by system theorists, with their concern for absolute control and management, but it is still a dream idea. It's a notion that computers will allow us to be better informed, to obtain more information, and to do something better, if only on a local level at a specific moment.

Lyotard is not alone in this positive view of technology, for throughout the network of articles and books examining the use of computers in education generally and in English classes specifically, there is a similar privileging of technology, focusing on the assumption that computers will help us teach better, in more interesting ways, for more effective results. A sense of the pervasiveness of such views comes from looking at how three authors, writing at milestone moments in the history of computers in education, all praise computers with versions of the same praise.

The first article, published at the start of the last decade (1981), in the appropriately named journal Educational Technology, discusses problems associated with computers, what the author labels "computerphobia." At this time, personal computers were just beginning to arrive on the scene. Offices and schools were just starting to readjust their views about computers. Because of these changes, many potential users were fearful about how
computers would change—and, they assumed, disrupt—their lives. Such worries lead the author of this article to suggest an idea that reappears over and over:

Computerphobia is unfortunate and uncomfortable. It must be overcome. Instructors need the sense of control, confidence, and authority that will come with understanding technology. (emphasis added) (Jay 147)

The words I've emphasized are crucial, for they reflect concepts one sees in many sources in the next ten years, the ideas that computers allow us to control the classroom better (even if such control is non-control) and that computers increase the confidence of writers and give them a new, more effective sense of authority over their own writing. One might recall that such concepts are related to the various theories of writing, for from classical rhetoric to collaborative learning, teachers have had to juggle new combinations of these ideas.

Such positive notions appear throughout the following decade. By 1985, Ronald Sudol suggests, in an article in *College Composition and Communication* that the growing use of computers for word processing would lead to "an impressive and high-status new role for the English teacher," a position that derives from the teacher's knowledge of how to use computers and how to employ the tricks of the trade that a "seasoned practitioner" would know (332). This position is similar to Lyotard's notion that even with computers "Pedagogy will not suffer" for students will "still have to be taught something: not contents, but how to use the terminals" (PMC 50). Again—control, confidence, authority.

By the end of the decade and the start of the next one, new views had taken the stage. "Collaboration" and "empowerment" had become powerful
terms, suggesting new directions for writing theory; they also provided new ways to see "control," "confidence," and "authority." Computers had begun to share some of this authority in the teaching of writing. While early in the eighties, articles on computers might be found in educational and technical journals (Educational Technology, above), and in the mid-eighties in English journals (College Composition and Communication), as the nineties began, two book-length collections of articles with powerfully simple titles appeared: Computers and Writing and Computers and Community. In these texts, and in many other places, similarly positive examples of computers continued to be "heralded," often as if for the first time. For example, after a short piece on postmodernism and computer networks, Thomas Barker and Fred Kemp write with assurance that "We have shown how network theory, or a new model of classroom interaction based on networked computers, empowers the student writer. . ." (26). Although "control," "confidence," and "authority" were now directed at the students working collaboratively, the assumption still seemed to lie with the idea that computers would indeed assist with such "empowerment."

Still, running through the decade are other voices, voices suggesting that although computers may be marvelous tools, they are also problematic ones, for their use may not be as effortless as some writers imply it might just be. Early in the eighties (1982), in their Computer-Mediated Communication Systems, Elaine Kerr and Starr Roxanne Hiltz suggest problems with the rosy picture of computers in the area of communications and the resulting "information overload":

Information overload presents itself first as a problem, then as a constant challenge to be overcome. Intensive interaction with a large number of communication partners results in the
mushrooming of the absolute amount of information and the number of simultaneous discussions, conferences, and other activities well beyond normal coping abilities. (emphasis added) (97-98)

Kerr and Hiltz suggest a key problem, one that recalls Lyotard's suggestion that efficiency leads to system breakdown, with the notion that the power and ease of computers may lead to more possibilities than "normal" conditions actually allow.

Although peppered throughout the writing on computers and teaching, such views are rare and are usually deflected by the much more emphatic, positive suggestions of the benefits of computers. Only as late as 1991, in Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's examination of "The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class" has there been even a systematic questioning of the problems of using computers, one that suggests that "writing instructors who hope to function effectively in these new electronic classrooms must assess ways in which the use of computer technology might shape for better and worse, their strategies for working with students" (55).

So much has been written about computers and writing that the composition profession cries out for a history of its beginnings with this technology. However, I will concentrate on just a few key issues, briefly looking at early uses of computers, then at the use of networked computers, and then a the specific network I used for the class I will examine in the following chapters. Such a survey will help explain concepts crucial to the following chapters in which I'll illustrate the potential problems of computers in more specific terms.
Early Use of Computers in Writing: Drills and Separation

Because computers can process large volumes of data quickly and efficiently (and I mean "process" and "efficiently" in a technical sense, not in the sense that we as humans can understand all that data), they first seemed of use for composition as processors of specific data at a specific cites. From the early eighties, there was great interest in programs that would allow writers to review and practice skills, experiment with content, and approach writing in new ways. By 1984, computer programs for writing could be divided into four categories:

1. text feedback—that is, programs which provide statistical information (often in the form of "readability formula" data) that allegedly serves to stimulate revision; 2. practice exercises, which concentrate on rote learning of grammar and sentence structure; 3. "simulations," which allow students to "create" their own texts, usually pseudo-poetry, by selecting elements of content that are then applied to a preprogrammed poetic formula; and 4. tutorials, the newest type of CAI, which attempt to "converse" with the student and aid her in exploring a topic by means of various prompts. (Bridwell, Nancarrow, and Ross 383-384)

Such programs are varieties of a special use of computers in education, called CAI, or computer aided instruction. Although important in many other fields, CAI maintains a complicated relationship to effective writing instruction. Early on, it provided "largely a world of drill and practice, a land of true-false and multiple choice" (Burns 393), the sort of exercises that classical and current-traditional rhetoric might prize but that more "progressive" theories, such as the new emphasis on the writing process, on reader/writer relationships, and on collaborative learning would reject. Even in these more progressive theories,
though, CAI programs might be used for progressive purposes, if as Hugh Burns suggests, their exercises focus on "matters mechanical" and thus free the English instructor to "discuss matters of content, organization, and style" (393).

The problem with CAI, though, appears to lie in the problem of getting a computer to respond to writing as a human would. Computers can certainly be trained to notice certain features of writing, but since language is so various, the exact meaning of such features might be hard for a mechanically-driven program to detect. Helen Schwartz, author of an early (1985) freshman composition textbook devoted to the use of word processing software, *Interactive Writing*, suggests that

> It is hard to find responses in CAI that are both honest and humane, especially if they are generated at random (for variety) or without the ability to evaluate or even understand the semantic content of a student's response. "Tremendous, Helen!" loses its impact when my response was "I can't think of anything to say!"
>
> Students soon learn to distrust facile praise. ("Ethical" 22)

Such programs would ask students to play a game without providing them with new tools to improve their writing.

Another kind of game might occur with a related form of software, text editors and grammar checkers. Such programs can help students determine mechanical errors in their own papers. However, because the students who we might send to such programs are the ones most likely to have trouble with grammar and mechanics, the effectiveness of such programs is questionable. Part of the problem concerns the level of the students. How would a student "barely staying on that bucking maverick called written English" use a program's "warning about "-tion" words"(Schwartz, H "Ethical" 23)?
Programs also do not always provide results that are appropriate for particular writers at particular situations. Students also might put too much trust into what such a program says, and aim to "get a 'score' within the acceptable range" even if such a goal could "undermine a student's growth in self-judgment for rewriting" (Schwartz, H "Ethical" 23). Further, computer grammar checkers are not always correct; if a program labels a certain sentence as containing a certain error, then the writer must know enough about the whole category of similar kinds of errors to know how to react. Grammar checkers always have a certain percentage of incorrect diagnoses of errors. They might, for example, label a sentence as too long or too wordy when it is really perfect as it is for a certain situation. David Dobrin calls such errors produced by computer programs "garbage," and suggests that they complicate our use of such programs: "Because the computer makes errors, we must pick through the garbage before we can use the output. If we know what we are doing, we can sift fairly rapidly, but where we are in some doubt—or even just overconfident—we will make mistakes" (44). Who would be in such an inefficient position? Potentially any writer, but inexperienced (in the world of academic discourse and its strict rules of form) writers would be a prime group.

To see an example of this kind of problem, one that calls to mind the whole question of whether computers will contribute to our efficiency, notice the following:

```
<<*_G2. IS THIS A COMPLETE SENTENCE? *>> . . the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered<<*_S1. PASSIVE VOICE: is offered *>> to an active
```
interpretation. «\*_S12. CAN SIMPLER TERMS BE USED? \\
*» «\*_S4. IS SENTENCE TOO DIFFICULT? *» «\*_S3. \\
LONG SENTENCE: 36 WORDS *»

These words, or rather some of them, originally appeared at the start of this dissertation. The odd marks, the codes, and the all-capitalized letters were added to Jacques Derrida's words by a current grammar checker, RightWriter Mac from Que Software. This program will detect all sorts of problems and provide all kinds of useful reports about a piece of writing, but a user must know first how to direct the program (telling it what style is the desired style) and second how to interpret its results. For example, this writer would have to know that he wanted to use the passive voice, that for him, here, it is useful. An inexperienced writer would not be so fortunate; the program could lead to a terrorist re-writing of his text, one that would not necessarily produce an improved sentence. Imagine—if Jacques Derrida had written these words as a freshman writer, he might have changed them based on the program's suggestions; after all, he might have asked himself, "IS [this] SENTENCE TOO DIFFICULT? "

Such programs may also be difficult for instructors teaching such students. Referring to a new program with which he "is quite taken," an instructor referred to it as a challenge: "This is cutting-edge technology, so there is no pedagogy that applies," he says. "It is difficult to know how to develop an assignment for use with software that has no precedent" (qtd. in Watkins A26). This statement from 1991 and the problems that RightWriter can produce now suggest that using the ability of computers to follow specialized functions (an ability that fills the computer catalogs with page after page of advertisements) may not be especially useful for writing instruction.
Computers have been useful due to other programs, though—word processors. From the mid-1980's many schools have established computer writing centers and have offered sections of composition courses in rooms full of computers. In an early article on the positive effects of computer writing labs, Dawn Rodrigues suggests the benefits of such facilities to students:

Perhaps the most important effect of computers on the behavior of basic writing students is their role in **moving students toward more independence as writers**. When students came to the computer laboratory earlier in the term, they asked for my help frequently. But in the last few weeks of the semester, students rarely asked for help with word processing or with writing. They knew what they wanted to do, and they had developed the confidence to attempt it by themselves. While learning how to control the computer, students had also learned how to experiment with their own words and thoughts (emphasis added) (339)

This idea of independence recalls the notion of "authority," of how students can obtain better control over their own writing.

In the classroom, the word processor has similar strengths: it allows students to revise and edit, although students do have a tendency to focus on surface, rather than on deep errors. Although word processors in the classroom can make students recognize their "independence as writers," the machines also teach them about audience. In a somewhat strange paragraph, strange since it speaks in a language that seems to be based partly in modern rhetoric's notion of process and audience and in current-traditional rhetoric's privileging of the teacher, Ronald Sudol suggests one value of the computer writing class:
To be sure, on papers clear of unedited clutter teachers can concentrate their commentary on the intended meaning and purpose and be more demanding in a more meaningful way. The copy we read is just that—a copy of a text held in storage from which a fresh, unmutilated copy can be ordered. Accordingly, students should come to understand that the paper we read and comment on is not only theirs but ours as well. Like anything else that is given to another person, a piece of writing becomes a possession of the recipient, whose use of it may or may not be controlled by the giver. (333)

Such a use of computers raises all sorts of theoretical problems, for it implies that using computers may help to reinforce the old structures of authoritarianism and control, structures the newer theories seem to try to overcome.

At first when computers were placed in composition labs and in writing classrooms, the features I've surveyed would be effectively local, locked in individual machines that individual users, one at a time, would use. Such a use of computers raises problems similar to those suggested by Sudol, above, for they sketch a computer classroom with students who are even more separate from each other than they are in the most traditional non-computer classroom, for even there, where they do not work with each other in collaborative groups, they do see each other. However, one version of a computer classroom, with the computers separated from each other around the sides of the room, promises even further isolation, a situation that should us to "ask . . . some hard questions about students and computers" (Suhor 19).
Connected Uses of Computers: E-Mail, Conferences, Modems

Many writers have answered such hard questions with one answer: networks. Schools at various levels have connected students in one room or one school or one city with systems that potentially can connect students around the world. This use of networks began in the early eighties, about the same time, curiously enough, that collaborative learning began to influence writing programs. Throughout the literature on the use of networks runs a thread of collaboration, with innumerable testimonials to the collaborative possibilities of computers.

Some writers compare the collaborative possibilities on campus with those over a network. In a study of the value of networks in a secondary school, Aron and Balajthy make a statement that summarizes this tendency, when they write, "It seemed easier to develop a sense of authorial community in this new kind of learning environment than in more traditional writing settings" (532). Carol Klimick Cyganowski provides a specific example from her experience to suggest the difference between classroom and network collaboration:

Before I used the computer classroom, some students reacted negatively to collaboration and especially to peer critiquing, feeling that they got little from sharing papers with their peers, that their papers were "cut up" by others, or that the time they had put into a project was wasted if reader responses indicated that the writer should "start over." Such complaints are essentially eliminated in computer lab collaboration. Students' emphasis went from critiquing as judging and criticizing to critiquing as suggesting, starting, and creating in new plans and parts in the same session. The fluidity of computer text files and
the intermediate connection between peer response and collaboratively creating alternatives establishes a sense of continuous interaction between readers and writer. (emphasis added) (71)

Such a comment suggests a wide range of miraculous benefits to networking, as if the negatives of human interaction are erased.

Other benefits attributed to networking include a new intensity of the importance of "group knowledge," a concept tied to collaborative principles. Barker and Kemp's notion of "network theory" is based on such a conception: in a network, "transactions should be so managed by the network as to encourage a sense of group knowledge, a sense that every transactor influences and is influenced by such group knowledge, and a sense that such group knowledge is properly malleable (responsive to the influences of each transactor)" (15). They also argue that transactions on a network often more "purifies" the transmission of information, through the notion of "psychological filtering" that "arises when a person uses a computer to communicate with another person, either through electronic mail, or through electronic discussion. Cynthia Selfe suggests a related idea that networks lead to more egalitarian relations, since networks "encourage groups to function in a more egalitarian and democratic manner because they encourage more active participation by more group members . . . [and] may remove some of the hierarchical social cues that constrain face to face encounters" (193). As a result, with networks, "the links or lines of contact proceed from every workstation to every other workstation. No link is privileged. There is no master control over them" (Barker and Kemp 16).

The assumption at work in such a system is similar to the collaborative notion of efficiency: the system will allow large numbers of contacts and
discussions, leading to group consensus and decisions. As a result, groups can pool their resources to learn the topic at hand. The value of the network is to make the group itself that much more emphasized, for the collaboration now occurs over a series of connections between all of the students. The teacher is either out of the loop or is at most positioned at only one of the "links." Such a progression leads to the collaborative learning notion of a teacher as, at most, a referee or a coach; Thomas Barker re-emphasizes the sense of efficiency by referring to this teacher as an "'education manager,' responding to students as their needs arise." In a networked collaborative class, the "students might learn experientially. They might recognize gaps in their knowledge and consult their coach-teacher. The coach-teacher might direct them to information, but might also assign learning exercises designed to strengthen skills. In this way the relationship between teacher, students, and the real world becomes more fluid, the applications of theory to practice more clearly defined than at present (17).

So, how does all of this newly renewed energy of collaboration occur? Through three related, potentially overlapping structures: electronic mail (E-mail) transactions, computer conferencing structures, and modem-delivered, distance education courses. Through electronic-mail, one may send messages to other users on a network, individually or in-groups. In computer conferences, students use "conferencing software" that allows them to choose or create a topic and then enter messages and view all other messages entered about the same topic. Often, electronic-mail and computer conferencing are used as supplements for a classroom-based class. Students and teachers are able to contact each other outside of regular class or office hours through the "electronic bulletin board." In an early (1982) use of electronic mail in an
engineering class at Rutgers University, electronic mail provided several benefits:

Between class meetings, all questions, answers, homework and project reports were sent through the computer. Anything of value transmitted by any one team was put on the bulletin board for all to read. Whenever Welsch [the teacher] wanted to critique a paper, he used the computer like a word processor, writing his own comments into the paper itself. (Eldridge 46)

Computer conferences are often used as a means to encourage students to discuss course readings and concepts; on-line such discussions can lessen harsh effects of face-to-face contact. Discussing a course offered over the conferencing system CONFER at the University of Michigan, Schriner and Rice suggest that "it is heartening to note that the voices . . . heard on CONFER . . . were often unheard in class: one student who stuttered for example, had a forum for expression through CONFER that he did not have in class." (475)

Courses occurring completely through the network via modems offer another possibility, one that is less practiced and less analyzed in the literature. Such courses tend to attract students who have complicated schedules or who have a highly developed sense of independence (Coombs 47). Students use modems to tie computers at distant sites (homes, offices) to their school and instructor. Because of the separation and because such courses usually operate through a series of assignments, they resemble correspondence courses, with the addition of the ability to receive and exchange messages with the other members of the class. This form of education is also attractive to students who "can read the material in a much shorter time than is required to sit through oral presentations." In this sort of course, they can can exert a much
greater sense of control over the information they read over the system, reading it when and how they wish (Hiltz and Meinke 433-4).

HCC's Modem Program: The Computer System

So far, I have made various references to the particular class I am examining in this dissertation, but always in reference to some other topic at hand. I've suggested how Lyotard's ideas say something about such a class and how this class says something about Lyotard. Still, I've avoided examining specific aspects of this class: how it operated, how it was structured, its history, its statistical importance. These are the topics of this chapter, one focusing on fairly nuts and bolts kinds of issues. Still, such a focus is important before I launch into my examination of the ideas I suggested in chapter eight, for just as Lyotard set the scene for his narratives by defining terms and suggesting background, I need to do the same now by examining the computer system and the course design that structured—or at least seemed to structure—the interactions of the class's players.

The course I'm examining occurred during Spring 1991. Titled "English 1301: Freshman Composition on the Modem," it attracted twenty students, half of whom completed the course. I counseled most of these students about the course during the registration period, advising them about how the class operated and how it would be different from an on-campus course. The students and I met in two orientation sessions, one the Saturday morning before classes began, the other the first Tuesday evening of the semester. Students attended only one of these sessions; as a result, they were never together in a classroom as a "class." One review session occurred at the end of the
semester, but it was optional and only a few students chose to come to it. Except for a few phone calls and a few face-to-face meetings, the entire class operated through the computer network.

Houston Community College has offered courses such as English 1301 on the modem since 1987. Most of these courses have been math/science based—accounting, data processing, computer programming—with other courses such as philosophy and history. English 1301 was first taught during the fall of 1990.

Until that same semester, the system operated through a personal computer. The software used at that time, "Fido," was fairly user friendly, providing numerous "prompts" to help students and teachers move through the system. The problem was that there were only two phone lines going into the computer. As a result, many times there would be busy signals when students would dial in to send and receive messages, especially in the prime time of early evening. The size of this computer and the problems with busy signals inhibited growth. These particular courses had been very successful, leading the school to anticipate further growth and thus search for a more powerful system that could better accommodate all of the users and grow as the program would grow.

In Fall 1990, the school switched to a different configuration by using the school's mainframe computer, an IBM 9370. There are 16 lines into this computer, so students and faculty rarely receive a busy signal. (I've never gotten one.) However, with the increased power also came increased complication. Instead of one menu-driven program, we have to use three programs, neither of which is especially user friendly. To log on to the mainframe, we use the "VM" operating system. To send files to the mainframe
computer, we use "Kermit." To transfer files within the mainframe computer we use "Ricemail." Each of these programs has its own glitches and tendencies; switching from one to the other—as a user must do—is a little complicated, especially for some students—and instructors. As a result, the administrators have written, edited, and revised a series of manuals on using the system.

Further, since the course I am examining was taught (Spring 1991) two sets of enhancements to the system have been introduced. One set has allowed users to send different kinds of files (essays written off-line and then uploaded versus messages written on-line, on the system) in different ways. The most recent change has been a menu-driven system for the mainframe, making the system less complicated to new, unsure users. However, since these enhancements occurred since the semester I taught this course, I am ignoring their changes for this discussion.

At the time I taught, the operating procedure basically went something like this: Students and faculty would use their word processors and their own computers (IBM compatible or Macintosh) to draft messages to send to others. These messages might be a teacher's assignments or lessons or the student's homework or essays. The users would be sure to save messages in "text only" format; otherwise as the information would go from their personal computer to the mainframe back to another's computer it might be scrambled. Because students and faculty were using their own computers, potentially in their homes, they could work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They also had twenty-four hour access to the mainframe, making their participation in the class very flexible.

Once messages were ready to be sent, or if someone wanted simply to check for messages, he or she would dial the school using the modem. After
placing a phone call, the user would be connected to the "VM" operating system; he or she would then use "Ricemail" to send messages to other users or to check to see if anyone had left messages. If a user wanted to send a message that had been typed off-line using a word processing program—saved in "text only" format—he or she would transfer to the "Kermit" program, to send the file to the mainframe, or "up-load" it. Once there, it could be sent using "Ricemail." For every message sent, the system would automatically make a back-up copy of it; it is this collection of backup copies that has provided the data I'll examine in chapters nine, ten, and eleven, what I call there the "text" of the class.

The users would also, of course, receive messages from others. Students would receive assignments, lessons and graded work from their instructor; essays and homework from other students; and messages from everyone. An instructor would receive homework, questions and comments from students. To examine these messages off-line by down-loading them, class members would use "Kermit."

After transferring files, if they were finished with the system, the users would log-off and usually transfer to their word processing programs to read and edit what they received. In the word processor, they would carry out any function its program allows, including going into the text that they had down-loaded from another writer and making comments or simply reading. Then, the users could turn that file, with their comments into the "text only" format and send it back, starting the process over again.
The Course Structure of English 1301 on the Modem

At Houston Community College, as at many large schools, the freshman English program is fairly standardized. Freshman English covers two semesters, with English 1301 focusing on essay structure and English 1302 focusing on persuasion and research. All sections of the course use the same textbooks, a grammar handbook, *The Modern Writer's Handbook*, and a reader, *The Riverside Reader*, containing supplemental readings organized around the rhetorical modes of narration/description, comparison/contrast, definition, division/classification, process analysis, and cause and effect. Until recently, this course was so standardized at this school that on any given day, one could visit classes across the city and discover everyone analyzing, say, George Orwell's "Shooting the Elephant." The course was based on what we called "the instructor's syllabus," a manual of xeroxed pages first compiled by the English department years ago and revised every so often. This manual explained procedures and policies, gave teaching suggestions, and offered extra readings. It also contained what HCC calls "The Grading Profile," a five-category grading grid used to grade all essays in the course; this form would allow a student to earn not a "B" but an "83" on an essay—it is very objective.

Because of its origin, it continual revision, and its need to be responsive to especially vocal members of the English department (and others), this syllabus and the course it represented contained a collection of sometimes conflicting theories and techniques. Basically the course would be labeled "current-traditional" since it focused on a orderly series of rhetorical modes and included a review of grammar, as well as a dollop of "the writing process."
In the last few years, the syllabus became a little less rigid, in the sense that teachers were encouraged to arrange their classes in ways different from the recommended structures, so various teachers have tried more progressive techniques, including collaborative activities and portfolio grading. Still, certain absolute goals, assignments, and requirements remain departmental policy. These are listed in Appendix I.

As a department, the English Department of HCC exerted a certain amount of control on its teachers and its students—so much so that even in the period of the department's relaxing its control, some teachers still feel they must follow the "suggestions" of the department as if they were "requirements. Because of this climate of control, I welcomed the chance to teach via the modem as a liberating experience, but I still was also aware of control.

Before I first taught the course, in the fall of 1990, I wrote my own syllabus for the course, a document of about one hundred pages. I took the official course structure and assignment sequence and altered it to fit the kind of environment I thought teaching over the modem would provide. This modem syllabus was due at my department and the distance education office of HCC about two months before the course was to begin. It had to be approved by appropriate administrators as well, which it was. Although no changes were made to the course as I wrote it, theoretically these offices could have required such changes, allowing other kinds of control to come back into the picture.

The first semester I taught the course, I followed this syllabus, organized around the rhetorical modes I mentioned above. Although the course worked fairly well, I was not satisfied. I've never been fond of the entire concept of rhetorical modes since they always seem to blur together to me. After all, when you "define" something, you can also "compare and contrast" it with something
else, no? Further, since I wanted students to talk to each other through the computer network (I used the introduction discussed above for the two semesters I taught the course), I was frustrated that for some reason they did not seem to want to talk about the concept of "division/classification"; I can't imagine why not.

So, for the second semester, Spring 1991, the semester I'm examining now, I changed the focus and direction of the course. I organized the course around topics based on an index of essays in *The Riverside Reader*. These topics included such issues as "the family," "ethical issues," "places," and "the women's perspective." I picked the first topic; since the semester began with a war in Kuwait, I chose the category "heroes." The students read six essays in the reader concerning heroes, discussed them with each other, and wrote essays on some general topics relating, positive or negative, to heroes.

Appendix I explains the mechanics of this course, but basically the semester worked as follows. Each week I would send what I called a "lesson" to all of the students. This lesson would discuss the topics of the week, offer suggestions, give explanations. It would also make assignments for the following week. Some of these assignments concerned readings in the textbooks and related writing assignments. Other assignments concerned the major papers of the course and the process of creating them. Students were asked to send some pre-writing about their particular topics to me as well as rough drafts of their essays to me and to each other. Still other assignments were more in the vein of exercises, on writing, word use, and sentence structure. I don't like to think of such exercises as "grammar exercises," for I think they were more inventive; students would transform passages that I would send them.
When they completed these assignments, students would send them to me and, in many cases, to everyone else in the class, using the "English" ID. They would then read each other's work and make comments, returning both back to the original writer. I would also make comments and return work to the original writers. The computer system facilitated making these comments, for it allowed readers to insert their own words into the words of other writers and then save this text with corrections as a new file and send it back to the original writer. Potentially, one could insert many comments; as a result, making just a few comments could lead a reader to think a paper had been read without a great deal of care.

The seeming efficiency of the class did become a concern for its management. Keeping track of all of the messages flying across my computer screen, remembering which I had saved, to which I had responded, and to which I still had to respond was a bit of work. Further, when students would send me the same file twice, as often happened because of inexperience with the computer system, I would have to read the file twice to be sure it was a duplicate and not just a revision. Students also received duplicate files, causing similar problems. In Appendix I, I mention under "File Labels" the naming procedure I suggested to keep track of the different kinds of messages. This procedure worked fairly well, but since it was an artificial system imposed to create order, it wasn't wonderfully effective. We all kept forgetting it, so we all re-read duplicate files.

Another aspect of this efficiency concerns the tensions that occurred because of the closeness the network provided. As I've suggested earlier, networks alter the relationships between participants; they bring people closer together. At times, such closeness can lead to the collaborative successes I
cited previously. However, closeness does not always mean fondness. When participants are establishing contradictory goals with each other, when they see the situation differently, when they see their situations differently, being close to each other can be painful and difficult. This is an aspect of teaching that teachers sometimes admit to each other, but it's also an aspect that is outweighed by other factors: the good relationships, the successful moments, the production of a semester.

However, a course that exists purely over a computer network, as this did, is different. It changes the importance of such issues as "closeness" and "difficulty." As I mentioned earlier, the distance education modem program at Houston Community College occurs completely off-campus—not only for the students, but for the faculty as well. Thus, the students and I were using computers in our own homes. Mine is in my bedroom, surrounded by the clutter that is my idea of decoration (and I've included some descriptions from a student in a following chapter). I mention this now for this reason: imagine the feeling you—whether as teacher or as student—would get when in a "painful and difficult" relationship in a classroom. Whether student or teacher, the experience can be troubling, but it's an experience that occurs in fairly neutral territory (though not completely neutral for, of course, classrooms may seem to be the teachers' natural lair to their students).

Now, imagine this: that this same frustrating relationship occurred in your bedroom, that when you turned on your computer, as you were sitting next to a photograph of the person you love most in the world, next to the letter from your best friend, you would face messages that would be hard to deal with, messages that would require great concentration, messages that would accuse you (or so you thought), messages that might lead you to make your own
accusations. All of these messages could come rolling over your computer screen, rolling through your printer, rolling into your lap. A network occurring through terminals at a school building is public; a network that is hooked up to the back of our houses is an odd mixture of public and private.

Whether teaching in a traditional classroom or teaching over a computer network operating on school property, imagine what you, as teacher or student, would do if such a complicated situation occurred. With whom, for example, would you talk and share the experience? Most likely other students and teachers, people with whom you could talk because they would understand the structure of such an experience. However, as these sheets of annoyances come rolling down your hall, chasing you to make you face up to them, who would you talk to at home? Unless you live with other teachers or students (who are also involved in on-line education at home), who would understand the problems and concerns you face? Do you think your spouse, significant other, child, or next-door neighbor would be someone who would know what to say? Would you want to tell any of these choices all of the intricacies of the class that could make the experience have the meaning to him or her that it does to you? (And, of course, are you willing to share in his or her comparable experiences at work?)

Such a situation is unusual for most teachers and students, for it's a little more personal than the personal face-to-face relationships we have in even crowded classrooms. It is a situation that the efficiency of teaching and taking a class from the privacy of our homes brings to us. If we extended the possible consequences of this new situation, we might end up with The Twilight Zone, a fate I don't mean to suggest as an actual possibility, but it does make a wonderful, tantalizing image of what could happen. Still, I do think it's
important to emphasize the novelty of this sort of teaching/learning situation. It's a relatively new form of education, making its successes and its problems of great importance for our future.

The Students Attracted to Modern Instruction

Before examining more specifically how this course operated, one needs to learn a bit more about the students who took the course. As I suggested earlier, community colleges in general attract students who are less traditional and sometimes more marginal than are the typical students at a university. Houston Community College is a good example: out of a total enrollment at HCC in Fall 1991 of 52,362, over half were women and most of these were 25 to 44 years old (HCC Fall). The modern program not only reflects that breakdown; it emphasizes it. During the same semester, over two-thirds of the students were women, and two-thirds were in the same general age bracket (Elliott). Such groups of students faced many non-traditional experiences before they landed at a community college. They work, they raise families, and they juggle a range of responsibilities, making participation in any course important to them and often quite intense.

Since I began teaching over the modem, I have had a varied group of students. One was a salesman who traveled. He would log on to the system at least once a week. Another student was a nurse in a nursing home; she would work on assignments during her lunch hour using the office computer. She also would come into her office on weekends to get everything accomplished. Another student was a non-degreed "accountant"; she attended school to get a
degree in accounting to increase her job prospects. She did all the work for the class in the evenings while her husband took care of their small child. Another student took the course with her teenaged son; he dropped and, typical of such students, she did not. Some students could be called "Off the Wall Students." One was a computer genius who came into the class sending files of suggestions, including a program to allow us to send documents with "control codes"—the computer codes that tell a word processor to underline, use boldface, etc. Because we had to send files in text-only forms, such enhancements were unavailable. We could use all capital letters, but that's all. With his system, we were supposed to be able to use these codes; however, the student gave me the program to use on my end sent me a sample file, and never surfaced again.

Along with such a varied student body come varying levels of problems when students became acclimated to the course. Several of the students signed up for the course and knew it would occur over a modem—even though they couldn't type. They planned to use the system by having spouses and friends type their assignments; such a plan was, unfortunately, doomed to failure. A couple of students were completely computer illiterate even though they could type. Spouses or relatives did the computer work—such was the case with the mother/son combination.

Some of these students took this course because they felt they could not work in a visit to the campus with their busy schedules. Some of these didn't realize that although they could juggle when they participated in the class, they could not juggle the amount of work that constituted the workload; in fact, this class requires more work from the students, since all communication is in writing. As a result, there was a relatively high drop rate of about 50%.
Generally, classes at HCC have a fairly high drop rate because of the nature of our students and our late drop deadline (at the end of April in the spring semester). In the modern program, those who stay seemed enthusiastic and interested enough in the course to lead me to conclude that those who dropped were doing so due to personal and economic reasons—the same reasons that cause many other community college students to withdraw as well.

A Basis for Narratives

Operating through the computer system and following the course structure I’ve suggested above, the students and I attempted English 1301. The result is a set of messages—essays, assignments, lessons, question, comments—that seem to me to have a certain narrative cohesion. In the pages that follow, I examine this data from this perspective, not from the perspective of course design, or course effectiveness. I am also not attempting a comparison of this course with a "standard" course occurring on-campus, although given HCC’s somewhat standardized syllabus, such a comparison would be possible. However, I’m avoiding such issues, approaching the data not from the perspective of student improvement or curricular design, or even rhetoric, but from that of the language game interactions of the players. From this perspective, the data suggest how Lyotard's ideas are applicable to help us understand how the class worked. The also suggest how the class helps us view Lyotard's ideas in new ways. The result? Many results are possible, but the one that seems most tantalizing is the notion of a class not as a progression
of assignments and topics, but as a legitimate institution formed by the narratives that were sent through the network.
CHAPTER 9: NARRATIONS OF LIBERATION AND CONTROL

In chapter six I examined essays from three scholars, Jane Tompkins, Mary Kupiec Cayton, and Robert Brooke, and called their work "narratives." I suggested then that their use of narrative helps show the importance, contra Lyotard, of the narrative structure for legitimation. In chapter seven, I again referred to these authors, but here I used their narratives to imply that a network full of such narrators would indeed be complicated. Now, I suggest something else: that the narratives they tell are all versions of emancipation narratives, for they are all concerned with either the freedom or enslavement of some hero, whether student or teacher. Of course, these authors are divided over exactly who should be the hero of each of their proposed narratives of liberation—who most needs to be freed from tyranny. The teacher is the answer Tompkins and Cayton give us, while to Brooke, the student is more in need (although he also gives some aspect of heroism to the teacher).

These four elements of freedom, control, students, and teachers are very important for this project, for they've provided me a useful set of tools to investigate and explain what occurred in the class I taught through a computer network. In this class, these elements come together, through various narratives, causing players to form the metaprescriptions that guide their future moves. The result is a view (to be more precise, one should say views) of a class that is different from the precise proposals of these three authors, for their elements interconnect here in various, complicated ways, even sometimes simultaneously—mixing elements of freedom and control, and the roles of student and teacher. The result is the social bond of this particular class.
One further aspect of this class is its support system, the computer network that allows for these narratives and players to come together. Much of the information in the following chapters comprises a narrative, for I will be re-telling the events, interludes, convergences, interruptions, and seeming plots of this class, telling who said what and who did what to whom. Except for a few phone calls and the in-person orientation session, this action occurred over the computer network I described in the previous chapter. When the players were first introduced to this network, it seemed to sing the same siren's call that computers had already sung for Lyotard and for composition instructors. The network seemed to promise radically new ways of playing the games of students and teacher, ways of offering increased support through improved interaction. Throughout the course, the players relied upon the network to connect them and support them fully. However, as I've suggested earlier, computers may not be as efficient as they might seem, for they are merely the prosthesis through which the stories of their users flow. A result, the issue of the technical efficiency of computers is thus another key element of this class. As I navigate the narrations, it's an element that will appear over and over, with varying results.

This chapter examines the origins of the legitimating narratives that constituted the class, showing how they originated and how they worked to emphasize the course as a legitimate institution. Throughout these narratives runs the theme of efficiency. To some extent, these narratives and this theme seem to form a fairly stable system, an efficient structure of various narratives blending into an effective form of education. It is as if a sense of narrative and technical consensus is at work. I mention this now, though, to suggest that other data in future chapters show a slightly different combination of the narratives of
legitimation and technology. As I move toward those ideas, I will be suggesting that although I've criticized certain of Lyotard's key ideas about narrative and technology, other parts of his theories of legitimation still seem especially apt.

**The Opening Narrative for the Class**

Lyotard describes the situation leading to the emancipation narrative as follows: "All peoples have a right to science. If the social subject is not already the subject of scientific knowledge, it is because that has been forbidden by priests and tyrants. The right to science must be reconquered" (PMC 31). One can imagine such a general set of statements coming from various sources, political speeches, policy papers, *The Declaration of Independence*.

In my class, my statement of freedom was presented to my students twice: first during orientation and then again as the first of the weekly lessons; this statement is included in Appendix I. I was convinced that my students, who had never before enrolled in such a course, would need a philosophical statement to hold on to as they navigated the network of the course. The orientation sessions were the only time I would actually meet all of my students (and then in two groups). I sensed that after that first meeting the course might seem like a series of disconnected exercises asking them to write this and write that and send the writing here and there, so I wanted them to know how I thought they should see a course as a whole. I normally provide similar written statements for on-campus classes but for this class such a statement seemed even more important.
For part of these goals I relied on ideas not that different from those of an emancipation narrative:¹

Welcome to Freshman English on the Modem! This course will help prepare you for the kinds of writing assignments you will face in your college courses and throughout your career.

With these words, I imply a common, but important idea for the people who take English classes at Houston Community College. As a writing teacher, I know that people who write well—or write at all—are better prepared at least for some aspects of employment; and that's a common goal for most of my students. They plan to take classes at HCC for a couple of years and then transfer to a university, with the ultimate goal a better job than the one they have now. Connecting "writing" to this goal has always seemed like a good idea; along with other writing teachers teaching other students, I wanted to hook my subject onto the ultimately economic goals of these students.

As I continued this opening statement, I said more about the particular kind of class this course would be. I wanted the students to see it as an unusual experience, a class unlike any they had ever attended. This semester was the second semester I had taught via the modem, so it was still special to me. I hoped that making the course special would make it seem exciting and that such a feeling would help motivate and encourage. But this statement has a related, more controlling side: I wanted the students to realize that this class would be, frankly, a lot of work. I didn't want them to think that since we'd never see each other again, that they wouldn't need to work hard.

¹ The following is the first in a series of quotations taken from the messages of this class. Some of the quotations are fairly long, but they are necessary to trace the narratives they contain. Some of the quotations contain grammatical and spelling errors. I have not corrected them, to keep them in the form sent by their authors.
Thus, in the section that follows I was emphasizing two related concepts: that because the course would be constituted through writing, it would both allow for new possibilities and at the same time it would require a fair amount of work. At the time I taught the class, I saw these statements as taking care of potential problems—I learned when I first started teaching that I needed to explain the hows and whats and whys clearly and early. Now, as I look at these statements as part of the text of the class, I see them as introducing two related narratives that I was using to legitimate my position as an instructor: a narrative of liberation (one that appears in several different forms) and a narrative of control.

Notice the following (I've numbered the paragraphs here to refer to them more easily; originally they were presented, I think, with a bit more flair on the page:

1. In some ways, taking this course via the modem creates special difficulties. Most students in other sections of this course learn how to write by working with others around them. Well, with this course, you may feel that there are no others around you. As you read my words on your screen, you may be alone, at 3 AM, with your array of snacks beside you, your dog at your feet and your favorite music around you—but with no other people near you. Even if there are people around you, they aren't in the course; they aren't going to be able to answer every question you may have about your work.

2. So how do we solve this problem, so that you will be fully able to improve your skills in writing?

3. \textit{WITH WRITING!}
4. You will correspond with me and with each other through WRITING. If you have a problem, you can send a message to me in WRITING, and I'll respond in WRITING. You will read each other's work, submitted in WRITING, and you will respond in WRITING. You will discuss the readings in our textbooks in WRITING.

5. Most students in any freshman writing course do a fair amount of WRITING, but it is WRITING confined to a specific arena: the "formal essay." Here, though, you'll WRITE essays, paragraphs, journal assignments, notes, and questions. Any WRITING teacher emphasizes at least two areas when teaching students how to WRITE essays: making the point clear and explaining the point. With formal essays, such areas are often difficult to master, but when, for example, you have a question, I think you'll find that you can easily state your concern and explain it. Doing that will help your WRITING and will thereby help you succeed in this course.

6. So, I hope I've made my point about WRITING, yes? Good. Before we jump into the course itself, we need to examine/review some more mechanical issues.

In each of these paragraphs, I'm establishing different aspects of the narratives of liberation and control.

In the first three paragraphs, I'm suggesting that I both care about my students and see their experiences as special (the narrative of liberation) and that the experience on which they are embarking will require new kinds of discipline on their part (the narrative of control). The experience is liberating in its being new—they have never participated in a class this way before. They
are able to take a class, an English class that they may be taking only because it's a required course, in fairly comfortable surroundings: "with your array of snacks beside you, your dog at your feet and your favorite music around you." And—they get to do this at "3 AM"—a time when most people aren't in class, a time that some people might see as undue punishment, but a time that signifies a rebellion against standard order—"3 AM? And you're doing WHAT?" I'm also telling my students something about me that fits in with this sense of liberation; I'm giving them an idea of what I'm like. I didn't want to be seen as a red-pen pushing, critical guy; no, with this description I'm giving them my idea of mid-American everyman: junk food, a dog, pop music. How, if I like these things, can I be a tyrant?

My role as potential tyrant comes by luring them into a class in which they are going to be alone, cut off from their world—for that is another implication of these paragraphs. Their situation is one, of course, of "special difficulties." They will not have the benefits of experiencing a writing course with others sitting around them (although this is a benefit that does not necessary accrue from such seating arrangements, per se). They are alone, up at the uncivilized time of 3 AM! Even their family members and housemates are of no help; they are cut off from them too, for "they aren't going to be able to answer every question you may have about your work." So they are cut off from all means of support from other humans.

This problem is solved by falling under the controlling mechanism of the class: "So how do we solve this problem, so that you will be fully able to improve your skills in writing? WITH WRITING!" This is a tricky statement. On one hand, this is a statement of liberation, since it implies that the students will develop new, positive abilities—they will be "fully able" in a way that, perhaps
they weren't when they faced the chains of past oppression. However, they get to this new idea through writing—and not just "writing" but "WRITING"—writing emphasized, made all important. Partly, the word appears this way just for emphasis, but it also appears this way to drive home the point that the students will be doing a lot of writing, a lot of work. There's a sneakier bit of control in the first line of the quotation—the shift from the first person plural "we" to the second person singular "you." The "you" will be fully able; the "you" will receive these miraculous benefits. However, it will achieve these results only from the "we"—meaning only from the "you" student being helped by the "me" teacher. I suspect that I used "we" to make a slight shift from the student's situation in the previous paragraph to the class in which I will be a part, but invoking this "we" here makes me think now of all the authorities who would say in their stereotypical way "So what are we going to do?" when what they would mean would be something more like "What are you going to do, now?"

In the next three paragraphs, I provide the meat of my orientation, for I let the students have more of an idea of how this course will function. The first of these paragraphs, paragraph four, suggests that the course will allow students to find a way out of their difficulties; the course will liberate them. They'll discover new people to talk to, something useful since they are cut off from all except their dog. They'll be able to send and receive many messages. Notice that the first response that they'll receive is to a "problem," suggesting that they will be taken care of in this course, that I will be a better teacher/care-giver. But notice also, that I'm emphasizing that they will have problems and that I'll be the first one to contact for assistance. Notice also all of the "WRITING." The capitalization is an effect that does emphasize the repetition of the word, giving the paragraph a certain rhythm, but why this effect and why this rhythm?
Possibly to drum home the idea that the course will be WRITING, WRITING, WRITING? What fun. Notice that the capitalization extends throughout the entire passage, through the following paragraphs. Notice also that the last of these promises is "You will discuss the readings in our textbooks in WRITING"—the other possibilities at least seemed to connect to the students' personal needs and interests, but I have yet to meet a student who, simply for the joy of it, likes analyzing textbooks; even I don't do that readily.

In the next paragraph, I take a common ploy of liberator/controllers: I compare the plight of these underprivileged with the worse plight of other underprivileged students; I try to make them feel special, for both liberation and control. Students in on-campus courses have to write "formal essays"; using the word "formal" I make these essays, which in English 1301 at HCC have to be around 500 words, seem like massive, bound affairs. The option I give these students seems much lighter: essays (not formal ones), paragraphs (short and sweet), journal assignments (nebulous, yes, but not as threatening as formality), notes (fuzzy things), and questions (designed, of course, to help free them from their shackles). Thus, clearly, these students are better off in this class, loneliness and lack of sleep and all. Further, they seem to be better off because they are taking a course in this new, experimental way.

The next section of this paragraph expands these ideas. Again, I compare this class to "regular" classes: "Any WRITING teacher emphasizes at least two areas when teaching students how to WRITE essays: making the point clear and explaining the point." Part of the point of this comparison is to introduce the two related ideas I emphasize as a teacher of writing, and it's emphasized as I do, without the jargon of the English profession, without mentioning "thesis statements" or "supporting evidence." The language here,
"making the point clear" and "explaining the point" is my idea of liberating language for a writing course—fairly simple, basically clear. But it's also controlling, for I'm setting up a structure that comes from me, that I created and control. I'm suggesting that I am the one who has made all of this understandable and comprehensible.

With the next sentences, I continue this emphasis but also introduce a related idea, by contrasting the problems of formal essays (they are "difficult to master") with the ease of this course ("when, for example, you have a question, I think you'll find that you can easily state your concern and explain it"). Now, writing is sometimes easy and often not, even when a writer thinks it should be. If a writer has a question that is well-formed, he may be able to ask it without much difficulty, but what if the question itself is muddled, a question contained in and defined by the writer's confusion? That's the case often with writers in a writing class. Here, though, I'm suggesting an across-the-boards easiness ("I think you'll find") that some or many students may not experience. This sense of "ease" is related to the sense of "liberation" I've been suggesting. It implies that this will be a class in which past problems will disappear, simply from the structure of the course.

It also implies a large amount of information changing hands. Imagine this: every student in the course has—what?—just two or three questions a week; each puts these questions in writing and sends them to me. I respond in writing and send replies. Some/many of my replies are unclear and the students return with new questions. "Questioning" has become a language game. It can be a similar game orally, but then it occurs in real time, quickly. Over a network, each question is a message, each has to be typed and then read and re-typed. That's, quite frankly, a lot of work. It emphasizes a side of
the liberation narrative that offers an even further contrast with the controlling narrative. It implies that in this course the students will receive lots of feedback, more, perhaps, than they ever have before. This feedback will allow them to be fully liberated from the shackles of not having good writing skills. This feedback will thus lead to that college degree, that better-paying job that this passage promised several paragraphs ago. However, giving that feedback is a lot of work. As much as someone, here a teacher, me, wants to explain every question and offer solutions to every problem, or at least make some comment and some suggestion or show some concern, how is that really possible? In the real-time world of the classroom, questioning time is often limited, to before or after class, or to appropriate moments in class or during office hours. Over a network, answering questions from several students becomes a different kind of work—written work with all of its complications.

What this leads to is a problem that recalls the problems that Lyotard suggested in the grand Narratives: that their legitimation was based on a presupposition that they couldn't support. The liberation narrative and the controlling narratives, although opposed throughout this passage, are both based on the presupposition that in this sort of course, that very liberation or control is more possible, all because students will be doing more writing (WRITING, WRITING, WRITING). However, although I don't overtly make this promise, I imply that I will respond to all of their writing. Even in a classroom, teachers feel the need to put some mark on a student's work to show that it has been read. Teachers have developed an entire industry of arguing tactics to argue with each other about whether or not they should put many marks on an essay or grade it "holistically." In a networked course, the holistic option is limited, for if students are sending me questions, I can't just respond with
"Question received." That's not an answer. However, answering all questions thoroughly, carefully can put to a test any teacher's belief in the value of writing. He wants the students to value writing and ask questions. But for every question a student writes, the teacher will have more questions from other students to handle as well, making the whole questioning language game a game of burdens.

I raise this problem now because it's a problem that narratives of liberation and control, in this sort of course, must face. Although I want to serve as the students' hero by leading them to success, and although I am also a tyrant because I must control their actions (just because I am a teacher), these roles are thwarted by the amount of work they will generate. I'm reminded more readily of the problems of efficiency in the performativity criterion, for in a system that promises efficiency (whether from the perspective of liberation or control), that promise may mask the fact that efficiency is simply not possible. And, as Lyotard suggests when he examines the collapse of these systems of legitimation, just what does legitimate the system? In this case, if not liberation or control—what?

The final part of the passage ignores this kind of problem (as well it should, for when I wrote it, I had never even considered that such a problem would exist) as it promises success:

Doing that will help your WRITING and will thereby help you succeed in this course.

So, I hope I've made my point about WRITING, yes? Good. Before we jump into the course itself, we need to examine/review some more mechanical issues.
Notice that I'm emphasizing that the student is the source of the success ("you succeed") after the "help" provided by earlier "ease" of stating concerns. Remember also that earlier in the passage I suggested that I would be part of the solution to the students' problems ("So how do we solve this problem . . . ?"); now, I've shifted the focus back to the student. I want him to feel good about himself, to see himself as a success, or rather a potential success if he works hard. Thus, again, I'm setting up a dual structure: the student will be in control, he will liberate himself; but he will do this if he practices what the course will teach—if he will just follow the lead of the controlling mechanism. The first two sentences of the final paragraph emphasize this point even more. Although their opening tone is friendly, it's also a little brusque. The first sentence asks a question the student must answer, and from the way the question is asked, there can be only one answer, the only answer the unempowered can give to the powerful at this point: yes.

I realize that I may be guilty of overly-analyzing this passage from the opening message to the students, but this message was the main expression of the goals and intentions of the course in a fairly informal way. I wanted this passage to give students an idea of what the course would be like and what it would contain. It gave them their best opening idea of who I was to be in the course and what I intended and who they were to be and what were their possibilities. On one level, this would be a new, wonderful, liberating experience, one that could change the students' lives. I think any writing course can be this way, and of course I'm prejudiced, but I thought that this course would be even more so. On another level, I was expressing my teacherly concern for control. I wanted to emphasize that the course would be work, a lot of work, and that I would be exerting some power. I've referred to these two
orientations as narratives for that's the form I think they take. They position
different players in the roles of hero in the liberation narrative and beneficent
leader/tyrant of the controlling narrative.

With the controlling narrative, the player in the key role is fairly easy to
detect: me. As teacher, I send messages of control to the students. They, as
addressees, do play the role of sender, but only as senders of reduced power,
sending messages at most in response to my more powerful messages.

With the liberating narrative, the position of hero is much more
complicated since both the students and the teacher can serve as heroes of
different aspects of the narrative. In fact, these aspects are so different that one
should regard them as separate narratives (making, perhaps the general
concept of a liberating narrative more of a narrative of a narrative, or a
metanarrative). I'll refer to one aspect of this narrative, the one most evident
from the introductory message as the "Narration of Liberation." Here the student
is partly the hero since she is able to participate in this course in a way never
before possible. She is able to send messages expressing her opinions,
concerns, and possibilities in ways not considered in earlier, more stringent
courses. The teacher as addressee responds, sending messages of
encouragement and assistance, not messages of power. At times, though, the
teacher may seem to play the role of hero, for he is the liberator of the class; in
his messages he emphasizes that the class is now free. The students as
addressees respond by offering examples of their newly liberated power. This
sense of role reversals is crucial to a narrative of liberation, for one of its basic
features is the ability of past controls to be made more shifting and changing.

A second metanarrative of liberation appears more focused within the
scope of the students. As a result, I'll refer to it as the "Narration of
Collaboration." In this narrative, students are the heroes. They are able to exchange messages with each other, without the interfering presence of a teacher, either as a controlling tyrant or a liberating hero. They can learn about each other's lives as they build a base for collaborative interactions. They can offer suggestions for each other's work. They can help each other learn more about the topics they discuss as they work as peer groups of experts.

These two narratives are focused on the actual course of English 1301, what it was designed to provide to the students. However, a third metanarrative connects this class, one that refers more to the computer system that constituted the class, one that I call the "Narration of Experimentation." In this narration, again, all students and the teacher take the role of hero, for each of them is involved in an experiment. Part of this experiment produces elements of efficiency by joining this disparate players. However, the experiment also produces problems—files that are jumbled, messages that are lost, computers that don't work. Along with messages concerning the course content, these messages about the system run throughout the class, allowing students and teacher to vent steam when problems arise, offering new suggestions to avoid future problems.

This is the world that the course created and that the text of the course presents, one of multiple narratives, three liberating narratives and one controlling one. I realize that one might argue that these narratives are just language games that the players adopt or discard at will in the way that Lyotard's paralogical scientists throw out little narratives without legitimating power. That would be the general poststructuralist or constructionist approach. However, I think they are more important, for they provide structures that the students and I use to defend our positions and create new acts. They may not
be ultimate structures; they may exist on purely local levels, but at that level, at
that moment, they have the effect of such powerful structures. They serve as
means to legitimize the individual player's acts, but more importantly, their very
use in the class allows the players to legitimize the class itself, for the class is
the structure in which these narratives occur. Because it allows these narratives
to occur—all of them, in all of their complication—it is legitimate.

This use of multiple narratives of legitimation is clearly different from the
position of the grand Narratives. In that structure, only one narrative seemed in
effect at a certain time for a certain group of players. Of course, even then, the
two narratives really did occur simultaneously; their difference was more a
difference in scope. They supported different aspects of western society,
aspects that combined to produce the total society. Much earlier, in chapter two,
I examined Lyotard's notion of "totalizing" knowledge of a culture and "critical
knowledge," pointing out how critical knowledge becomes part of the general
system of totalizing knowledge. One may regard the same kind of connection
here. The two grand Narratives combine to form society. From the perspectives
of their times, they may appear separate; from a wider perspective, they appear
to be two sides of a totalizing structure. The same kind of connection can justify
multiple narratives in the class. They guide different kinds of statements at
different times, offering different aspects of legitimation to the players. Together,
by the way they divide and classify the actions of the class, they provide
legitimacy to the class itself.

One should also note that this position is similar to that suggested by two
works I have quoted, both works examining the relationship between
poststructuralism and feminism. Recall Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson's
argument that narratives of legitimation are useful tools to probe society, useful
even if there are concerns about whether such narratives can still exist. Simply because the grand Narratives of the dominant culture are in question does not mean that other kinds of narratives could not exert similar kinds of power. This argument is related to that of Diana Fuss, in her suggestion of the possibility of a "hidden essentialism" behind "radical constructionism" (12). Both sets of authors suggest that narrative means of legitimation may still be used because of what they allow us to see.

Just as feminist concerns can shed new light on how poststructuralist theories actually reflect the construction of ideas, the use of narratives in this class, and more the clash of the games of narrative and metaprescription, suggest both the applicability and the gaps in Lyotard's theories. To see the full range of these possibilities, we'll look at more examples: examples of the four narratives at work within the class, and how these narratives explain aspects a relationship I had with one especially strong student, and examples of how these narratives work in the interactions between students.
CHAPTER 10: NAVIGATING THE CLASS NARRATIVES

The Narration of Liberation

In this narration the students and the teacher exchange many messages in which they develop relationships somewhat different from those in a traditional classroom-based class. Both sets of senders seem able to ask a variety of questions and make numerous comments to each other. Many of these comments are statements that the rules of a teacher-centered current-traditional class would not really allow. There, student questions and comments would occur at odd moments before, during, or after class. During the class, such comments would possibly be integrated into the "official" structure of the class, generalizing them and taking them away from the precise sender. A question about developing a particular essay would be turned, for example, into a general discussion of the topic, one that could benefit all the students but one in which a sense of individual liberty would be subsumed by the general good.

Before or after class, the messages would be either at the teacher's whim, depending on the available time given other duties and desires, and at the whim of the others, for the more students with questions and comments very possibly the less time would remain for such statements. Thus, even in the most student-centered classroom environment, some constraints on absolute liberation would necessarily remain.

In a networked class, students are playing liberated roles, sending as many messages as they wish. Sometimes these messages concern specific classroom issues, sometimes they concern more general topics, but always
they offer contributions to the overall sense of just what this class is. To start, look at one example from Ellen, one of the most active students in the course:

Date: Sun, 03 Mar 91 11:37:54 EDT
From: Ellen <ENG18@HCCSV1>
Subject: revising sentences
To: Chief <rford@HCCSVM1>

Hello again! I have a question for you about the revision on one of the sample sentences you gave us to practice on. The original sentence was: There has been an increase in the number of publications of pornography that sell at newsstands from zero in 1953 to a number well over thirty in the last five years. You revised it to: The number of pornographic publications sold at newsstands has increased from zero to well over thirty in the last five years. They no longer mean the same thing. The second one says the sales increase has been in the last five years. The first one says the sales increase has been over the past 38 years. When you are talking sales figures it makes a big difference. Anyway, this is probably just a way for me to spend my time as I make excuses not to finish revising my essay. Bye, Ellen

Ellen is referring to a homework assignment on wordy sentences, an exercise that I took from Linda Flower's Problem Solving Strategies for Writing (181). I've used this exercise in classrooms with some success, but over the modem, the students could not ask me the sort of instant questions that the word-play of rearranging would require. Further, in a classroom, I would wait to see what kinds of changes the students would make before I introduced possible

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¹ All names of students have been changed.
revisions. Here, Ellen is pointing out a valid point: the revision I had suggested misses a crucial aspect of the sense of the original wordy statement. Her reading closely enough to see this problem and then her telling me about it are important, for she demonstrates that in a class over the modem she must actively participate in the class if she really wants to learn. She must behave as a free player, responsible for evaluating what she says, not just passively absorbing everything in a controlled environment.

Her way of telling me about the error is even more important. Through this system, she feels comfortable adopting the momentary name "Chief" for me; the rest of the note has the tone and form of an informal, friendly message, from the greeting "Hello again!" to the ironic closing statement, "Anyway, this is probably just a way for me to spend my time as I make excuses not to finish revising my essay." She may be pointing out an error I made, but she uses a form that makes the error less a criticism and more a chance to clarify the ideas for her.

The whole issue of errors within my messages is, I think, a topic in which freedom and efficiency intersect. As I've examined the text of the class, I've noticed various typographical errors and unclear statements that occur in my messages. For the students, such errors are occasions to send me questions for clarification. When they do so, they are asserting their positions as knowledgeable, free peers in the class: they see a problem that I missed, and just as I would point out such a problem in their work (that is, of course, my job), they are doing the same. In many of these messages about my errors, I'm struck by how straightforward and friendly the students are being. Perhaps they adopt this pose to deflect my possibly irrational anger at being "found out," but I don't think so. Instead, such messages suggest that the students see their
positions as important: they can do what I do, and we can help each other. These messages are occasions for the students to assert their freedom in the class. Notice Ben's question about an incorrect page reference, the sort of error that (to defend myself, just a bit) occurs in many class syllabi:

I have read the assignment for week 5. I now have a question.
You listed some pages to read and I read all of them except pg 230 number 2. I went to this page and found text from a story. This seem to me to be the wrong page. What is the right page to read?

Ben has to ask this question to find the information I've told him he needs to read. The more he notices such problems, the more he asserts his position in the class as someone who is interested and who demands clarity. Later, Ellen noticed the same problem and sent me this message:

Hi Robert! I'm sure I probably want to do item number 2 on page 230 because when I turned to that page there was no such thing.
My kind of assignment I guess instead I'll venture where angels wouldn't dare and attack number 6 on page 88. I intend to tie "seeing is believing" into the abortion issue. Now I'm having fun!!!

Ellen

With this comment, Ellen is asserting an even stronger position that is Ben, for she makes my error into a joke, one that connects the two of us: I've given her an incorrect page reference and she would seemingly choose its options, for the choices are blank. Such a comment clearly recalls Brooke's notion of "contained underlife," but instead of a student sharing her wit with other students in defiance of the authority of the teacher, she is sharing it with the teacher who by making an error a part of the class has almost put himself into an underlife position as well.
I've put such examples of my errors and how students respond first for several reasons. These examples do emphasize simple, direct ways in which students have to assert themselves to learn over a network; they cannot be passive. In other examples, this assertiveness requires them to take more important stands about their writing, the writing of their peers, and various reading assignments from the textbooks. Further, though, these examples highlight a necessary concern when teaching over a network: everything the students learned from me I had to type into the computer. I could use a spelling checker, as I did, but editing was my responsibility, as was determining page appearance and section divisions. Such decisions affected how the students understood the course, so they were important. But they were also necessarily time-consuming. While in a classroom I could add a new example to my normal repertory fairly quickly and easily, on the modem I had to write it all out—and then edit and proofread it. The sheer act of putting class directions into purely written form was difficult. I discovered that handouts I'd used successfully in the classroom required numerous additional explanations to make them clear without the normal oral introductions I would give. Thus, errors such as these call to mind the issue of efficiency; I had trouble providing the efficient text that the computer could send to the students. Although such errors are in a sense embarrassing, they are also, I think useful, for they provide occasions for students to assert themselves, to say that the teacher 's message is wrong. They also taught me, as writing about them right now is doing, to approach writing with a certain humility, to treat error as less a mortal flaw and more of a kind of event in the presentation of ideas. In their messages about my errors, the students asserted their freedom while I learned to hold my power in check.
I've mentioned a series of examples concerning my errors. Often, though, students would send messages referring to their own errors. Just as they would be direct in pointing out my admissions, they would also recognize problems in their own writing. Joe, when sending a rough draft to me, attached the following note: "Robert, I hope this one contains no more than the two errors I just saw. hah hah hah.. you know i did send the wrong copy before. I had one with all spelling errors corrected, you should see the stupid mistakes i make in math!!" In such interchanges, the students and I are participating, to a certain extent, as equals.

Students also used the network to make more important statements and questions about their own writing. One student's questions about a topic he wished to examine is a good example. The topic concerns a serious family problem, one that I'm purposefully leaving rather vague right now, to respect the writer's privacy. After the writer explains the situation of his "unique experience," he writes,

Robert, you told us to send along questions if we have any regarding our next assignment, Essay #2. . . . i'm thinking seriously about writing an essay entitled, [title withheld] and try to use the "cause and effect" mode of writing. i've been making notes, sort of an outline, of the events that have taken place. it's a tough subject. not a pretty one. but i think it's a challenge. . . .

question: do you mind? do you think i can write this story and not make it look like i've written about real people? i have mixed emotions about that. . . . if this isn't the subject of my next essay, i'll have to revert back to an 'easier' subject. . . .
would appreciate your thoughts, and if you agree with my pursuing this, subject, am I choosing the right rhetorical mode to write it in? Thanks!

In classroom, students often write about very serious, complicated topics, but relative anonymity of the network would make writing about a topic with serious personal implications easier. More importantly, through the system, the student and I were able to discuss the pros and cons of such a topic. The student was not so much asking for permission as asking for advice from one interested party to another. I tried to provide this advice by writing

[Name of student]--this is a great idea for an essay, assuming of course that writing it will not be too painful for you. That is my only worry. That you have been taking notes makes me think that in that very process you've made a start at distancing yourself--that is what will make the writing of it a less draining task. Now, do you intend to make the piece seem fictional? I understand why, but you might have to think of how you'll introduce it--as an example similar to others, as a true story, how? I'm not sure what to suggest until I see what you'd like to do. I think the proposal is excellent--it has the makings of good writing. Cause and effect is a good idea too--but why don't you just start writing/planning it. As you are working, you'll see what to do. Let me see something as soon as it is beginning to come together. Oh--we'll play with the deadline for something such as this.

The student's request for advice was met with my general suggestions. The last line of my comment, referring to the student's concern that he couldn't write the paper until an immediately upcoming event was over, is also an example of
freedom—part of the culture of this class allowed me to make exceptions freely to the official set of deadlines. Since students were all working singly at their homes, there was less of a need to keep them all on the same schedule, as long as they were roughly able to read and respond to each other's work. Of course, the problem with such an extension for me was processing the reading and grading of student work; instead of coming in a neatly piled stack of papers, the essays came one at a time through the network.

This is another example of problems in efficiency, for although the system could allow students to have an enhanced level of freedom in writing as they needed, I was still faced with a continual flow—that sometimes seemed a barrage—of work to be graded. Of course, I was the one who encouraged this continual flow, but I did so because it seemed appropriate due to the nature of the system. If the computers allowed for a sense of adventure and playfulness in the writing of the assignments, how could I inflict what seemed to me Victorian deadlines upon them?

A similar sense of the conflict between liberation and efficiency occurred with the whole issue of students' revising seemingly graded papers for increased credit. Such regrading is an institution for many teachers, and although I've never emphasized it, I also am willing to use possibly higher grades to encourage students to improve their work. Students would send messages such as this one, from Ben: "Robert, Is 88 my final grade or do you want me to do the changes you wanted and return it in. Please write me and let me know. Thanks." I responded with the following comment:

Ben--yes and no. I really don't believe in final grades and I don't, frankly think grades are important (they are a part of the institution). I would love to see another version of the essay. And
I would re"grade" it. I guess my main concern is with my marks/suggestions/places I was unclear--are they clear to you? If they are and if you agree with me or at least understand where I was coming from, I would love to re-see the essay. And regrade it..................Robert

More than in a classroom, the discussion about extra credit takes the form of an actual discussion—the student asks a question with the possible options and I choose the one I wish and offer an explanation. Because a simple "Yes, revise the essay" would make a fairly skimpy message, I make an explanation that corresponds to my more pressing concerns—that the student understands what I wrote or will seek clarification.

From time to time, I would also send messages asking for more clarification from students about their writing. In these messages, I was not playing the role of official teacher. Instead, I was more of a curious reader. For example, one of Karen's essays, about a secretary who discovers that her boss has been stealing from the company, written in the first person, ended in a quotation:

Almost a week has gone by since Mr. Jones first took me into his office to talk to me. His boss, Mr. Smith, just called me. This was the first time Mr. Jones ever called me. He usually only called Mr. Smith, or his secretary placed the call for him. He wants to see me to in his office. As I walk in the direction of Mr. Smith's office, my knees begin to knock. The look on his face tells me he knows.

"Have a seat, Mrs. Ellis, I'd like to ask you a few questions."
Several of the peer responses (as I'll show in the next section) address this issue, suggesting concerns; I felt that the essay was generally effective with this ending, because it adds a little suspense.

However, I was most curious about why Karen decided to use it, so I attached a short note about the ending when I graded the final version of the paper (my comment is in capitalized letters because this is how I would distinguish between a student's writing and my writing when I would write within their files). Although I recognized the strength in the ending, I also saw its problems, so I wrote the following:

KAREN--I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK--THIS IS A RIVETING PIECE-- IT MOVES WELL, IS FULL OF WONDERFUL BITS OF DETAIL. I GET AN IDEA OF THE CHARACTERS. THE ENDING IS BOTH FABULOUS AND TROUBLING. DO YOU INTEND WHAT I THINK YOU INTEND? OR DO YOU WANT TO MAKE THE READER NOT KNOW? I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SUGGEST. MORE OF AN ENDING WOULD POSSIBLY REDUCE THE ESSAY. BUT THIS ONE SEEMS INCOMPLETE (THE PURPOSE, YES). GOOD DECISION--BUT WRITE ME AND TELL ME WHY/HOW YOU MADE THIS DECISION TO END THE PIECE THIS WAY? I WANT TO KNOW--REALLY. (emphasis added)

Karen responded with

Robert, you asked me why i chose to end my first essay with just a quotation, leaving the reader 'hanging.' well, would it be fair to say i'm not sure why i did it, but that when i got to the end, i just thought it would work. my rough draft wasn't quite clear enough to make the reader be sure what i would do in the end when i was
confronted regarding the missing $50,000 worth of sales, so I made it a point in the second (or final) to say that I couldn't lie for my boss, that went against my principles. That way when you got to the end, if you knew I couldn't lie, you were sure what happened, but if you were a person who could bilk your company out of some funds, then you were left "hopeful" that the boss got away with it.

In these messages, Karen and I are talking to each other not from the perspective of teacher and student but from more egalitarian positions. I am curious about one of her decisions and I suggest the range of my feelings. Karen is replying as a writer who has made real decisions as she narrates the story of the ending's creation. In this story, she is not claiming absolute knowledge for what she should have done; her claim is more incremental, for she suggests that she made a series of decisions that led to the ending.

Thus, Karen is presenting herself as a writer making choices, not as a student trying to please the teacher. As her message continues, though, she takes an even more powerful position, one that emphasizes her freedom in the course even more. At first she seems to criticize herself with "sorry, I was just being cute! maybe I watch too many movies. if the movies can get away with cliff hangers, I guess I thought I could too! think of it this way." Then, though, she turns to the official topic of the essay, "the hero," and suggests that potential problems in the essays ending have some relationship to the topic (one that, of course, I selected for the whole class):

... if I'd have experienced a HERO in my life, my whole essay would have been different. trying to think of a situation like I came up with wasn't all that easy. I mentioned it to my boss at work and I
think he thought i was thinking of an actual case involving him. no
way. it was just my imagination. See ya! Karen

Karen is suggesting that the essay and its ending are her ways of
responding to an assignment that seemed potentially controlling. Several
students told me later that they didn't like this topic, for the essays in the reader
concerning "heroism" were not as interesting as later essays in the text, and
because they just preferred the later topics more. My choosing this topic was, of
course, a way of exhibiting my ability to control the class, by structuring the
topics it would cover. Karen in her message is emphasizing that although she
recognizes the control, she is also able to handle it in her own way, by inventing
a topic and a scenario that allow her to write about it. In her message, leading
up to her closing remark appropriate to an equal or a friend, "see ya!" Karen is
asserting her freedom in the class; although she may be required to write about
a topic, she is able to explain why she used the technique she does.

As a final example of this narration, here is a message from a student
indicating just how liberating this class could seem. While in a classroom-
based class with specific deadlines, a student would have to attend regularly or
miss a fair amount of the events of the class, in this class, due to its structure,
such absences are not necessarily a problem. Throughout the course, I was
sending messages suggesting that deadlines could be changed or
arrangements could be altered as the need arose. To do otherwise would have
seemed to contradict the very system under which we operated. Toward the
end of April, one student sent the following message, one showing that he
realized that he could assert his power as a free individual and do what he felt
he should do, in regard to absences:
Robert concerning the paragraphs on ethical issues, I will be out of town on business till Monday, I will send them to you then. I'll be in Corpus Cristi up-grading a PC at our shore base there. I'm installing a larger hard-disc and some new software. I'm taking my wife and kids so that they can play at the beach while I work. The company, of course, is paying for a rental car, hotel, and per-diem so it will be a short but free mini vacation for the family. Saturday we will drive up the coast, some where around Rockport, then I get to do some fishing.......wish me luck! Will have fd [final draft] and paragraphs to you as early next week as I can. Have a good weekend!!......Come-on sun shine!....Paul

By this point in the semester, Paul knows that such a rearrangement is part of the general culture of this class; it's part of the approved possibilities. He's not asking for the permission that a student operating under another narrative of control might request. Instead, he's addressing me as an equal, recognizing that I will wonder what has happened to him, but he is not asking for permission. That he ends the message as he does just intensifies this message of liberation.

Now, the forms of liberation in this class may not be exceptionally dramatic, but they are somewhat consistent, for throughout the class, students sent messages that seem to come from a position of power, or authority over what they wrote. The system allowed them to exchange messages and converse with me, instead of simply requiring students to read what I sent without comment.

As elsewhere, though, I feel the need to be careful in arguing that this class is more a place of freedom than, say, a typical classroom-based class. In some ways, the computer system allows for more of a two-way sense of
freedom and possibility, as I've suggested. However, the kinds of episodes of freedom I've discussed here could also, I agree, occur in the classroom; I know they are the sort of actions I want to encourage in my classroom-based classes. Still, what is most important here is that the system allows us to see these different episodes in this narration of liberation, to see how the students address the teacher as an equal, not as a tyrant.

The Narration of Collaboration

In the second narration, the roles of sender are held by the students alone; they send messages to each other as they collaborate on their work in the course. This is the narration that much of the literature on computer networks emphasizes; as in those works, students in this class did make efforts to refer to each other as peers. For collaboration to occur, students must feel a sense of connection. In this class, such a sense of connection first came from their responses to an early assignment in which they were asked to describe the place where they would be doing the work for this course. Since the class was occurring throughout the town and all of the students would never be together in one place, these descriptions of their places allowed them to have some idea about the others in the class. The following is a typical example, from Liz:

less than one hour ago I was bribing and threatening my children in an effort to make them clean their rooms. After my portrayal of Joan Crawford, I picked up my English assignment to the sound of clothes and toys being stuffed under beds. I figured I could finish before inspection time. Hmmm..., describe my workplace. Well, I'm
working at the desk in my bedroom, where it is pushed up in a
corner due to lack of space. On top of it I have my computer,
printer, modem, and an assortment of books and magazines all
piled together, kind of 'creatively'. My chair is not very comfortable,
however, it is convenient in that it's sporting my pantyhose until
they dry. I don't think I'll be able to pace the floor in the event of
writer's block as there are suitcases and other objects deterring
me. Also, there is a pile of papers here that i need to pilfer through
for the instructions on how to get this file loaded up to the main
frame. I'll go check on the kid's progress for now, maybe it will jar
my memory as to where I put that User's Guide.

This writer expresses a crucial concern for the kinds of students who attend
HCC and take modem classes: balancing schoolwork with family work (not to
mention their other work, at their jobs). This is also a concern that brought
together at least two other students in the class, Karen and Ellen. Upon
receiving this message, Ellen wrote back to Liz:

    I loved your work space. I don't know you, but I think your kids
    have been talking to my kids!!! I thought I would be the only one to
    be writing between "can I have a drink" and "He hit me". I'll have
to remember sending them to clean their rooms. That could give
me hours of free time!

In the very act of sending this message, Ellen is bridging the gap between not
knowing Liz and viewing her as a peer, as someone with whom she has a basic
connection. Karen, about the same time, sent a similar message to Ellen,
whose description of home is similar to Liz's (but which I'm not quoting due to its
length). Karen wrote: "Ellen, i enjoyed your 'work place'. i also have 3 children (17, 19, 22) and i can only say, 'i've been there too.'"

As Karen was sending this message, Liz was also responding to Ellen's first message, sending the following:

Hi there! I'm the one you sent the message to that has two little darlings to help me learn the frustration of computers. Thanks for the message, I'm glad that someone else in this class can empathize. I'm getting better (I think) at transmitting this stuff but am not sure of due dates, etc. Oh well, hang in there!

This ability to "empathize" with each other's situation introduces the groundwork on which this narrative is based. The students seemed to establish their own groups of "knowledgeable peers" based on the interests they detected in these messages. They viewed themselves as part of the same experience, best characterized by Liz's suggestion to "hang in there." Another set of connections is represented by a message that Joe sent Maggie soon after reading her description of her workplace, a description that suggested how hard going to school would be. Joe wrote her that "i enjoyed reading about your workplace and just wanted to confirm that i know how nice it is to be 'going to school' when all you have to do is 'go to the computer'. your living situation sounds a bit tough, but it also sounds like you're going to do just fine." Such messages established a spirit of collaboration—to a certain extent—between the students, a spirit that allowed the students to move into more important levels of collaboration.

One sees an aspect of this higher level of collaboration in messages students sent to each other regarding essays they read. For each major topic we covered, I asked students to choose several essays from The Riverside
Reader to examine. They were to explain which ones they enjoyed and give specific reasons why they felt as they did. After they sent these responses to each other, several students sent messages discussing how their addressees had handled the essays. One example is a message Ellen sent Jane concerning her response to the essay "The Rules of the Game"; Jane had criticized the essay, saying that she liked it least of the ones she read. Ellen sent a quick message of agreement: "Don't feel alone! I wasn't in the audience for this essay ("Rules of the Game") either." By this message, Ellen is putting the two writers in the same group.

One of the most interesting examples of collaboration occurred when Ben responded to Joe's comments about Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Revelation." This story provoked some complicated responses. It was included in the section on "heroes," most likely for the anti-hero represented by the story's leading figure, Mrs. Turpin. Students had trouble dealing with this character. She is clearly racist. Some students were able to differentiate her racism from O'Connor's views; some, though, thought that Mrs. Turpin is the voice of O'Connor's racism. One writer suggested that the story was a lighthearted escapade—not, though, a reasonable view of the author's intention for most readers. Joe's analysis of the essay suggested another character, Mary Grace as the hero, in an analysis that led another student, Ben, to send him the following message:

Joe, I'm sorry I have not writted to you earlier, but I have been really busy. You seem really enthusiastic about this class and I hope that I can capture some of it and put it into my work and yours. I was reading your eassy on Revelation and I saw the same thing as you. Mary Grace might have been the heroine of the
story, but she had a small part in the story. I can see how she would be the hero in that she attacked what everybody else seems to think is the enemy. Maybe in writing this story Miss. O'Conner tried to capture the story not from the eyes of the heroine, but from the eyes of the villain. With every story there is always to sides. I am going to read the story again with this in mind. SEE YA.

The students, at least from Ben's end, are engaged in a conversation about the essay, using the network to examine an essay that is complicated and subtle. What even more interests me about this exchange is a message that Ben sent another student, Richard, a bit later. Ben did not just praise Joe's analysis to Joe; he worked as a collaborative peer to spread knowledge, by suggesting that Richard should examine Joe's analysis for more information:

I read your eassys on "On patrol" and "Revelation" and they are right on. I agree with your opinion of "On Patrol", war is wrong and must be stopped at all costs. Your essay on "Revelation" seems to echo my sentiments exactly, but maybe you should read Eng99 [Joe's student ID] eassy. It sheds some light on who the real hero is in the story.

Ben is both praising Richard's ideas and pushing them further, by using his knowledge about Joe's ideas: he is both learning from Joe and using that knowledge to send new knowledge to Richard. He is following new rules that he reached from reading Joe's analysis, rules that have helped him better understand the story and rules that lead him to try to help others in the same way.

The best examples of collaboration occurred when the students read and commented upon each other's own writing. Earlier, I discussed my question to
Karen about the ending of her essay on corporate crime. In her response to my message, she mentioned that as she was changing the rough draft into the final version, she considered that "... my rough draft wasn't quite clear enough to make the reader be sure what I would do in the end when I was confronted. ..."

Looking at some of the responses she received from this rough draft about this issue, one sees ideas that could have influenced her. Notice the following peer responses, all of which raise some sort of question about this ending, and some of Karen's responses to them:

**Liz to Karen:** What would you have done if Mr. Jackson had not called you in his office (him knowing that you knew)?

**Ellen to Karen:** What form of locomotion was this essay? You were racing along beautifully until you came to a screeching halt. And that leads directly to question # 6. What questions am I left with after reading this essay? What did you do? If we are talking about heroes here it really makes a difference to the story.

Thanks for the essay!

**Paul to Karen:** Karen, you little devil you. How will this end? Will it have an end? As I've said to others in the class I'm not the best writer I know, but your paper is nicely written. Looking forward to your ending. (if there is one)

**Karen to Paul:** thanks for your note, Paul. I've been working my essay over and intend to get it to lead more easily up to the point of being questioned by the boss's boss. I enjoyed your essay about 'sam'. will send my critique shortly.

**Richard to Karen:** WAS THE BOSS PROSECUTED OR HOW DID HE MAKE RESTITUTION? WAS HE FIRED OR DID HE STAY
WITH THE COMPANY? I LIKED THE STORY, AND I LIKED THE ENDING; BUT I STILL WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE MORE OF YOUR WRITING.

Karen to Richard: thanks, Richard, i enjoyed your comments. i rewrote some of the essay so the reader would be convinced at the end (i think) that there was no way i was going to let my boss drag me down with him. i still left that question, but i think i made it clearer that covering up the crime was against my principles.

are you enjoying the class? how do you like getting messages from people you may never meet? what do you think about our prolific classmate ENG99 [Joe]? do you hear from him often too? Karen

Joe to Karen: Questions left after reading this writing;
Was it: drugs,liquor, gambling, women, or the stock market? Did they file charges? Did you get a promotion?

Karen to Joe: thanks for the good points. re movie: how about the "working girl" movie where the boss stole the secretary's idea? when i read the assignment on page 87 (#2) that's the first thing i thought of. since i work in an office that assignment seemed the easiest to make some story material out of. (where do you get your ideas?)

let's write another ending to my story: boss got arrested, i got a star (and a promotion? - let's be real here! i probably just get a"ata girl!") yes, it was bad stock market deal.
wanna hear something funny? my 15 year old daughter
gets mad because she can't get any incoming calls when i'm
logged on to the mainframe. my-oh-my, isn't that a shame!

These messages are excellent examples of how the computer system allows
users to exchange information. All of the above responses present different
sides of the same problem: the ending. Especially in the examples with
Karen's messages, there is a sense that she is possibly developing or at least
defending her ideas in response to the ideas she received from her readers.
Paul's comment raises the possibility that there is actually no further ending, but
just as he seems to be looking forward to one that will possibly be added, Karen
suggests that she is working on making the end of the essay move "more easily
up to the point of being questioned by the boss's boss." To Richard's comments
about wanting more information about the boss, Karen responds with how she
viewed her position with this boss. Karen takes Joe's suggestion that the
secretary will get a promotion and turns it into an alternate scenario, one that
allows her to emphasize that her way of structuring the essay is superior. Even
if Karen is not accepting the ideas of her readers, she acknowledges that their
ideas are valid, partly by responding to them, and partly by placing that
response within the context of more general messages to the peer readers, to
show that she too is concerned with her fellow students.

In other examples of peer responses and final essays, correspondences
such as those above are not as clear; when one looks at the text of this class, it
is often hard to see how specific responses from peer readers lead the writer to
make changes. Even then, though, the tone used by students making peer
responses suggests that they viewed themselves as operating as part of a
narrative of collaboration. They seem to try to engage the reader in a
discussion about his or her writing, even if the author does not pick up on the
discussion to the extent that Karen did above. Two responses made to Paul's
essay about the birth of his daughter (a birth complicated by a medical crisis)
serve as an example. Although the final draft Paul produces could still be
criticized from the perspectives that these readers, Ben and Maggie, present,
their comments show much about how they view their role in the course: first,
notice Ben's comment:

Paul, I liked your story, but I was not sure who the main hero was.
I am guessing the answer might be in the title. It seems you and
your wife were very heroic to go through this crisis together. You
all are heroes just for being parents. The doctors are heroes for
doing their jobs, but I didn't get a feel for their heroism in the story.
To me the biggest hero was your daughter for fighting through this
problem and surviving. Most people don't think about a baby as
being intelligent enough to understand what it is going through. I
believe they do and the fact that your daughter had the strength to
overcome her defects to survive proves it.

Here, Ben analyzes Paul's essay by looking at its parts—the parents, the
doctors, the infant—for possible heroes, referring to Paul's title, "I Know a Few."
He's also offering his own interpretation, that the newborn infant was somehow
involved in her own recovery, by possessing the "strength to overcome her
defects." Although this idea is not so emphatic in Paul's essay, it is by no
means alien to it; by offering it to Paul, Ben is showing just how closely he read
the essay. Although he is suggesting problems in the essay, he is also
suggesting how it succeeds.
Maggie's comments suggest the existence of the collaborative narrative in a different way. With the first line of her comment to Paul she shows herself as part of a society of readers, a society that Paul should consider:

Could you not show more emotion even to those you do not know? I do not mean that to sound cold, but I felt as if I was reading a newspaper article. I would like to know more about how you felt. You were right, though, in saying that your daughters a real hero. I'm very happy for you.

Notice that she tempers this seemingly blunt opening criticism with an apology ("I do not mean to sound cold") and an explanation ("I felt as if I was reading a newspaper article") that supports what she feels the essay needs ("I would like to know more about how you felt.") In such peer comments, this reader is presenting herself as someone who is not just pointing out problems, or pointing out what an "ideal," typical reader would want (as a teacher playing the general reader is likely to do). Instead, she's responding as she feels, even to the point of letting the statement become a little brusque and critical. That she tries to deflect and explain this critical tone suggests just how much membership in a collaborative society means here: as an equal peer/member she can say what she thinks, but she also feels the need to avoid alienating her reader by appearing too critical.

Towards the end of the semester, when responding to Karen's final essay, Paul shows that he too views himself as belonging to a collaborative society. Karen's essay concerned the need to distribute the tax burden among more people; Paul sent a long comment to Karen about this topic, a comment almost as long as the essay Karen sent him. I quote just part of his comment:
Karen, I have not corresponded much with you in this class and I apologize. Concerning your almost finished essay it is a very current and much debated topic. On the educational issue I feel this is the one area we must all pitch-in if we are to ever change any thing. I like a lot of people feel there is much abuse in our welfare programs. . . . [Paul offered many similar suggestions] Hopefully these ideas will help you find a direction to end your essay. Certainly you don't have to agree with me but maybe an opposing opinion will give you fresh ideas. What you have so far is great, good luck.......Paul

Paul is both acknowledging that Karen is almost finished as he suggests that he has even more ideas "to help . . . find a direction" to end her essay. By offering so many ideas, and by framing them as he does, Paul is suggesting that he both respects Karen's right to write her essay as she wishes ("you don't have to agree with me") and that he sees himself in the position to offer such suggestions ("maybe an opposing opinion will give you fresh ideas"). In fact, of course, Paul indicates that he should have been offering the same sort of assistance earlier; perhaps all of these suggestions are what he owes Karen from these earlier omissions.

Of all the students, Joe is the one who, from time to time, seems most interested in evoking the collaborative narrative. When starting to work on the second essay, concerning families, Joe sent a message analyzing two related essays "My Name is Margaret" and "Everyday Use," even though he said also that "for some reason I have come down with a case of writer's block." As he worked through this topic and its application to these essays, eventually, at the
end of his message, he appealed to the rest of the class from the position of collaboration:

GOLLY GUYS AND GUYETTES, I SURE HOPE THIS TOPIC GETS MORE INTERESTING. WOULD YOU PLEASE USE YOUR WRITING TO DIRECT MY ATTENTION TO A MORE PRODUCTIVE PATH?? YOU SEE I LIVE ALONE. BY YOUR EARLIER WRITINGS IT APPEARS THAT YOU ALL ARE FAMILY (AS IN BLOOD) ORIENTED. I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES.

From this comment, Joe seems to feel that with this topic, his peers in the class will be of great assistance; he sees himself as belonging to this group, a group that has the ability to lead him to a new understanding of what he might write for this topic.

Throughout the text of the class, such examples suggest a narrative of collaboration. Some of my earlier examples imply that this collaboration is acknowledged on both directions of the messages: that senders and addressees see themselves as participating in it. However, I've cited the following slightly more negative examples for a reason. As I suggested above, they do imply that the players see a collaborative structure in operation, but at the same time, they suggest that that structure is not as all encompassing. In a sense, a student is acting collaboratively if she thinks she is acting collaboratively; by this perception the collaborative act is legitimate for her. However, if that same spirit of collaboration is not picked up by the others in the class, then how collaboration supports and legitimates the entire class is threatened; collaboration does not have the maximized performance it might
have even given the ability of the computer network to connect all of the
students.

**The Narration of Experimentation**

One narrative that does connect all of the students—and the teacher—it
the narrative of experimentation. From the beginning of the course, various
senders sent messages about this system. Although experiencing a course
over a network suggests the positive ideas I traced in my introduction to the
class, ideas that recall Lyotard's privileging of technology and composition's
emphasis on the positive results of using computers, many of these messages
concern problems in using technology. Some of these problems would be
specific to this particular system and even to this particular semester, but since
there are so many messages relating to this narrative, this narrative holds a
potent position in the class.

In this narrative, both students and teacher see themselves as engaged
in a new venture; they are experimenting with a new form of education, and they
are trying to survive and prosper. However, as they make these attempts, time
and time again they face obstacles. Some students, such as Ellen, address this
situation from a position of irony. Notice just three of Ellen's appeals about the
system:

1. Hi! I'm sorry I didn't get this in by Saturday. I could not get
   my files to transmit and I was getting a message that the disk was
   full. Sydney [Sydney Elliott, the member of the Distance
   Education office who fielded many of the questions from students]
helped me out this morning. Aren't computers wonderful? Adieu. Ellen.

2. Hi! I love this course, but this computer system is going to drive me to drink. There has got to be a way to respond to an essay and send it to you and to the person who wrote it without sending it to the entire class. I just can't figure out how to do it. I have managed to send one of my responses to you, but not to the author, and I have managed to send one of my responses to the author, but not to you. I realize this is an operator error, but could you please let me in on the secret and lower my frustration level? Sydney has been out sick lately, so I haven't even been able to tap into that source of information. Thanks!

3. Once again your advice on cleaning out my file solved my problem and got me on the road again. Thank you so much for your patience and cheerfulness in the hot seat. Ellen.

From asking "Aren't computers wonderful" to "this computer system is going to drive me to drink," Ellen is approaching the system as a challenge, one that may test her resources, but one that, ultimately she will conquer, when she'll be able to be "let in on the secret and lower my frustration level," and thus get back "on the road again." The assumption here is that the system will work for her—if only she knew enough.

For other students, this mild frustration is much more intense. Notice Karen's way of looking at the system in two messages written at the same time as Ellen's:

1. sending response to questions regarding sontag's essay. hope you get it. fact is, i thought i was sending it right now, but i
see i didn't follow something quite right. oh well, will keep trying. what a challenge this course is. computers are really something! i use electronic mail at work so all the function keys for kermit are different than i'm used to at the office.

2. i too have had major modem problems this weekend. hours and hours and calls to tom [tom montgomery, a member of the distance education staff] and still no connection at home. brought "kermit" to work and he worked fine on a pc here. what frustration. just wanted you to know i'm still in the class, and am down-loading my two files prepared for yesterday's due-date today. karen

from these messages, notice that karen presents herself as more acquainted with computers: she uses computers at her office, but even then the codes that work on that system don't work on the school's system, and the program that worked on the computer at her office wouldn't function on her computer at home. both ellen and karen were soon able to make the system function for themselves, but what i find especially interesting in their responses is that the one who seemed to know the most about computers, karen, wrote the most about the problems in the new system. however, ellen, in her relative ignorance about computers was still able to trust them, still assume that all would be right.

besides these hopeful and criticizing messages, much of this narrative of experimentation was built upon discussions of more specific problems that plagued the system. however, because so many of these messages were sent through the network, they worked to bring the class together. we were all involved in this experiment, trying what we could to make things work. these actions gave us legitimacy in the course; the person who could best explain the
problem or offer the most important solution would be the seeming hero of a particular episode.

One set of problems concerned control codes, the codes that word processing programs put within text to indicate underlining, boldfacing, italics, etc. Because the members of the class were using different computers and different programs (IBM and Macintosh), control codes that might mean, for example, "boldface" in one program, might mean "page break" in another. I warned students of the importance of eliminating control codes by saving their documents in "text only" form, but still the problem persisted. One of my first messages to the class reminded them of the importance of eliminating control codes:

HELLO, EVERYBODY.
I'VE SENT THE FILES I RECEIVED BY TUESDAY NIGHT. MANY OF THEM CONTAINED CONTROL CODES AND WHAT APPEARS TO BE END OF MESSAGE NOTATIONS. SYDNEY SUGGESTED TO ME THAT I REMIND YOU OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SENDING MESSAGES IN TEXT ONLY FORM--WITH NO NO NO NONONONONONONONOO CONTROL CODES.
CONTROL CODES CAN CAUSE MANY PROBLEMS. I NOTICED THE FOLLOWING:
GARBLED MESSAGES
MESSAGES THAT CONTAINED REMNANTS OF OTHER STUDENT'S MESSAGES (AND I RECEIVED NO MESSAGES FROM THOSE STUDENTS (IF I HAVE SENT YOU A MESSAGE SAYING I RECEIVED NOTHING FROM YOU, AND YOU ARE
SURE YOU SENT SOMETHING, IT'S POSSIBLE THAT YOUR
ORIGINAL TRANSMISSION WAS "EATEN" BY ANOTHER
STUDENT'S MESSAGE).

MESSAGES WITH MULTIPLE LINE BREAKS (EVERY
LETTER IN A SENTENCE)

MOST LIKELY, IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO RESAVE
AND RESEND WHAT YOU SENT LAST WEEK.

BECAUSE OF ALL OF THIS AND BECAUSE I HAD
PROBLEMS WITH MY COMPUTER, I AM GOING TO SEND THE
MESSAGE I WAS TO SEND ON SUNDAY JANUARY 17 ON
SATURDAY OR SUNDAY FEBRUARY 2 OR 3. WHEN I RESENT
THE MESSAGE FOR WEEK 1 I PUT A FEW ASSIGNMENTS AT
THE TOP. DO THOSE FOR NOW, RESEND THE PREVIOUS
MESSAGES AND BY THIS WEEKEND I HOPE WE'LL ALL BE ON
TARGET.

AS A RESULT, I AM CANCELLING WEEK 2 AND WILL
CONVERT IT INTO WEEK 3.

When I wrote this message, I didn't really know how control codes could cause
one message to devour another, but that was what appeared to have
happened. Just as my opening statement to the class suggested that the class
would be a liberating experience, this message suggested that part of that
liberation would be surrounded by a spirit of experimentation, as we tried to
make the semester work by juggling assignments and weeks of the semester ("I
am cancelling Week 2").

I was not the only one noticing what appeared to be control codes. Other
players of the class also sent messages claiming that they had spotted control
codes: one of my first messages to the class arrived in their computers with the ends of its lines chopped off; the villain appeared to be control codes on my end; I received messages such as this:

Robert, I was successful logging in for the first time. Your mail had a lot of lines that were chopped off at the end. I think however, that I understand what the assignment is. It will be a day late because I just got back in town. (I talked to you on the phone Friday) Looking forward to the class and improving my skills at writing. Paul

Notice also that Paul is holding the same positive spirit that Ellen demonstrated earlier, at least about the course itself. Other messages about control codes come from students trying to eradicate the problems they saw in their own files, as Ben is doing in the following:

I'm writing you . . . for some help. I'm did my homework on Microsoft works and saved it as a text only file. I then uploaded it to the mainframe. Then I attempted to send it to you, but when the computer showed me the file it was incomplete. I am going to send you . . . both files and maybe you can figure out what might be the problem

Before I could respond, Ben was able, he thought, to solve the problem: "I figured it out!!!! In mircosoft works you don't save as a text only file, but as a printed text file. Just gave it a try and got lucky. Talk to you later."

Other responses to control codes took various forms. Some students, such as Paul, noticed problems in their own files and asked for collaborative help from their readers: "Joe, I noticed the fragmentation of some of the other files too. I hope that my files are coming out right. Please shoot me a yea or nea." Others, such as Karen, diagnosed problems in other student's files. In a
message to Maggie, she wrote the following on the top of a file that contained control codes. (I'm including some of what appeared to be control codes to give an idea of just what they look like, at least on a Macintosh computer):

    Maggie, has anyone told you that your work isn't "readable"; you have to send it ASCII test. hope you can see it so you know what it looks like.

-----------------------------Original message--------------------------------

WPC4   { 2 B \ P Z &  Courier
10cpi #I x @I O X]kX@ Courier
10cpi { 2 V @ ZIBx ~6X @I FuX@--------Panasonic @I O
X]kX@#I x { 2 2

Karen's response may have been useful to Maggie, but what if Maggie could not see what Karen saw? How would they be useful?

Joe took a more didactic approach in alerting his peers to their control codes. Although at times he might make a brief, double-edged statement such as "same as previous message this file format is somewhat unreadable have a good weekend..joe," a message he sent to Ben, he could also later suggest, also to Ben that

    . . . your file is full of control codes. Are you resaving it as a text or ASCII II file every time you pull it back up on your word processor to view it? Most especially before you send it? Also when you pull it or one of our files up on your word processor it should be retrieved as a text or ASCII II file in order to get the format we sent which should be straight text..

Joe is moving from the role he served in the first message, a role also adopted in the earlier examples with earlier students as "good peers" to a role more as
Joe is moving from the role he served in the first message, a role also adopted in the earlier examples with earlier students as "good peers" to a role more as the computer teacher/explainer of the class. The following message to Maggie is an excellent example of Joe's assuming the position of leader:

You seem to have quite a number of control codes in this. Did you save as a text file? (dos or ascii file) You can not use anything but hard return (enter key) at the end of each line NO wordwrap. The only way to properly space or indent is with the space bar, not even the tab key is allowed. It can cause quite a number of problems. Why don't you call Tom Montgomery if you have problems understanding anything. His number is listed in the booklet given at orientation as you entered the door. The one for English has a violet colored cover. Tom's hours are listed they are after 6:30 pm. If there is no problem please forgive this assumption.

Joe's tone of voice here is the polite but firm tone of voice a teacher would use; he's not criticizing Maggie; he's trying to get her to recognize the problem, as he gives her helpful suggestions for solving it.

These discussions about control codes served as a main socializing episode for the class; just as Americans know where they were when they learned about John Kennedy's assassination, the members of this class knew about the problem of control codes. We all served as heroes trying to help the other members of the class stop the plague; and we all served as victims. Some members assumed the victim position more; some members, especially Joe, assumed the position of hero in his quest to rid the network of the scourge of control codes.
Sometimes, the system would seem to lose mail, leading to message sequences such as the following:

**Paul to Robert:** Robert I sent you the rd back again let me know if you got it. On march 5 when I sent it to you I did this: mailbook feb28 notebook after getting the list of mail on my rough draft, I thought it would send the document back to you. This time I did a forward on the mail(rd) hope this worked......Paul

**Robert to Paul:** PAUL--I GOT YOUR NOTE AND I RECEIVED THE ROUGH DRAFT WITH MY COMMENTS, BUT I HAVEN'T RECEIVED THE FINAL COPY OF THE ESSAY. IF YOU SENT IT, I APOLOGIZE, BUT I MAY HAVE ERASED IT. WILL YOU RESEND? THANKS.

**Paul to Robert:** ROBERT, I DID SEND THE FINAL DRAFT BACK ON THE 4TH. I WAS WONDERING WHY I HAD NOT HEARD FROM YOU. SENDING TO YOU AGAIN THIS MORN. LET ME KNOW IF YOU GET IT. I ALSO SENT THE JOURNAL ENTRIES FOR THE ASSIGNED READING ABOUT FAMILY'S. DO I NEED TO RESEND THOSE? HEAR FROM YOU SOON....PAUL

Notice that in each of these messages, the senders are telling what we might label "little narratives" to explain what they did in the hopes of avoiding the problem they now face.

At other times, the system's ability to keep track of who had sent a message to whom allowed for odd messages and oddly appearing messages. For example, if while on-line I wanted to send a message to someone who had just sent me a message, I would just have to type a function key. However, if I typed that key by mistake, I might find myself sending a message to someone
just sent me a message, I would just have to type a function key. However, if I
typed that key by mistake, I might find myself sending a message to someone
even if I had not intended doing so. I would then have to think up a message to
send, as in the following message to Joe from late in the semester (May 7), a
time by which I should have known better:

I'm trying to check my mail but for some reason the machine thinks
I wanted to send a message. So I'm writing you. I just sent you
what I had down-loaded. That was all I was holding. seriously--
that's why I sounded so fuzzy-headed when we talked. I didn't
have the essay. I wonder if while I was subdividing the big file I
down-loaded if I cut your essay. I'm going to check my mail next,
find the copy you just sent and read it over and out.

Such a message may just be mindless chatter, but it is also part of the entire
experiment of taming this computer system to the needs of the users. By this
point, this message was part of the relationship I had developed with Joe, a
relationship in which our roles were rather interconnecting.

At times, the computer would lock in a certain "name" one might give
oneself—or others—when sending a message. Early in the semester, when
discussing "Shooting an Elephant," Joe referred to me as "Sahib." When I used
his file to send a return message to him, the system called me "Sahib," again.
Since I wasn't exactly sure how to take this name, I was a bit perplexed. Later, I
tried to give myself a special name and trapped myself in the same situation.
When trying to encourage one student's work on a paper, I called myself "My
effort at being a muse" in the "From" slot of the message. I had to send a series
of messages that day to other students, but the system continued calling me "My
Many of my messages as part of this narration of experimentation concerned my own problems with the computer I used to teach the class. At the time I taught the class, I did not own a computer that would allow me to use a modem. As a result, I had to borrow a computer from the English office to teach the class. Borrowing machinery invariably leads to problems, or so it seemed, leading to messages such as this:

First, please accept my apologies. I'm sending this message on Thursday night, March 14, a strange time to be sending a lesson starting on March 10. I am having my previous computer moments. I had a brief spurt of no problems but here they are again. The problem is not machinery really (several of you have been kind to offer me assistance, and thanks!)—it's lack of machinery. I haven't had access to a computer. I am now at another friend's house, piling up another pile of debts (And so, L--, when do I need to wash your car?)

In response to such problems, the students offered various suggestions such as the following from Paul:

Robert, What are the problems with your PC at the moment? I have access to a lot of resources that might help. I work in Data Processing and have worked on PC's for a number of years. I have some old hard disc's and other parts as well. Would be glad to help. I have a 10 meg hard disc that's about to get tossed. I know you would probably want something larger but this could at least get you going for now and it is free!

This situation, with the teacher in need of a machine to teach the course and a student with the ability to offer that machine, provides a strange reversal of the
This situation, with the teacher in need of a machine to teach the course and a student with the ability to offer that machine, provides a strange reversal of the normal lines of the teaching hierarchy. Here the student has the power to take the role of leader/hero; the teacher is just another user in trouble with the system.

Of all the students, Joe offered the most assistance to the others, including me, about using the system. Because the school had just switched to this new computer system, all of its abilities were not yet known. Joe assumed the position of "class tinkerer," and discovered several features of the system, including how to send messages containing previous messages obtained from a certain user, and how to contact each other "live" on the system. He sent this information to the rest of the class with messages such as these:

SAY FOLKS I HAVE PICKED UP ON A FEW THINGS I WANT TO SHARE WITH THOSE THAT DON'T KNOW YET.

1. TO REPLY TO A FILE FROM THE MAIL AREA PUSH PF6 AND YOU WILL BE PROMPTED FOR ID TO FORWARD AND NAME. THE FILE WILL REAPPEAR WITH THE CURSOR IN IT IF YOU HIT THE ENTER KEY THE CURSOR WILL GO TO THE COMMAND LINE.

—or—

Hello Folks! If you have the same problem with your key board locking up while online with the system and don't know what to do other than reboote...then... LISTEN UP!!! When this happens simply hit [CTRL]+[G] I don't know what you think but to me this discovery is FANTASTIC NEWS!!!!!!

—or—
IF YOU ARE THERE LET'S TRY USING THE MESSAGE COMMAND TO COMMUNICATE:

1. FROM THE READY PROMPT, TYPE 'SET MSG ON'
2. TYPE 'MESSAGE ENG05 (THEN A MESSAGE)
3. PRESS ENTER (OR WHATEVER YOU USE FOR IT)

With such messages, Joe established himself as an even more powerful hero than he was when he tried to help students such as Ben eliminate control codes, above. In many ways, he seemed a more legitimate authority than the school itself because of his ability to offer new ways to use the system more efficiently. After all, the school's suggestions were contained in a manual I and others tended to lose. Joe's would come through the system, sometimes in duplication—and his suggestions would work. He taught me how to use the first and third features above; I know that the other students thanked him for the second procedure several times.

Joe's power in the class because of his knowledge of how to use the system is best expressed by this message from Ellen:

Joe - Where are you when I need you? I am trying to reply to the essays I have read. As far as I can tell the information you have given on how to use the system makes more sense and is a quicker response than I get from the college. What I need to know is how to respond to the essay and send a copy to both Robert and the person who wrote the essay. So far I have managed to respond to one classmate, and the response erased before I could send it to Robert and then I managed to get a response to Robert on another essay, but it was canceled before I got it to the classmate. This has got to be an operator error, but I called for
If you have any information that would help I would be eternally grateful. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you! Ellen

I don't know of another message, as beseeching and in need addressed to me, or Sydney Elliott or to anyone else. Joe had established himself as a legitimate authority by seeming to master the system and by offering his assistance to the other students. While we were floundering in the technical stew, he seemed to have figured our how to navigate it. He strove for the efficiency that the system seemed to offer, an efficiency that our ironic comments and our problems seemed to counter.

Although in terms of course content, this narrative of experimentation may not be that important, for it does not really address the content of the messages, just the problems in transmitting and receiving them, this narrative provided a crucial means of legitimating the class. We presented ourselves as valid players by mastering the technology of the system. When a message appeared riddled with control codes, a user would be less able to follow that message, or it might appear totally unreadable. As the semester progressed, although the positions of student and teacher could be fairly clear in the liberation narrative, and less secure in the collaborative narrative (since the students could serve as equal peers or as "better" peers on occasion), these roles were in flux concerning technology.

Although I thought I knew a fair amount about the system, I didn't know enough to avoid the kinds of problems I've suggested; I certainly didn't know enough to anticipate and solve the kinds of issues that led Joe to his teacherly suggestions. I've suggested that the liberation narrative is potentially jeopardized because of the inability to produce the efficiency that the system implies it will allow. The same problem with technical inefficiency fuels the
implies it will allow. The same problem with technical inefficiency fuels the experimentation narrative: inefficiency threatens the legitimacy of the daily activities of the class (because the problems make sending messages difficult), it threatens the positions of student and teacher as legitimate institutions, and it creates new ones, with those who seem to best control technology more in control in the class. This last situation recalls Lyotard’s explanation of how the lines of power shifted in the industrial revolution from a system in which the one who controlled knowledge controlled technology to one in which the owner of technology controlled knowledge.

One may regard such a state in two ways: either from the perspective of an event of delegitimation before the postmodern age, in which the technical problems threaten the legitimacy of the class and its institutions, or in a more postmodern way, in which this seeming crisis allows for a new sense of how technology legitimates. It is about this sense that the experimentation narrative speaks over and over throughout the class. The narrative does not lead to the destruction of the class; instead, more than do the previous two narratives, it suggests that the ultimate form of that legitimacy will be different.

The Narration of Control

Especially with the first two narratives, the course seems to be dedicated to freedom or liberation from the teacher tyrant and to empowerment of collaborative peers. With the experimentation narrative, although the idea of freedom is paramount, its role in the realm of technology introduces new levels of complication, leading to specific figures taking dominant roles. Such is the case with the narration of control, only here the leading figure is, generally, no
surprise: the teacher. As I suggested when examining the opening statement, there is at least the veiled suggestion that in this class, for all of its seeming openness, a narrative of control is operating as well.

When one looks through the text of the class, one finds various examples of this narrative, many of which are fairly hidden and veiled. Notice the following two examples:

1. Robert here is the rough draft copy that you requested to be returned.
2. I didn't read until after i forwarded my final essay that you wanted me to tag on the other student's critiques. i can still do that as a separate file if you would like to read their comments. i think i heard from 4 classmates.

In both of these examples a fairly mild control is in operation for the students are responding to the teacher not so much as a liberator or a peer in experimentation, but as a teacher who makes specific assignments. The first student is letting me know that he is sending another copy of an essay as I required before I would grade the final version. In one sense he is being merely polite, but in another he's reminding me that he's doing what I requested. In the second example, the student is calling to attention her not following the rules I had set up for turning in copies of the final drafts of the essays (I asked students to put copies of peer responses in the files). In many cases, I had these responses already (because they had already been forwarded to me). Still, I requested new copies, to make the grading process easier for me; part of this request derived from the issue of efficiency; although I might already have copies of these responses, finding them in the files I had down-loaded from the system could be quite difficult.
I emphasized this sense of specific procedures as a way of giving the class more of a definite structure. I was worried that such an oddly constituted class would seem amorphous and fuzzy. Specific deadlines and policies helped give it at least the illusion of a structure. As I mentioned when discussing the narrative of liberation, I often would disregard this structure; still the idea of it was presented as an aspect of the class. At times, one student would lead another student to wonder about the importance of following the structure. Joe's peer analysis responses are an example. Before the students wrote their first essay, they exchanged a series of short assignments analyzing essays they had read, some of which I've discussed earlier. I suggested that they make at least some comments about what they read of each other's work. Joe was the most prolific in these comments, providing paragraphs for each paragraph he read, agreeing with the other writers and arguing with them.

When the class started writing their own essays, Joe continued the same procedure, even though I had established my own procedure: a series of six questions that I had used in classroom-based courses to motivate students. However, Joe did not really need this motivation; he was making excellent comments on his own. Still midway through the first round of peer analysis responses, Joe received the following message from Paul:

Joe, Robert wanted us to reply to 6 questions about 3 of the essays. Your's is one of my three.

Paul's purpose here is simply to explain why he has chosen Joe's essay for analysis. Paul is taking the assignment as I literally made it; all he does is answer the questions—he's following the rules of the class, and that's fine. However, he is not providing the kind of detailed information that Joe did in his
sometimes more rambling statements. However, soon after Joe received this message, he sent the following message to me:

    Just learned from Paul . . . that my responses have been taking the wrong format..sorry Joe

This message is one of the best simple examples of how a statement made under one narrative (Paul's, the narrative of control) causes an addressee operating under another narrative (Joe, the narrative of collaboration and possibly the narrative of liberation—by sending the peer responses to me, as he had been doing) to form new metaprescriptions for his actions. That's what has happened—Joe has recognized the official rules, has apologized and has changed his actions.

Examples of the narrative of control in action in my messages often occur in the final remarks I attached to rough drafts and final essays the students sent me. Final comments form what seems an institution in writing instruction; these comments are the last chance for a teacher to put teacherly suggestions on a particular paper, to emphasize strengths and point out especially crucial weaknesses. Here is a closing statement attached to one student's essay:

    THIS IS A COMPLICATED BEGINNING--YOU'RE TRYING TO LAY A GOOD FOUNDATION (AND YOU ARE DOING THAT). I WORRY, THOUGH, THAT THAT FOUNDATION IS TOO COMPLICATED--IT REQUIRES A GOOD DEAL OF EFFORT TO WORK THROUGH. WHAT IF YOU FOCUSED ON AN EXAMPLE/STORY TO LEAD INTO THIS?

    YOU ARE MAKING A STRONG EFFORT TO COVER A WIDE RANGE OF INFORMATION HERE. MY WORRY IS THAT THE TOPIC IS TOO BROAD TO MAKE THAT COVERAGE
SUFFICIENTLY IN-DEPTH TO INVOLVE AND INTEREST A READER ENOUGH. COULD YOU FOCUS ON SOME SUB-ASPECT? EACH OF THE ASPECTS OF FAMILIES, OR THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEN AND THE NINETIES WOULD WORK. WHAT THE PAPER NEEDS MORE IS GOOD, VIVID, STRONG EXAMPLES, TO MAKE A READER SEE THIS TOPIC, FEEL IT, TASTE IT, ETC.

WHAT YOU SAY IS EXCELLENT--AND I CAN SEE A LOT OF THOUGHT HAS GONE INTO IT, BUT A MORE THOROUGH PICTURE THROUGH EXAMPLES WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE FOR A READER.

In these comments, I first start with a mildly positive opening statement, one that suggests a strength of the essay (a strength that is also a problem). I am emphasizing the need for more examples, an idea that I often emphasize with freshman writing. Notice that I refer to the idea several times in different ways, whether as "What if you focused on an example/story to lead into this?" or "What the paper needs more is good, vivid, strong examples, to make a reader see this topic, feel it, taste it, etc." or "a more thorough picture through examples would be more effective for a reader." I'm also approaching the essay from the perspective of this typical reader, explaining how this reader would react ("It requires a good deal of effort to work through"), asking for the examples to aid this person.

I don't consider this example an especially good or bad example of a final comment on an essay. Its strengths are its recognition of positive and negative sides to the essay, and its language that suggests that I really have thought about the essay. However, I'm thinking about it in fairly teacherly ways.
I'm using such general language that I could transfer this final comment to many other essays, with a few changes. I view this kind of statement as a kind of controlling comment. It would come either after all of the previous comments I made or the other students made to this writer; it might even come beside those if attached to a rough draft. I don't think it would deflate a writer severely, but it would also not liberate him, say, in the way that a specific comment focused on the specific essay at hand might. I'm reminded of the comment I made about Karen's essay with the surprising ending, mentioned earlier in this chapter. With that comment, I clearly indicated my curiosity about her essay, my desire to know more. This comment is more teacher-talk, the language that the student and I have heard before.

A more emphasized form of control occurs in the actual grading of the essays. Because the computer system allowed me to down-load a student's essay, I could take the file into my word processing program and write in it. I could insert comments about unclear sentences, spelling errors, word choice. To stand out from the student's text, I would use all-capital letters. As a result, in an essay full of marks, my marks would stand out when the students received the essay back: Notice the following example of a rough draft marked this way:

Growing up in North Carolina among the pine trees, beaches, and beautiful Appalachian mountains NOT LIFE?life seemed far more laid back than it is today. My family was pretty much a typical southern family YOU MIGHT EMPHASIZE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP HERE? and spent a lot time together. There were five of us, COLON: mom, dad, Greg, Mel, and myself. I'm the youngest and this distinction meant that I had three male role models to guide my growth. Of course, at the time,
I never looked at them that way. COULD USE A BIT MORE. Both older brothers were excellent SP students, very active in sports, and participated in various school and social clubs. Our father, Buck, was very active socially SP and athletically SP as well. Buck basically set the example that both Greg and Mel followed. He refereed High School football and basketball for twenty years and several times was voted "Sports Official of the Year". PUT PERIODS AND COMMAS INSIDE OF QUOTATION MARKS. For some ten years he was the highest rated basketball official in the state. Those accolades and the fact that he worked as a postal carrier (he knew everyone in town) afforded him a semi HYPHENATEcelebrity status. That name recognition and respect seemed to inspire my brothers for they thrilled on getting involved as much socially and sports wise as possible. Each earned a lions POSSESSIVE share of awards, such as "President of the Key Club", SEE ABOVE "All City and All Conference" in sports.

BY THE WAY, THIS IS INTERESTING, WITH A GOOD RANGE OF SUPPORT.

These comments are more thorough than the comments I would have marked on an essay in a classroom-based class, especially for a rough draft, because there I would use symbols to fit my comments in the space available. Here, though, the computer allows me to make my own space, and add comments as I will. What I've approached here is the computerized version of drowning a paper in red ink. I've marked so many comments that they seem to strangle the actual prose of the writer. They are also comments that move in different
directions; many relate to grammar, with new versions of the symbols I use in handwriting. Others, such as the opening one "Not Life?" try to make the student writer think about the problem—here I'm trying to get the writer to think about the logical problem in the sentence, the problem caused by starting with a dangling modifier. Elsewhere I suggest the need for more detail with the phrase "could use a bit more." I end the passages with the vague, concluding comment: "This is interesting, with a good range of support."

In hindsight, I look at graded passages such as these and think "What was I doing?" for I seem to be treating the student's passage in the most superficial way. In the process, I am exerting my teacherly control of the passage and of the student. I am asserting myself as the one at least to flag the need for corrections even if I don't make the corrections myself. I'm responding to the surface level of the text.

After talking to students in this class and other classes taught over this network, I've had the impression that such grading within their texts is popular. One student told me that he liked it for it allowed him to go though his paper and change the teacher's suggestions, one-by-one, to correct or better versions. He felt that such corrections helped him improve his paper—that the teacherly control was helpful. And so it may be. I've been using this term "control" in fairly negative ways, implying that it denies whatever positive effects accrue from a more liberated class structure. However, such students desiring this kind of control, and there are many at schools such as Houston Community College, want teachers to help them meet the standards of the dominant, academic culture. They want to learn academic discourse, not just appropriate it in bits and pieces. (Learning the correct discourse is a part of their own personal
narratives of legitimation.) As a result, a teacher marking a paper as I did above is the desired goal, not a nightmare to flee from in terror.

These marks have another side, one that brings back the issue of efficiency. Marking a paper as I did above takes a fair amount of time and close reading. Marking a class-load of them, in rough and final forms takes even more. And if the students, especially the ones especially eager to become proficient in academic discourse submit multiple rough drafts (submissions possible under the narrative of liberation, of course), the kinds of marks I've made in the above relatively small examples could become burdens on the teacher. They're the kind of corrections that computers allow so easily, but because of that ease, the humans who must make the marks may easily become swamped in commas needing correction, verbs without agreement, and statements without enough clear examples. The possible lure of performativity again suggests a means leading to a conceivable collapse of the system.

In this, the longest chapter of this dissertation, I've tried to trace these four narratives of the class in a fairly separate fashion, as if each is in effect by itself or at most just side-by-side. However, at places in this discussion, these narratives have intersected, with one narrative seeming to twist into another: liberation becomes control; joint experimentation with technology leads to a new hero. So far, I haven't suggested the results of these intertwinnings; I've just implied that each of these narrative systems seems to offer legitimacy to its players and to the class as a whole. However, if the narratives cross each other as I've just suggested, what would be the result? That's the topic of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 11: NARRATIVE PARALOGY

Throughout the previous chapters, I've generally suggested that the four narratives exist as separate entities in the course. Although the narrations of liberation, collaboration, and experimentation are all part of the same general metanarrative of liberation—all emphasizing the importance of freedom in the class—they do approach this topic from different directions. The clearest sense of separation occurs between the narratives of liberation and collaboration since the liberation narrative focuses on a new open relationship between student and teacher, while the collaborative narrative exists in the world of the students themselves. The experimentation narrative is similar to both narratives, for it concerns groups of just students and groups of students and the teacher; it is different from the other narratives in its subject: the uses and abuses of technology. Thus, it too maintains some distance from the other narratives. The narrative of control is even more distant, for it suggests an organizational scheme especially alien to the first two narratives.

However, I've also suggested that the narratives may be seen as more blurring. On a certain level, my very inclusion of the experimentation narrative as a separate narrative introduces this seeming confusion, for it seems to take a bit of the previous three narratives, depending on how it is activated, only applying them in a certain specific area, concerning technology. And, of course, at other times, other narratives seem to come together, as the narrative of liberation blurs into the narrative of control when Joe realizes how I intended the peer analysis responses to be structured. Still, these narratives seem to function as parallel but different structures of legitimation, much as the
emancipation and the speculative narratives legitimated different forms of knowledge in different ways at the same time.

However, with so many narratives, especially such different ones in the same class, the possibility exists for narratives to come together even more, to intersect and create—or seem to create—potential problems in legitimation. Such blending of these narratives, each of which alone gives a sense of legitimation to the players and to the class, may be seen in two ways, both of which recall issues that Lyotard examines in *The Postmodern Condition.*

On one hand, the presence of multiple narratives—and their potential interconnection—could be seen in a negative way, as a source of delegitimation for the players and for the class as a whole. Narratives would cancel each other out; players would seem to be operating under different narratives of legitimation. When a player operating under, say, the narrative of liberation encountered a player operating under the narrative of control, he might seem to be assaulted; the values that he assumed supported himself and the class would seem inapplicable in the class as a whole. Seen this way, the multiple narratives could easily slide into the sort of nihilism and pessimism that Lyotard cites as the result of the delegitimation of the grand Narratives at the end of the nineteenth century. The seeming presence of more than one narrative would seem to be cause for throwing out the whole lot of them.

Such a perspective, although tempting in its ability to make a class seem to be the site of such instant glamour, would miss the ultimate power of a class functioning through multiple narratives. The example I mentioned above, about Joe’s switching from the narrative of liberation to the narrative of control is a good example. One can view his position as one more in line with Lyotard’s notions of paralogy. Once Joe realized that the situation in which he was
operating was different from what he first thought, he altered his behavior. One might say that he recognized that the sense of consensus under which he was working—that he was in a class in which he was free to write lengthy comments as he wished—was no longer applicable. He stumbled into a moment at which this idea, legitimated by the narrative of liberation, ceased to apply when Paul sent him not only his peer response but a message that he was sending what "Robert wanted us" to do. This moment marked Joe's awareness that his following the narration of liberation had led not to consensus with the class, but to dissent with the rest of the members. As a result, he shifted to another narrative, the one that seemed more in effect at that particular moment in the class.

Joe is behaving as a scientist behaves in a paralogical system. He may seem to be operating under a structure of consent, but he is well aware of dissent—those places where the going narrative ceases to function. He then forms new rules—new metaprescriptions—that tell him the overall structure of the statements he should make, and he moves to a new basis of legitimation. His recognition of the collapse of one narrative into another may be seen as negative, of course, but, ultimately, for the strength of the course, it's fairly positive, but positive in a much more complicated way. When one narrative collides with another and a player forms new metaprescriptions, the class shows itself as a structure that is alive and functioning, for it's the structure that allows for this awareness of dissent, change, and new rules.

In the following chapter, I'll examine several examples of how the narratives come together to cause the players to form new rules. At times these convergences make the class seem to cease to function, but it's at those places where it functions best, for the class is made legitimate as a site in which
different narratives can come into seeming conflict, and their players can reach
new resolutions. These examples focus on two sets of relationships, one
between the students Joe and Karen, and the other between student and
teacher, Joe and me. Both relationships developed through the paralogical
blocking apparatus I've just described, both relationships had some rough
points, but ultimately both relationships were able to use the clashing of
narrative positions to help the players understand each other better and make
the relationship stronger.

One might notice that in both of these relationships, I'm focusing on the
same student: Joe. Such a choice is by no means a coincidence, for as the
class progressed, if any one voice seemed to dominate the discussions, it was
Joe's. As I suggested in the previous chapter, he was one of the students taking
a strong position in the experimentation narrative; he played with the computer
system to make it easier to use for himself, and he made sure that other
students in the class had access to his knowledge.

From early in the semester, both Joe and Karen engaged in a strong
correspondence. Each of them came to the class with a certain familiarity with
computers and each attempted each assignment with a strong degree of
imagination. If any two students in the class could be regarded as "strong"
peers, it would be these students. Looking at messages between the two of
them, one sees this sense of collaborative connection developing: they provide
an excellent example of the collaborative narrative at work. I suggested an
aspect of this closeness when I examined the peer responses to Karen's essay.
I've put Joe and her messages about the essay in the previous chapter.

I also found myself engaged in a complicated relationship with Joe. I
respected him and admired him for his work in the class, for he was in many
ways the most dedicated and more prolific student—features any teacher would admire. At times, though, I didn't know what to do with Joe, for I felt that he was talking to me from a slightly different direction from that I was using. As a result, I even found his messages sometimes annoying or frightening, and often perplexing. He, from the messages he sent me, let me know that he found me complicated too. He saw me as someone with whom he could talk openly about his work, but I was also someone who misread his intentions and thus did not give him the attention and respect he always needed.

Throughout the semester, the ways I read him and the ways he read me caused all sorts of problems in the class. We each were trying to decipher the other's messages, reading into them more than just their surface text: we were engaged in determining the sense of the self—or the narrative—that backed up the messages, at the same time that we were also using the messages to determine what actions we would take, to determine which metaprescriptives would fit the particular situation we appeared to have before us. Often, reading the other's messages and speculating on his narrative and then deciding what our own rules of procedure would be made working with each other rather difficult. Thus, our interactions are complicated; that's why I see the two of us—and Joe and Karen's interactions as well—as excellent examples of what multiple narratives in one course can lead to. Each of us was able to operate within the same narrative with each other and with other members of the class, as I suggested in the previous chapter. However, in many of our interactions, we caused each other to question the appropriateness of particular narrative roles—suggesting that the other should change, or we changed ourselves.

The kinds of tensions I'm about to show are not that different, I admit, from tensions that occur in classrooms in which students and teachers are
practicing Robert Brooke's underlife roles, both "contained" and "disruptive."
What Joe and I and then Karen and Joe illustrate is how these differences in
roles function in a class, how they make the class a legitimate structure.

Joe, Robert, and the Narrations of Liberation and Control

My opening statement about the class went to the students twice: I
handed it to them during the orientation session for the course and then I sent it
to them through the system as the first week's assignment. This statement was
my way of assuming the teacher's role and establishing authority, as part of the
narration of control, even an authority at least partially based on the
metanarrative of liberation. Re-sending this message helped remind the
students of all of the procedures and policies that helped maintain these
narratives. Sending another copy also helped make sure that any new students
who enrolled late would have a copy in their mailboxes as soon as they logged
onto the system. It also served as a check to be sure that everyone could
receive and process messages effectively, before the new messages of the
following week started (thus, it was a test of the student's ability to use the
system, part of a series of messages in the narrative of experimentation). Thus,
I sent this first message on January 23, fairly late in the evening after I had
access to a computer, about 9 PM.

I checked my messages the next day, never dreaming that any of the
students would have become acclimated to the system so quickly (since during
the previous semester I heard from no one for the first week). Still I checked my
messages anyway, being concerned with liberty and control. I found the following two messages, from Joe:

1. Date: Wed, 23 Jan 91 09:08:01 EDT
   From: JOE<ENG99@HCCSVM1>
   Subject: JAN22
   To: PROLOCUTOR <RFORD@HCCSVM1>

   Barely made it to the shop in time, hated to leave, very enjoyable hour with every one, very happy to be here, thanks so much. Joe

2. Date: Wed, 23 Jan 91 21:49:53 EDT
   From: JOE <ENG99@HCCSVM1>
   To: robert <RFORD@HCCSVM1>
   In-Reply-To: Your message of Wed, 23 Jan 91 21:03:30

   WHEN TRYING TO READ THIS MESSAGE IT CAME OUT VERY FRAGMENTED AND SOMEWHAT DISORGANIZED....ANY CHANCE IT CONTAINED CONTROL CODES?? I CAN SEE IMPENDING NEED FOR A PRINTER. ANXIOUS TO GET THIS ROLLING JOE BUENOS NOCHES SEN-OR.

Besides feeling surprised that even one of my students would be able to use the system on the first day, I was also taken aback at the subject and tone of these messages.

Look at the first message, specifically at the time, "Wed, 23 Jan 91 09:08:01 EDT." The system was in working order sometime that morning, probably a few hours earlier, but someone would have been around the distance education office after 8 AM or so. Thus, Joe could have been advised
when he could start sending messages—or he could have just dialed the number he had been given to call the mainframe computer and have taken a chance. Either way, his was the first message sent this semester, before everyone else's, including mine. His subject line refers to the previous night's orientation session, as does the message. It's a polite, breezy, informal message, especially so because of the string of predicates joined by the commas. It's a message that seems coming and going, quickly. It suggests a writer who is indeed happy to be part of the class as he looks forward to its promises. By sending the message so quickly, Joe opened the student's side of the liberation narrative, by writing his instructor a thank-you note—not what a student in a traditionally-controlled class would even think to do. However, from the orientation session's discussion of the course, he's learned that in this course things will be different.

I should have had no reason to wonder about this message, but at the time it seemed just too much: it came too soon, it seemed too assertively written, it seemed to assume relationships that I had not yet considered in existence. I reacted from the position of the narrative of control. I saw the messages as an assault on authority, as a student taking the lead in the narration of liberation, making it seem, well, just too liberated. Then, of course, there is his salutation to me, "PROLOCUTOR." What did he mean? Was this a word he used often (my snobbish sense that I didn't, made me think that he didn't either)? Was it because he is a member of the Church of England, as the dictionary I consulted told me? Was it because somehow his thesaurus told him that this word would be a good word to address the person who had been addressing him the previous evening? More importantly, how did he mean it, ironically or seriously? And, if it were meant ironically, then how should I read
"very happy to be here, thanks so much"? Was he happy to be in the class? Did he really mean that he "hated to leave" the previous night's meeting?

While the actual message does seem to be the sort of statement that the narration of liberation would allow and even encourage, I was simply not using that narration. My surprise at finding any messages kicked in the narration of control, and that narration led me to construct rules that made me concerned about this message. My sense of control intensified as I glanced at the second message. This message was sent later on the 23rd, at about 10 pm in reply to the message I had sent around 9 pm that night, my introduction to the class. As I could see at the end of the message, this time my name was to be "SEN~OR." Again, though, I wondered how this line was meant, and this time, I had a much more pressing reason to wonder since I had to decide how to read the first line of his message: "WHEN TRYING TO READ THIS MESSAGE IT CAME OUT VERY FRAGMENTED AND SOMEWHAT DISORGANIZED." With this comment, Joe is invoking the narration of experimentation and its role of questioning technical problems in our quest for an efficient system. By sending the message so quickly after I sent him my message and by questioning its form, Joe is putting himself in a strong position in this narrative. He is also effectively opening this aspect of the narrative in the class; all of the later messages about problems with technology flow after him.

With the next line, "ANY CHANCE IT CONTAINED CONTROL CODES??" it is a even clearer that Joe is speaking from the narrative of experimentation: he's implying that the file I sent was not sent in text-only form, that I had not put in this form before I uploaded it and sent it to the class. The previous evening (during the particular orientation session that Joe attended) I had mentioned the importance of sending text-only files, cautioning the students that failure to put
files in this form could cause grave problems on the other end, the end of the addressees. Reading Joe's message from the perspective of the narrative of control, I felt an implication that I was not doing my job. That all of this message is written in capitalized letters just makes things all the more emphasized, for I had also presented this message form as the one I would use when marking student's papers.

My reactions, deriving from the narrative of control, made me unable to see these messages from Joe's perspective of the narratives of liberation and experimentation. In these messages, he's responding to the kind of class that narration would support. He's showing himself as an interested, diligent student wanting to participate in the mutual sharing the narrative suggests. Thus, he writes his instructor immediately to send greetings and to let him know the importance of the class for him. He even calls the instructor by a respectful name. He writes in a friendly, casual style because he's confident. He realizes, from all the instructor told him the previous night, and especially from what is printed in the handout, that in this class the instructor wants him to send messages, to feel free to ask questions and offer suggestions. When he asks "ANY CHANCE IT CONTAINED CONTROL CODES??" he is both engaging the instructor in dialogue and participating in the experiment that the class represents. The question is not at all insinuating; instead, it shows that Joe faces a perplexing problem—as suggested by the question marks (??)—and therefore is wondering if maybe, maybe, there could be some other problem.

Looking at these two sets of narrative positions, one should consider again the issue of efficiency. Joe and I are approaching each other from different narrative positions; as a result, the information we receive about each other through the system—all we really have about each other at that point—is
not "perfect," efficient information. Instead, it is information supported by
different narratives of legitimation. On a certain level, it might be said to lead to
the dissolution of the class, what Lyotard might call the dissolution of the social
bond, in the same way that the grand Narratives collapsed because of the
presumptions of their existence and that performativity collapsed because of
problems in supporting consensus. Here, though, lack of efficiency in
understanding each other, although causing minor surface irritations and
annoymances, is a mechanism that propels the discussion. I don't understand
Joe's position, but I don't let discussion stop, either by withdrawing him from
class or avoiding contacting him. Instead, I use the position from which I speak
and how that position views his messages to create rules to respond to what he
has sent me. Because we don't appear to be in consensus, I continue
contacting him, partly trying to understand his position, partly trying to
emphasize my own. This is the general action of this class; it is the process that
legitimates the class.

After I received Joe's query about control codes, I sent the following
reply:

WAS THE RESENDING CLEARER? BY THE WAY, YOUR FILES
CONTAINED MANY CONTROL CODES TOO--WERE YOU
AWARE OF THAT? THE PREVIOUS MESSAGE WOULD HAVE
PRINTED OVER ABOUT THIRTY PAGES DUE TO CONTROL
CODERS.

I'm playing more than one role here. On one hand, I'm being the caring teacher
of liberty who uses the system to fulfill his students' needs: if one needs another
copy, he gets it! I'm also participating in the discussion of the narrative of
experimentation, wondering if now I've made the system work. However, I'm
also turning the message back on Joe, suggesting that he also has sent a file with control codes. Thus, I'm playing a strong position in both the controlling and the experimentation narratives. I am asserting my teacherly love of evidence by referring to another file Joe has sent me, one that seemed to contain control codes, suggesting that this file contained the kind of problems he labeled in mine.

After Joe sent me the file with what I labeled control codes, but before I read it, he sent me the following update on that file:

RE: RESPONSE TO "BEAUTY"
PAR 5 SENT 2 WORD 7 CHANGE FROM IN TO [OF]
PAR 6 SENT 3 WORD 11 CHANGE FROM UNMARKED TO [UNMARRED]
PAR 7 SENT 1 FINAL CLAUSE SHOULD READ:
"OF MORE VALUE IS THE WHOLE."
THANKS....JOE

This message is an example how Joe participates in the narrative of liberation. He realizes that he left errors in a piece of writing already sent in, and he's sending corrections, but he's treating these corrections as just additional information, not as errors. He knows that as a liberating teacher I will want to know how best to read his work, and this message will help in that goal. Of course, the message also calls to mind a possible challenge to the whole notion of efficiency, for to fully use this message, I would have go back to the original file, count all of these lines and words, and mark the errors. Such a process might seem easy, but it would also be time-consuming especially since I would have to connect this file's information to that file's information. I sent Joe a message in return, my first message to let him know that I although I wanted him
to be diligent, perhaps he was being too diligent: "I loved the corrections, although they do, a bit, hurt my head!" Notice that I don't use capital letters in this message. My role has changed. I'm still playing an element of the controlling teacher, by acknowledging the corrections, but I'm also using the roles offered by the liberating narrative, in the sense that I'm speaking as a peer ("I loved the corrections"), and by the experimentation narrative, in my reference to how hard actually using this file to read another one will be ("they do, a bit, hurt my head").

Around the second week of class, Joe began operating in the narrative of liberation in a much greater way. At this point in the semester, students were working on short writing assignments, concerning the notion of heroism, what they thought of it, what examples or non-examples could they imagine. I asked the students to send these short passages to me and to each other. Generally, I received one or two examples. I made some comment on them and sent them back, and the students did the same with each other. From Joe, though, over the course of several days, I received several copies of the same file. When I first read this file, I responded, but more messages kept coming. With each one, Joe was improving the piece, making it clearer, but improving it in tiny, almost imperceptible ways to my eyes, making comparing versions difficult and really impossible since, as in the previous example, I would have to find the files containing the earlier versions.

This was one of the first moments when I began to doubt the whole issue of efficiency. Efficiency seemed an elusive goal. Although it was aligned with the narrative of liberation, I began to see it as a difficult goal to reach. If I wanted the students to revise and edit and enjoy playing with language, and I wanted them to feel comfortable sending this production to me, then I had to
look at it and most likely make some comment, since making comments was so theoretically easy. But keeping track of all of these versions and my comments on them caused a variety of problems.

By the time that Joe finally sent me his *final* version of this piece, he had reworked it until it looked like this:

Simply stated, whatever the motivation, be it recognition, revenge, love, guilt, philanthropy, death wish, survival, financial reward need to discover, the rush of adrenaline, job description, increased selfworth, fear, or pure ignorance, a hero is an individual who goes beyond the limits of what the majority would consent to be a common or typical human action in order to achieve beneficial, timely, and needed results.

Looking back over the few number of years lived I'm not certain what is the the most widely accepted concept of a hero, likely the one who risk or gives their life to save another. Certainly it is within my definition of the term. The word "unsung" springs to mind. In all probability, the majority and the most consequential heroic deeds go not only unrecognized but also fail mortal conception.

In a phone call, he told me how proud he was of this piece of writing, how difficult it had been to arrange like this, first of all, and then how difficult, second, it had been to send through the system. Some of the duplicate mailings were the same as this, only justified differently: to the left, blocked in the middle, etc. Through these versions, Joe was experimenting with the system and allowing
me to serve as a liberated teacher by offering my opinions on the different changes.

With all of these versions, Joe was telling me a lot about his role in the course—but I was forming stringent metaprescriptives to tell me what to do with him. He was clearly fulfilling a position in the narrative of liberation by sharing all of his work with me, asking for my opinions. However, all of the versions flying through my computer caused me to invoke the narrative of control, for although I liked what I saw, I couldn't process them all, and I didn't know what to do to get them to stop. If I said "Don't send any more," I would be contradicting the narrative of liberation, and exerting overt control—and my controlling tendencies were generally more hidden. In a message sent after he sent this last version (notice: a message after a version after many versions), he wrote this:

Robert, I apologize for all the excess messages but maybe you do want to see our work as it progresses. I only sent the class the first draft. Excuse me for assuming that it is fair work that might give some incentive and ideas to others. Also I hope you will overlook where it was necessary to leave out a punctuation mark in order to achieve the desire spacing. I really don't think it is very obvious. Of course the whole thing could be easily pushed together into standard form, but I might go to the gas chamber if it was. Dig? Have a beautiful weekend...thanks so much for allowing me to express myself. Maybe I will send it to the class

This is an involved message. In it, Joe takes the position that he realizes that he had been sending many messages, acknowledging the possibility that I'm coming from the narration of control. Still, he is emphasizing that he's acting as
part of the narrative of liberation, a topic he touches upon with the greatest care: "but maybe you do want to see our work as it progresses." Wording this passage this way calls to mind my original statement, especially since Joe uses the general, class-embracing phrase "our work," as opposed to referring simply to his own work. Even if I have felt overburdened by the number of words coming to me, my hands are tied, for he's calling me on my own promises, again, promises that I want to see his work. His "maybe" implies the position that I was approaching, as I saw more than I ever imagined I would see. The second line, "I only sent the class the the first draft," further emphasizes his connection to me as liberator. He realizes that sending so many copies to so many students could be too much, but, after all, he knows that I will want them.

In his discussion about the grammar, Joe is approaching the narrative of control from two different sets of metaprescriptives. On one side, he's fitting into the narrative of control and its concern for correctness. Towards the end of the passage, though, another response to this narrative comes out a bit: he knows the way his writing should be, and that way is without "proper grammar": "Of course the whole thing could be easily pushed together into standard form, but I might go to the gas chamber if it was. Dig?" With this statement, Joe writes in a negative tone critical of the narrative of control, one that refers to a denial of the narrative of liberation. Joe doesn't dwell on this idea, for again, he shifts roles slightly, taking the paragraph back more directly in the narration of liberation: "thanks so much for allowing me to express myself. Maybe I will send it to the class."

In such interchanges, both of us are invoking more than one narrative at the same time. We speak in different voices, making our communication partner have to reevaluate his position. In a sense such exchanges suggest a
breakdown in communication, but if so, such breakdowns continued throughout the course, for Joe and I wrote to each other constantly. The moments when our narratives seemed to clash were actually moments when we used them to speak even more: the differences in the narratives allowed each of us to feel legitimate about our actions and our ability to operate from these different perspectives gave the class—and the network—a certain legitimacy as the structure that encouraged discussion.

At the same time this prose poem series was coming to me, Joe and I, with our attached opposing views of our narrative position, stumbled into our first little disagreement, the precursor of grander ones to come; these disagreements provide excellent examples of how a networked class supports the recognition of disagreement. At the orientation session, I mentioned that I might divide the class into groups, to allow students to exchange writing within a circle of just a few people, to allow for more efficient collaboration. However, I realized quickly that such an approach was not necessary, since several people dropped out of class within the first two weeks. About the same time, Joe sent me the following message:

Robert: Have you divided us into groups in the system? If so please send me names and ID's of my associates where I can be in more effective communication.

I have not receive diddly squat in the way of the hmwrk asnmnts to be shared or other messages. Maybe it is my deodorant, am I really that obnoxious in expressing myself and trying to communicate? What gives?
By the way, how are you doing all around. You are so far away, would you share anything with me to make yourself more real in my mind?  Joe

Joe is suggesting the two narratives of collaboration and liberation here; he's also asking for the efficiency that the course promised in all of the narratives. By asking for the "ID's of my associates," he shows himself interested in getting to know them as fully as possible, for "more effective communication" between these players. His classmates are not just "students"; instead they are the more powerful "associates," a title suggesting that they are linked in a productive enterprise. His second paragraph is also couched in the narrative of collaboration, but here he questions its effectiveness. The reference to missing messages leads Joe to the final paragraph, in which he shifts the focus to me, the teacher. He's speaking from the position of the liberation narrative, for that narrative implies that he can ask questions such as this in the class: "would you share anything with me to make yourself more real in my mind?"

This shift into the mode of liberation is a shift that my response recognized but didn't really respect, for when I wrote back, I was operating out of the narration of control. I viewed Joe as asking for too much information, for blurring too much the collaborative narrative and the liberating narrative. Collaboration might imply that he could share information freely with his groups of peers, but by leading such sharing to a desire to share similarly inclusive information with me, I viewed him as asking for too much liberation in the liberation narrative; the controlling narrative kicked in. In previous messages with Joe, I had operated under a similar narrative, so when I was now being questioned directly, I played the controlling teacher even more:
Joe--no class divisions quite yet--I'm hoping everyone is running on the system first--you are the most prolific one in the class; You should be getting mail about now, if the assignment I gave last week is working. Let's hope. Do I seem distant? Sorry. I think I described one of the places where I work in an earlier message, so perhaps I should tell you something else?

HMMMMMMMMMMMMMM--what? Why not let's do this--you give me a writing assignment and I'll answer it--no kidding

My response here is almost entirely from the narrative of control. There's an element of playfulness in the essay assignment I suggest, but it's a playfulness that those in control can pull out for fun. Part of this message appeals to the hope for efficiency, that if all students are using the system as they should, they should be sending Joe messages based on "the assignment I gave last week" (emphasis added). Even my language talking about this assignment suggests machine efficiency. The short, clipped sentences of the following lines are hardly friendly, engaging—they're not really responding to what he was saying. They represent a voice that has created rules—for control, for power, possibly for protection.

The end of the passage, although offered as an aside, shifts the discussion. It's something thrown away, coming after the fake "HMMMMMMMMMMMM--what?" which suggests that I'm really thinking of telling something while I'm writing the paragraph, though in this paragraph I let go of no secrets as either liberator or a collaborator. With my solution to Joe's question, I seem to relinquish power, by asking him to come up with a writing assignment for me, but I've actually maintained power, by keeping my separate role from him still separate.
Joe's return comment at first seems to respond in a neutral tone with "I believe the id's that have sent mail are 01,04,08,09,11?,18,2?. That is about it just trying to scan mentally"; he is continuing to speak as a hopeful collaborator, cataloging his possible associates. However, he then confronts the implications of my previous request for a writing assignment; he recognizes that I have taken a position outside that of the narratives from which he had written:

I am not certain what your last sentence means? Are you implying that Joseph is at times too personal? Moi? Pardon me, I thought this was a small English writing class that was involved with who and what we are, expressing our selves in relation to both one another and the material covered, and developing all?!

Joe realizes that my comment to him contained a veiled statement of controlling power—not too much to complain about, but just enough to notice, since I controlling without being too emphasized. Joe, though, pushes past the comment, moving quickly from a possible request for clarification in the controlling narrative (a kind of statement that that narrative wills students) back to his previous position from the liberating narrative. Joe realizes that I was pushing away his inquiry about my personal life, and he turns my actions on me by citing the narrative of liberation that, after all, I had established in the class. My comment, although it might seem friendly, clearly was more of a statement of power; he wants to make sure that I know that he knows that position. The sheer wording of his comment is a masterful way for Joe to emphasize his ability to recognize my seeming rejection of the liberation narrative. By saying "Pardon me," he may be seen as playing with the kind of politeness the controlling narrative would require and that the liberating narrative would make one desire. His statement that "I thought this was a small English writing class
that was involved with who and what we are, expressing our selves in relation
to both one another and the material covered, and developing all?I" recalls the
sort of general statements I made at the start of the course, especially since he
uses the plural phrases in "who and what we are" and "expressing ourselves." Joe
is not saying that I've criticized his question; in fact, he's implying that by my
comment of control, I've neglected the goals of the course, as presented best in
the narrative of liberation.

One more point about this exchange. The issue of efficiency is involved
here as well. The simplest thing for me to do when Joe asked his question,
would have been to give him a non-sarcastic "no," a "no" that might have
seemed to avoid any particular narrative (for in any narrative, as long as it's not
one of terror and coercion, a player has the right to say "no"—such a move
would be suggested by the need for "justice" that Lyotard cites). However,
simply saying "no" in a network would possibly seem too rude, too direct, given
the ability for the system to transmit great bulky documents. I could have
actually made a brief statement about my life, but doing so would have meant
having to write Joe something. By this point in the semester (the first few
weeks) my life was busy enough with the day-to-day responsibilities of this
course; I really didn't have time to add other little writing assignments helter-
skelter (whether operating as a liberating or a controlling teacher).

Joe is, in effect, asking me, as he might put it, to get with the program, to
participate in the class as a collaborative writer. He brings up an excellent point
for the narrative of liberation: if I ask him to write for me, why can't I write for
him? Haven't I established this sense of free exchange as a basis for the
course? However, trying to fulfill that narrative in a system that supports many
messages and even messages about messages (as part of the narrative of
experimentation) was difficult. A request for even more messages could lead to avoidance tactics, as here. By turning the request around and by making what Joe sent the basis for emphasizing a more controlling position, I avoided feeling overburdened as I exerted power.

Thus, for the moment at least our positions arising from our identification with opposing narratives causes a standoff of sorts: Joe recites to me the theory of the narration of liberation; while I entrench myself in the narrative of control. Because we approach each other from different directions the metaprescriptives we create to guide our future statements keep our discourse separate. Eventually, though, we move through this situation. Within a week or so, when Joe and I found another main topic of discussion, Joe responded to me about my writing assignment by speaking from the narrative of control. He gave me an assignment, in the same way that a teacher might give an assignment to a student found guilty of underlife behavior:

I was still asleep when first reading (and prematurely replying to) your last message. We can use that reply as a basis for your writing topic. Authority and authority Wisdom and knowledge please compare and contrast these four words in combinations of two. do as many of the combinations as time and desire permit but most especially do the pairings as they stand here.

His assignment is worded in the language of the controlling teacher. Joe has realized that the narration of liberation he was earlier expressing was not the narrative guiding the course's discourse, at least at that moment. Thus, as earlier, he changes narrative tactics, recognizing that the consent he saw as constituting the class was only local, that it masked a level of dissent between him and me. He's now speaking from the same narrative as I was, but he
approaches this narrative with metaprescriptions based on his previous
narrative roles: because those narratives allow him to make requests and
assume a powerful position, he continues to do so now. He assumes the
position of controller in the new narrative, using his past position of legitimacy to
give him new legitimacy now in a narrative that theoretically legitimates me, not
him. He's using one narrative to change the force of another, just as earlier he
used the narration of experimentation to allow him a similarly powerful position.

Karen, Joe, and the Narrations of Collaboration and
Experimentation

Joe also engaged in this play of opposing narratives with Karen; at times,
both writers would play from a position in the narrative of collaboration, in which
they were sharing ideas about each other's work, as in the peer analysis
example in the previous chapter. At times that narrative would blur into the
experimentation narrative in their lengthy discussions about the best ways of
making the system achieve the efficiency it promised. However, in these
discussions, and in other discussions about more general topics, each writer
veered into versions of the narrative of control, using it to emphasize a more
powerful position that the other writer would counter by creating new rules to
determine the way he or she would respond.

The examples I cite are from the early to mid point of the semester, the
period of their greatest discussion. Just as Karen responded to Ellen's opening
description of her work space, Joe also sent a similarly encouraging message:
Hey Karen  So momma finally gets to do something she wants....GREAT... It is fine being able to operate with more efficiency and much more rapidly in the home, isn't it ...All of that hard work will come back to you multi-fold. It's really hard to get help from your classmates before you're on line..huh? We are suppose to critique each others work so: Try taking your writing out of the first person; just flat out drop the I's and the me's. I funny recently started working on the same and it is amazing how quickly one is 'forced' to find more descriptive terms.

Have a good one  Joe

In the first part of this message, Joe is establishing elements of the collaborative and experimentation narratives: he and Karen are engaged in a new experience together, taking a modem course. He also makes the kind of statement that a collaborative peer might make to another: "All of that hard work will come back to you multi-fold." However, this statement is also the kind of statement that a teacher might make as well—it's a good, all-purpose beginning-of-the-semester remark. The last part of this comment continues the collaborative role, for Joe is trying to aid Karen in her quest to become a better writer; he seems to refer to the official discussion of student roles I included in my opening statement; he seems to be talking as if he's me: "We are suppose to critique each others work." In the critique Joe gives, he also seems to speak as a teacher, for his discussion of the need to eliminate "I" is the sort of comment that current-traditional teachers make to students from coast to coast. Although allegedly speaking in the collaborative narrative, Joe is using rules which actually govern the language of control. Since his discussion of error would go to Karen through the same system that a possibly similar discussion (assuming
that I would comment on the same issues) would got to her from me, the blurring of collaboration and control is more striking. He is both a peer and the teacher.

A bit later, as Joe was sending me the messages asking if I had divided the class into groups, he sent similar messages to the rest of the class, asking for the assistance of his "associates" to help where the teacher was lacking.

Along with everyone else, Karen received the following message:

Say Folks Has Robert already divided the class into groups? I haven't received copies of many persons' assignments. The two paragraphs on two of the selections from "Heroes". Come on I need some inspiration and communication. This is a network isn't it.

This message is an appeal from one collaborator to another to participate in the network that should allow such participation—if only the players would play the game of collaboration. Karen returned this message and attached the following message at the top:

Joe, you might be too hard on people. perhaps they down-load to read the mail and erase their mailbox items. if you try to reply and don't "forward" the file by pressing PF6, a person can't always remember what the reply refers to. how many times i've opened electronic mail to a message that reads, "yes, i agree, i think that's a good idea," only to find that after a time lapse i completely forgot what i asked or suggested originally. if you tag the original note to the bottom, a person can then see the answer and refer to the question (or whatever). i'm sure we'll all get better at this as time goes by.
Although the first line of Karen's message could seem to refer to the message it allegedly is discussing, the rest of the message is focused on a completely different issue: the problem of technology, a topic that positions her discussion as part of the experimentation narrative. Karen is explaining the problems involved in responding to messages without sending copies of those messages along with the response—a valid point for the reasons she gives including her experience from when she "opened electronic mail" to messages that left her wondering "what I asked or suggested originally." The problem with Karen's assuming this position of power based on her knowledge and her past experience with similar technology is that she's attached the message to the wrong message from Joe, making a point that doesn't connect to the content of that message and its value in the experimentation narrative.

Karen's message, which seems thus somewhat confused, is actually, though, responding to another actual message from Joe, one that is also somewhat confused, for it's a message in response to a strange message he received from Karen:

LET'S SEE THIS IS A REPLY TO A COPY OF A REPLY ENG80 MADE TO SOMEONE ELSE'S ESSAY RESPONSE THAT ENG80 HAD RECEIVED A COPY OF. THEN ENG80 TAGGED HIS RESPONSE TO THAT OTHER PERSON'S ESSAY AND SENT COPIES OF THE WHOLE THING TO THE WHOLE CLASS. IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE THERE IS GOING TO BE ONE HELL OF A LOT OF CLUTTER IF EVERYONE follows THIS EXAMPLE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ALSO ENG99 IS NOT "KAREN" MY NAME IS JOE. IF YOU KEEP YOUR MESSAGES SEPARATED IN FILES, USE X-EDIT TO REMOVE ALL THE ADDRESSEES (TO
SAVE SPACE AND TIME ON REVIEWING), OBSERVE
DATES, AND I THINK, MAKE YOUR REPLY FROM THE READ
MODE, OR AS RFORD SUGGESTED INSERT YOUR COMMENTS
DIRECTLY INTO THE OTHERS DOCUMENT (PULLED UP ON
YOUR OWN WORD PROCESSOR) AND RESEND THE
DOCUMENT AS A FILE. THIS PROBLEM OF NOT KNOWING
WHAT WHAT A MESSAGE RELATES TO CAN ALSO BE
SOLVED. HAVE A GOOD DAY FRIEND. JOE

The data suggest (based on the times and dates these messages were sent
and from and to whom) that Karen sent a message intended for someone else
to Joe, confusing Joe and leading him to send these suggestions for how to
avoid such problems. Of course, this message provide further evidence that
Karen's stated position of knowledge in the system is somewhat shaky. Joe is
asserting an even more powerful position from the experimentation narrative,
recognizing a possibly crucial problem with the system (to the point that "it looks
to me like there is going to be one hell of a lot of clutter if everyone follows this
example"). He is also is invoking the controlling narrative, as earlier, by
referring to the voice of the teacher and his commands: not only could the
confused message he received have been solved by the methods he suggests;
it also could have been avoided if the original student had followed the methods
"RFORD SUGGESTED."

After Joe received Karen's missed response, he sent her the following
message of correction:

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT "BEING TO
HARD ON FOLKS" AS WHAT THE MESSAGE SAID WAS THAT I
HAD NOT BEEN RECEIVING ANY OF PEOPLE'S WRITINGS
"HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT". ....AT THIS MOMENT IN THE REPLY MODE FROM READING YOUR MESSAGE(IN RICEMAIL) MY SCREEN SHOWS THE PF6 KEY TITLED "SUSPEND" I WILL CALL TOM MONTGOMERY [a member of the Distance Education Office] TO SEE WHAT GIVES WITH THE TAGGING. I ASSUME THAT USING THE PF5 FROM THE READ MODE WOULD KEEP THINGS TOGETHER. CERTAINLY SUSPEND DOESN'T SOUND CORRECT. HAVE A GOOD ONE FRIEND. JOE

Joe doesn't respond as if he realizes that Karen's message was intended for his earlier message referring to her even earlier misdirected message. Instead, in the first lines of this message, he's speaking in the language of collaboration, re-emphasizing what his message was stating. He then goes on to respond to her message about the use of function keys (PF6 and PF5) when relaying other messages.

In this series of messages there's a blurring of narrative roles: collaboration is seemingly struck down by a blend of the controlling and experimental narratives. This blurring arises only, apparently, from coincidental causes, from one student's mis-sending a file, another's responding in a fairly direct way, then the first student's mis-connecting her comments, leading to a final appeal for clarification from the second student. This sort of confusion makes the seeming efficiency of a network almost seem laughable, since a rearranged sequence of messages seems able to change the meaning of messages and restructure the dialogue that the students introduce into the system. Looking at the data from a third person's perspective, over a year later, I can see how the misunderstandings occurred, but at the time such errors in connecting messages lead the students to different assumptions of their roles.
Such missed connections did not seem to stop the communication between Karen and Joe, however. As their relationship progressed, they seemed very able to juggle narrative roles, sometimes confronting each other with opposing roles, but generally juggling roles as they moved through various topics. One writer's position in a certain narrative did not determine the discussion; although such a position was a legitimating force for this writer, the other writer seemed free to choose his or her own position. He or she would approach the other's narrative from his or her own set of rules, leading the discussion in new areas: one can view these opposing narratives as constituting the game of their discussions, a game that is supported by the class which is in turn legitimated by its allowing the various narratives to be interconnecting.

In one of their longest exchanges, Karen and Joe address these different roles as they jump through narratives. All of the following three sets of responses came from the messages of one episode. Since Joe started the exchange (although he refers to an earlier message not saved by the system, I've put his messages first:

**JOE:** Back to your problem. I have heard nothing. Another possibility is that you hit the [F9] twice on the same msg. That will unmark it for deletion. Let's see ....after you read the message in RiceMail from the mail command you log the message to a notebook or not and hit the [F9] then hit the [F3] to exit the mail mode and the screen says "x items will be deleted. Y/N/M(menu)

**KAREN:** yes, i press f9 (maybe once in a while press it twice but not on a consistent basis); yes, i answer 'yes' to question Y/N/menu, but i still get error messages (like key in qquit if you
want to escape error). I thinking problem is related to being 'full-up' on my file space. I wanted my incoming notes to delete, and since the system was unable to file my 'logged' messages, perhaps it just kept returning everything to me.

In this set of responses, both are involved in a game of speculation, each speaking from the experimentation narrative. There is a sense of curiosity flowing through both of these quotations, for they are together collaborating on a problem that they face in using the computer system, this problem focusing on another function key, the "F9" key, used for deleting files; as Joe makes a suggestion and Karen counters, they seem to be brainstorming. Although there is this sense of mutual collaboration, Karen is also clearly insisting that she knows how to use the system more than Joe would imply (and more than her earlier messages would suggest) when she mentions, briefly, that "maybe once in a while [I] press it twice but not on a consistent basis." She's re-emphasizing herself as an authority.

Karen continues this tendency to emphasize powers Joe denies in the following interchange:

**JOE:** I do realize that you work with a similar system on the job, but again being weary at day's end in a forest you really don't want to be it ...might take a toll.

**KAREN:** one more thing: yes, i'm spreading myself thin, but i'm hanging in there. i'm not the first person with a busy life and won't be the last. i'm doing what i want - i'm involved in lots of things. but i still go to school to keep improving myself.

Here, Joe is trying to give Karen an easy excuse for admitting the complications involved in understanding the system; he makes her other job as the excuse—
because of all she must do to deal with the computer system there, she should certainly have the right to avoid dealing with the problems in this system. Here, though, Karen again shifts the position that Joe has seemed to assign to her as she seems to shift into an entirely different narrative of legitimation. In the previous statement she just shifted to a different position in the experimentation narrative, but now she seems to leap to another narrative, the narrative of liberation. She asserts that she is busy but that such activity is her choice for she's "hanging in there" as she goes to "school to keep improving myself." She's invoking the kind of student that the liberation narrative is designed to free from past economic, social, and academic constraints. Apparently, Joe's message went too far—or at least it seemed to go too far to Karen—in implying that she had an excuse to avoid mastery in the system. Instead of just asserting her ability to understand the system, Karen shifts the discussion to a narrative which insures her more power.

Elsewhere in this exchange, the writers push the collaborative narrative to a new level, one that, again, leads to a heightened sense of power:

**JOE:** Did you get my "mis-response" to your draft? When do we get the "rest of the story? Mine progresses a bit each day. No one responded with any suggestions for beginning or end. I sure hoped it would get some class communication and participation going...oh well the best laid plans of mice and men..tell me bout the rabbits George...John did respond to one msg that hit home. You saw that one about the guy dying for nothing and no thanks.

**KAREN:** Joe, my honest opinion of your problem of no one responding to your essay is that you seem to be writing on level 10, when most of the class is still on level 1. your work is intense,
writing about very passionate subjects, and perhaps our classmates are unable to get on your wavelength and communicate with you with suggestions. I myself found I couldn't help the writer who wrote about her trip and seeing the wreck, or the nurse who wrote about a weekend without much direction. What can you say that won't sound tacky? So, I avoided the issue. I instead wrote to those who were relatively 'easy', if you know what I'm getting at: abortion, childbirth with risks, single parenting. See what I mean? For me these subjects weren't as heavy as your subject. I'm not picking on you. You're really dedicating lots of time and much effort to make your work powerful. I'm just saying perhaps people are just not getting into it with you.

Joe is writing in the spirit of collaboration, but as before he is aware that the other members of his collaborative team are not responding as he assumes they should. In his message, he in fact refers to one of the most intense messages he received from one of the other writers, a message from Richard in which he responded to Joe's comments about saving lives in burning buildings. This message was one of the best examples of collaboration between Joe and another student before Joe wrote to Karen. For Joe, the collaborative narrative is a legitimation force that almost seems illegitimate. Still, Joe continues to act in the spirit of the narrative, by asking Karen if she received his responses to her draft (which he ironically labels a "mis-response").

Karen, in her response, partly speaks as a collaborative peer with her suggestions of why he has received so few responses. She's actually, though, taking a more powerful position as a collaborator, for she is acting as the teacher-referee would act in the collaborative classroom. In the classroom, the
referee would try to lead the collaborative groups to consensus by resolving differences. Here, Karen is taking a similar position, in that she's acting as this sort of "better" peer by leading Joe to see why he hasn't received the help he desired, the help he later requested in his message to "Guys and Guyettes," mentioned earlier. What's most striking about this position as "referee" is that the consensus she's leading Joe to see is a consensus about lack of consensus. She's explaining, in a collaborative mode as the collaborative referee (a position I earlier suggested as analogous to the controlling position held by more traditional teachers), why collaboration isn't working.

First, the class is not a class of equal peers ("you seem to be writing on level 10, when most of the class is still on level 1"), making collaboration difficult since "perhaps our classmates are unable to get on your wavelength and communicate with you with suggestions." Karen suggests that she understands this position because she too felt unable to help certain writers in the class such as "the writer who wrote about her trip and seeing the wreck, or the nurse who wrote about a weekend without much direction." However, in these examples, Karen suggests that she was unable to help not because of the reasons (she implies) that lead other writers to avoid Joe's work (because it was too intense, too powerful, too demanding), but because she saw no point in the topics of these writers ("what can you say that won't sound tacky?") Instead of collaborating with those writers about such topics, Karen chose her own network of collaboration, examining essays on "abortion, childbirth with risks, single parenting." Although such topics seemed "relatively easy" to Karen compared to the essays on the "weekend" and the "wreck," they are of course fairly intense topics that could provoke complicated responses.
While she suggests that the other students would avoid Joe's writing about "passionate" subjects, she avoids writing about these two essays about which her remarks would be only "tacky." The two essays that Karen is criticizing here, although clear, were fairly straightforward, composed of mostly lists of details with little drama. They are unlike Joe's writing—which was much more dramatic—and unlike the essays that Karen cites as "relatively easy" to handle. Karen is thus setting up a different set of reasons for why collaboration is problematic: not because some writers are too intense, but because some writers are not intense enough. As "better" peer, Karen seems to put some writing in the collaborative pot but relegates other writing to a trash heap.

After she mentions the topics she felt like covering, though, Karen places them in a strange position. Although "relatively 'easy'" compared to the papers about the "weekend" and the "wreck," they are also "not as heavy as [Joe's] subject." The implication is that even these topics, topics more involved than the pedestrian topics of the essays she avoided are easier for her to handle than the topic of Joe's essay which appeared too intense and too passionate for Joe's fellow students to "get on your wavelength and communicate with suggestions." Karen's dismissal of collaboration relies on establishing a hierarchy: the other students can't collaborate with Joe because he is far above them. She understands their position because she feels similarly about the essays she couldn't help. She was better able to respond to more intense essays (perhaps because they were richer, fuller, more interesting), and even these essays were not as intense as Joe's. She's constructed a system that might seem like praise for Joe's work, but it's praise that so elevates his abilities that he's pushed out of the realm of the collaborative narrative.
As one navigates this hierarchy, the collaborative narrative seems more and more a fiction for the class as a whole—but it does seem, however, a possibility for Karen and Joe. Her comment suggests that she and Joe are both at some point removed from the rest of the class, making collaboration with these others difficult. That Karen and Joe continued to correspond just makes this idea that they form their own collaborative group all the more tempting. Karen is suggesting that group consensus doesn't apply, that collaborative possibilities exist on an even more local level of herself and Joe, and that she can see these possibilities in her ability to be the better peer for the whole group, certainly, and of the smaller group she forms with Joe as well. Recognizing problems in the collaborative narrative, Karen participates in one of the strongest statements of collaboration with Joe, made all the stronger because elsewhere, as I've suggested, she has not just accepted Joe's views of the current narrative: she's shifted her position to support herself.

Two days after Karen sent Joe the previous message, he responded to her analyses of George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" and Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation." Writing from the perspective of collaboration, Joe is both complimentary and pressing. He tells Karen that "YOUR WRITINGS ORGANIZED AND EASY TO READ (MUCH MORE SO THAN MINE)" but he wonders if "YOU'RE NOT A BIT IDEALISTIC WHEN THINKING ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE HEROES." After discussing the two stories more directly, giving her an idea of how he would view the concept of heroism in them, he concludes with

DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND ME I THINK YOUR WORK WAS GOOD, I JUST WISH FOR YOU TO BE ABLE TO SEE DEEPER INTO PEOPLE THE VERY BEST TO YOU....JOE
The general spirit is collaborative, for Joe is trying to respond to his other, better peer as a truthful, thinking collaborator. In the process, though, his sentences are the sort of sentences that a very controlling teacher could use to silence the budding efforts of an inexperienced writer—he's implying by hoping for her to "be able to see deeper into people" that so far, she hasn't exactly done so, that what she has sent out is shallow, perhaps in the ways she earlier suggests that the writing of other students was shallow as well, perhaps (to a certain extent) in the way that Joe's writing is not shallow.

I don't know if Karen responded or not to this message; if she did, the system didn't keep a copy of her response. However, she did respond to Joe's class-wide message encouraging everyone to use the PF6 key to allow them to send copies of messages with new messages about them (see page 277, in the section on the narration of experimentation). In her message, Karen is participating in the narrative of experimentation, but in a way that is countering the control that Joe has taken by sending his class-wide message. She first emphasizes that she already suggested using the code but that he had criticized her ideas:

Joe, when i suggested we use PF6 the other day you came back with a comment about my suggestion creating "clutter." now you're advertising the code. as you have now found out, resending the file you are referring to gives the reader a chance to scroll through and reread what he/she said originally, thus eliminating the possibility of forgetting what was said in the first place.

In this message, Karen first documents that Joe has already criticized this idea, by quoting his reference to "clutter"; using this word almost questions Joe's
authority in now proposing to use the code: it is as if he should see himself as not promoting the clutter he earlier criticized. Her concluding example, starting with the phrase "as you have now found out," recalls the tone of Joe's previous message to her, in the sense that both messages offer both praise and criticism (recall "I just wish for you to be able to see deeper into people"—there Joe implied that Karen couldn't see so deeply just as she is implying that Joe attacked a system feature that he now defends, and more, is "advertising"). Her actual example of how the code is useful tells a little story that illustrates the importance of using the PF6 key, but it's an example that surely Joe as advertiser already knows: she's preaching to the converted; she's taking a dominant role in the narration of experimentation for which such a role was not needed, but in doing so she threatens Joe's authority as she re-establishes herself as an authority.

Karen continues her message with further suggestions to emphasize her authority in the narrative of experimentation: "Don't forget, when forwarding a note and replying to someone, you can put more than one user ID on the TO: line, just separate them by a space, e.g., TO: ENG05 ENG06 ENG07." She then returns to the role of "better"-seeing peer in the collaborative narrative as she again warns Joe that when he suggests that "some folks are 'too good to share their work'" he is being too critical, or "too hard on us again, not knowing anyone's personal situation." Karen is emphasizing valid reasons why the collaboration Joe desires may not come true. She ends her message with the line, in parenthesis, "(p.s., don't forget, mothers try to be diplomatic)," a line that seems to reinforce her position as better authority with more knowledge about what motivates the others in the class: she views them as a mother would view them, seeing features that help explain and compensate for their weaknesses.
Karen is thus using a composite of two narratives to legitimate her voice in this message, as a way to differentiate herself from the position that Joe has established in the same narratives.

Joe's message in return seems to contrast directly with Karen's position. He starts the message with a denial of her assumed position of "mother" for the class, leads into a defense of the equality of the collaborative narrative, veers into a discussion of how their difference is emphasized, moves back to the experimentation narrative, and ends with a wildly sarcastic re-reading of Karen's assumed position of motherhood. This is one of the most powerful messages sent through the system, so I quote it in full:

MY ISN'T MOTHER DEFENSIVE AND SCOLDING..I AM NOT YOUR CHILD...THE OTHER STUDENTS ARE NOT YOUR CHILDREN...THEY ARE MEMBERS OF A GROUP...A GROUP WITH A COMMON PURPOSE...THERE IS NO NEED TO BE DEFENSIVE FOR ANYONE... YOU ARE RIGHT I AM RIGHT THEY ARE RIGHT AND WE ARE ALL WRONG.. I DO NOT EVEN BELIEVE THAT ONLY SIX MEMBERS ARE LEFT OF A CLASS OF 20+ BESIDES DON'T YOU THINK THE SYSTEM WOULD DROP THEIR ID NUMBERS. . I AM CERTAINLY GLAD YOU WILL COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS AND HOPE YOU WILL ALLOW ME TO communicate mine(don't the letters run together,see how we are different?) when i first saw your passing the message with mine attached, it appeared that it would always be that way also every time the entire class list is stored it takes up more memory than a short message. i keep my all notebook edited to eliminate clutter, but doubt very seriously if everyone does. as far
as being hard on people i still do not know what you are talking about...perhaps i am not as STIMULATING as i would like to be but their certainly are many more emotions to be dealt with and expressed besides one of niceness and understanding and motherliness..in case you have not guessed, i am not a mother. if i was and my children were not doing there homework in spite of numerous urgings i think i just might get a little more stern.6 people!!! so what if there is some problem with the system and i am not getting all my messages or theirs are not going through properly. Well lets be quiet and soft and gentle and sweet and all the ants and flies will come right to us. Tell me do you wear your motherhood as a badge or use it as an excuse or try to wield it as a weapon.you see i saw you do all three in the few lines of this attached message.i am neither impressed or intimidated...you see i think we should release microbes into the atmosphere that will silently sterilize ALL human beings then there will be no more mothers or poverty or disease or war or pollution or problems.. how does that grab you.....Joe

Joe is using the narrative positions to piece together his own legitimacy in response to Karen's message. On one side, he is opposing the legitimacy of Karen's assumption of the motherhood-of-the-class position, by invoking the collaborative narrative ("The other students are not your children . . . They are members of a group . . . A group with a common purpose.") As collaborators no one is more able to take a dominant position than anyone else: "You are right I am right They are right and we are all wrong." As a result, Joe seems more interested now in the differences that a collaborative structure emphasizes:
"don't the letters run together, see how we are different?"—an idea that relates to Karen's examples of difference earlier but that pushes it further, implying that any assertion of connection may be divided into pieces. By placing his rhetorical question about their difference so close to his thanking Karen with "I AM CERTAINLY GLAD YOU WILL COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS AND HOPE YOU WILL ALLOW ME TO communicate mine," Joe implies that in this process of communication, the differences between players are more emphasized by the discussion than is the sense of consensus that the metaphor of a mother's understanding all of them would suggest. That Joe shifts at this moment from all-capitalized letters to lower-case ones all the more emphasizes this point.

In the middle of this discussion from the collaborative narrative, Joe shifts abruptly into the experimentation narrative, but this time not assuming the role of a more knowledgeable user. He speculates about whether "the system would drop [the] ID numbers" of class members not participating. This is part of the other language in the class that questions and probes the system. After his return to the collaborative narrative, before launching into Karen's message even more, Joe returns to the experimentation narrative, this time re-assuming the position of knowledgeable leader as he says, briefly, that "I keep my all notebook edited to eliminate clutter, but doubt very seriously if everyone does." He thus excludes others from the position he gives to himself.

In the rest of the message, to a certain extent, Joe is presenting a counter-position to Karen's ideas that they should be "diplomatic" about the other class members not sending messages. For Joe, collaboration means sharing information, it means activity; in this message he is trying to stimulate that activity, at least between himself and Karen. In response to the lack of
messages from his seeming collaborative peers, Joe seems at one point to adopt his own position as an authority. Although he wants to encourage discussion, when discussion is not occurring, when the others are "not doing there homework in spite of numerous urgings I think I just might get a little more stern"—Joe seems to adopt his own view of a leader, not the motherly diplomat of Karen, but a stern disciplinarian. He views Karen's assumption of motherhood as a defense for understanding the seeming breakdown in the collaborative narrative as just another play for authority: "do you wear your motherhood as a badge or use it as an excuse or try to wield it as a weapon."

Joe's more powerful play for authority, throughout the rest of the passage, is his language. He packs this passage with wild examples, leading up to his concluding nihilistic view of the destruction of the world, a destruction hinged on some of Karen's very ideas (by listing "mothers" first as a problem to be destroyed by these "microbes").

The collaboration at work here seems, well, strange, for it is a bombastic collaboration, as if Joe is trying to bury Karen's ideas with the wealth and richness and imagination of his own. In a classroom, such a response would lead to confrontation, but here the lines of communication stayed open. On one level, Joe's message could seem to be a denial of the collaborative narrative, because it emphasizes its flaws and because he pushes the tone of the discussion so far that collaboration seems to become intimidation, but that is not really Joe's intent. As he says early in the message, "YOU ARE RIGHT I AM RIGHT THEY ARE RIGHT AND WE ARE ALL WRONG . . . . I AM CERTAINLY GLAD YOU WILL COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS AND HOPE YOU WILL ALLOW ME TO communicate mine(don't the letters run together,see how we
are different?"

This passage is an example of that difference; it's a statement of just how far the collaborative narrative can be pushed.

If this message were the end of Karen and Joe's communication (as one might think it to be), then one might regard it as a set of statements that prove the illegitimacy of the collaborative narrative. However, Karen and Joe continued to correspond with each other. Although Joe's statement might seem to be a point at which collaboration broke down, it actually illustrates that collaboration in a network can be built upon such breakdowns. At first, Karen didn't respond at all. Not receiving any messages from her, Joe wrote back:

I know my last message was a blunder, I attached the wrong message from you so did not have the correct relation. sorry

I hope you have just been busy mothering that no extreme problems have arisen, and that we are still communicating. I mean in my attempts to experience and communicate different parts of the whole, I may get a little carried away (at least for the taste of some)

I would like to hear how your work is going and even miss the feminine airs that only a protective mother can provide. Won't you send some word of your thoughts and life?......joe

By apologizing, and by then praising the very elements that in his previous message he was criticizing, Joe re-starts the communication process. At the same time, he again presents his idea of the importance of "experienc[ing] and communicat[ing] different parts of the whole" even though doing so may lead to his becoming "a little carried away (at least for the taste of some)." He still supports his own idea of what collaboration should indicate. He also makes a brief shift into the experimentation narrative, by suggesting that he "attached the
wrong message from you so did not have the correct relation," implying that the "blunder" was not so much in writing the message but in sending it attached where it was. He's appealing to their on-going discussion of the problems in tracking messages to legitimate his apology.

Karen responds with the following:

interesting you picked up on my silence. i just couldn't let myself take the bait and get involved in cross fire about motherhood. you must admit we'll all probably write our best work on subjects we're most familiar with. if everyone took the stand you seemed to about 'where i'm coming from,' i'd end up walking around with my head down and not say anything to anyone for fear of being 'attacked' for my feelings and beliefs. in any event, we'll see how things go. i'll have to go back into your note of a few days ago and see if i can salvage anything to respond to or just leave it be. my first reaction was anger, my second was cool off and not respond. i've thought about your remarks many times and chose not to log back on the system in the event you had come back with more. i doubt robert ford wants us to battle back and forth on our personalities. he's more interested in reactions to each other's literary works. later...

Karen has used silence as a means to reassert her position in her own narrative of collaboration because her view of collaboration, one in which one responds to only certain messages, and then in a diplomatic way, allows for "not responding" to be seen as a form of "responding." She opposes Joe's view of collaboration, by pointing out its problems: "if everyone took the stand you seemed to about 'where i'm coming from,' i'd end up walking around with my
head down and not say anything to anyone for fear of being 'attacked' for my feelings and beliefs." She has, of course, just given Joe a indication of this set of problems, by not responding to his message full of so many strong stands.

As she moves through her message, she emphasizes twice more that for her not responding again was a clear option. Although such statements partly derive from the view of collaboration she's expressed throughout her messages, when she would counsel Joe about the scarcity of messages from others, as she's repeating them, she's taking a stronger role. She's not just saying "this is my response as part of collaboration"; instead, she's taking a position of control, by showing Joe that she has the power to respond or not, that she is the one determining whether the conversations will continue. She is shifting here more to a narration of control. The hints about silence are a subtle mantra reminding him that his view of collaboration, although embracing from his perspective, is threatening from hers.

With her final statement, Karen invokes an even stronger image of control, by bringing the controlling image of the teacher, me, into her message. By implying that I would not want students to "battle back and forth on our personalities" because I'm more "interested in reactions to each other's literary works," Karen is asserting her own position as knowing what should be done: she understands the point of the correspondence with other students and what Joe thinks it is is incorrect.

In his response, Joe accepts aspects of her messages by writing "Karen so good to hear from you. Any level of communication is better than none." Still, he continues to support his view of collaboration with the following:

Personality is very relative but the point won't be pushed. I walked with my head down for years. Totally ridiculous except to know
what it is like but definitely not a place to stay for long. One
persons position is just as good as anothers,I mean after all the
sun is going to go out in x000000000000 yrs if a meteor doesn't
get us first. Get my drift? It takes opposing personalities to make
change. This system is really neat for differing thought exchange
as there is absolutely no physical intimidation and the other can
be 'turned off at any time',just don't quit. I mean there is nothing
threatening and who is to say you are the one to change?
whatever thanks for the response.....more?....Joe

He says that "Personality is very relative," an idea that corresponds to his earlier
statements about how people can be right and wrong at the same time, and that
supports the intense imagination at work in the message that Karen took as an
attack. Joe does of course say here that "the point won't be pushed," but in the
rest of the message that's just what he's doing—pushing the point, providing
other examples to show that his position on collaboration is the more
embracing, more positive one. After all, his view of collaboration is so
encompassing that it could lead to the idea that it is he, not Karen who needs to
change: "who is to say that you are the one to change?" By ending with the
word "more," Joe emphasizes the position he's suggested before, as he's
responding to the position Karen presented. Joe is continuing to write from a
position supported by his view of the collaborative narrative, but he is aware of
Karen's position too.
Conclusions—Narrative Paralogy

Other data from the course suggest that Karen and Joe were able to find ways to continue their correspondence, just as were Joe and I continued talking as well. The momentary disruptions in our messages were just momentary, even though they sometimes seemed somewhat threatening. In the previous two chapters, I've suggested that the narratives functioned in this course as separate fields, since they may be seen as legitimating various different kinds of statements and actions. However, when we look at examples such as these in this chapter—when we look at specific, long-term relationships between writers in which many messages were being exchanged, as opposed to the singular examples of one or two connected messages that I cited earlier—the use of narrative seems much more complicated. Two writers may see themselves as part of the same narrative, but such a singular view seems possibly coincidental. Writers may be citing completely different narratives at the same time (as were Joe and I in the examples I've cited), or they may be referring to the different aspects of the same narrative (as were Karen and Joe).

As the writers expressed their narrative roles, they experienced a situation similar to Lyotard's description of paralogy. They used structures designed to legitimate themselves and their positions in the class. Each of these structures assumed a position of group consensus by allowing a group of people to see themselves as involved in a connected set activity, whether liberation, collaboration, experimentation, or control. However, because there are so many narratives and because they seem to apply in so many ways at so many times, with players assuming roles in a certain narrative that other features of that narrative would suggest is closed to them, writers are constantly likely to find themselves speaking from one narrative position as they confront
another, or as they confront an opposing aspect of the same narrative, one opposing their own position so far that it seems to contradict that position entirely. Such a situation is made all the more powerful because of the network: it eliminates face-to-face contact which could make such confrontation stop the discussion, but it allows for the opposing narratives to come to each user through the lines connecting each other's computer. Whenever a user checked his mailbox he or she, potentially, could face one or more messages offering legitimation strategies different from the one(s) he or she held.

When the writers are seen as trying to reach consensus about these positions, the system that the class offers seems to collapse, for their differences are too strong; the multiple narratives emphasize that the writers and their ideas are more different than similar. Such a situation, one that questions the assumptions built into the notion of consensus, seems to destroy the very notion of group consensus, just as the grand Narratives and the performativity criterion were reversed by certain assumptions as well. Viewed in this negative way, the profusion of different narratives and sub-narratives seems to destroy the class.

However, in this class, and others occurring over a network, the discussion doesn't collapse. Students continue talking, the teacher still has to contact students with whom he disagrees, and students still must consult difficult teachers. Such is at least partly the nature of a class: it lasts a certain period of time, all of its players have certain general roles, and the players cannot simply exit the class without penalty (lack of three hours college credit, loss of a paycheck). Instead, the discussion shifts, from one based on an assumption of consensus to one that searches for dissent, searching for those points at which the seeming group consensus is seen to be failing, where it is clear that not all
members of the group adhere to the ideas of that group, where different nuances of the basic narratives of legitimation actually legitimate the players. Through their messages, the players play a game of dissent, poking into each other's statements, shoving the other's ideas, even to the point of denying what the other sees and says.

How, though, could such a situation legitimate the class as a worthwhile institution?

The answer comes by viewing this process of finding flaws in conceptions of group consensus as the—or at least a—worthwhile activity for the class. Instead of viewing the class as a stable system in which all of the players enact different roles in different ways, but all fitting together neatly and nicely in one system (the view of system's theory, performance criteria and collaborative theory, structuralism), one would view the class as a place in which players can probe their points of dissent, where they can try out different narrative roles and where they can respond—or not—to the statements that others make when presenting their own roles.

In the examples I've cited in this chapter this notion of dissent has appeared in different ways. Sometimes a writer's awareness of the failing of narrative causes him to establish new metaprescriptives and shift to another narrative position. Sometimes a narrative uses some opposition to another's narrative position to refine and better express her own narrative position, but in either case and others, the writer uses this opposing position to legitimate his or her discovery of this new position. The class is legitimate because it is the general structure that allows for this play of dissent to occur; its legitimacy derives not from its group hold on the roles at work, but on its ability to allow, here through a network, the different voices of the class (multiple even for one
writer) to come through the system, to be allowed to argue their positions.

At the end of *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard suggests that his view of paralogical legitimation (along with the way that computers will help this process) allows us to "respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown." The notion of narrative paralogy I'm proposing respects this idea, for it provides justice by allowing different players to support themselves by the aspects of the legitimating narratives of the class that most concern them, without being locked into narrow, constricting points of view. The unknown is also favored, since with all of the possible intersections of narrative, with the blurring of one into another, there is hardly a static system at work: the system encourages new statements to keep itself going.

This process is both assisted by and hampered by the technical structure that constitutes the structure of the class. It allows the players to be connected in close, close ways. It allows them to send many messages back and forth, even to the point of sending messages that contain others' messages. Such a system seems both efficient and inefficient, though, for with all of this power, the players are offered more choices than perhaps they can accept. The narratives are seemingly harmed. The liberation and the controlling narratives become races to keep track of files; the experimentation and collaborative narratives become discussions on how to use the system better to encourage more discussion (which would in turn increase the number of files, further affecting the functioning of the other two narratives). The players face a barrage of messages that shout for response, especially when that player is the teacher receiving everybody's messages.

Ultimately, we've seen a view of technology from the perspective of the experimentation narrative that focuses on its inefficiency almost as a benefit,
even as the users are speaking about technology as though it were the efficient prosthesis Lyotard prophesies. In these discussions, the lack of absolute efficiency is possibly more useful for the networked class than a blindingly fast efficient system would have been, for the problems allow the users to plan how to solve them. In this planning, they learn about each other, learn other positions their partners hold, and create the rules that govern their conversations from then on. These discussions are just part of the more general discussions in which the players test the bounds of their narratives.
CHAPTER 12: POSTSCRIPT

This dissertation has developed from a series of terms: *legitimation*, *narration*, *technology*, *efficiency*, *performativity*, *paralogy*, *language games*, and then *collaborative learning*, *social construction*, *referees*, and then *networks*, *computer conferencing*, *modems*, and then, most recently, a new emphasis on *senders* and *addressees*, *heroes*, *liberation*, *control*, *experimentation*, *collaboration*, all culminating in a series of students and me. A complicated list, one that has sometimes has made my head reel.

The alleged point of all this came partly in chapter one's argument that looking at the data produced by a composition class could help one understand more about the poststructuralist ideas of Jean François Lyotard. I suggested then and in the following chapters that Lyotard privileges technology and dispenses with narration, even though his text, in a sense, does not fully support such a reduction, for it stacks the deck against narration by applying standards to defeat it that it doesn't apply to science and it dispenses with narratives with an ease that could suggest a cover-up.

By chapters six, seven, and eight, I argued that composition provides examples of how narratives still serve legitimating functions in the classroom, both in how the class is legitimated as a structure, an event, and an institution and in how the students and teachers play legitimating roles with each other and with their institutions. Narration is more than just "little stories" in these classrooms. And statements are more than just "language games." When the members, or players, of a class make statements to each other, they fashion those statements from the narratives that legitimate them in the classroom. Of course, the narratives legitimating a composition class are different from the
kinds of narratives that Lyotard intends, for they don't exist as singular, grand
entities; they exist side by side other narratives. Together, though, these
collections of narratives allow students and teachers to achieve legitimate
positions in their classes, however local and momentary, however sporadic and
collapsing such positions may be.

As I examined these instabilities in legitimating narratives in the
particular class I taught over a network, I eventually suggested that these
narrative complications produce a paralogical world, akin to the one Lyotard
proposes for society. The narratives do not legitimate merely from simply
existing or from supporting certain players in the class. Instead, they allow the
members of this class to play certain roles at certain times; when players come
in contact with other legitimating narratives in the class, they form new
metaprescriptives to guide their future actions. Multiple narratives make the
class a site as much of dissent as of stability and consensus. The class
achieves its legitimacy through the process by which the players change roles
as they experience multiple narratives and as they react to those narratives by
acting upon new rules.

In the most stereotypically conservative, traditional classroom-based
course I can imagine, there might be—or seem to be—one official narrative,
that of the teacher or the institution, but in this networked class narratives
intersect and blur. This situation might suggest a certain terror of chaos to the
teacher who would inhabit the traditional classroom, but to the players in this
networked class, such a controlling teacher would be the representative of
"terror." Here chaos is not, oddly enough, a negative concept, for the idea
implies that players are able to use their resources to navigate through the
class. Conflicting narratives require players to choose and discern, to face
change, to deal with annoyance. They must read between the lines that come scrolling through their computers, they must analyze their senders' messages to decide how to respond. The network gives them lots of data to analyze, so much so that at times they may feel swamped by a veritable sea of chaos. This data allows them to form their rules for action, but because it derives from different sources of legitimation it is not always simple or clear. It is not what Lyotard calls "perfect information."

This is a point, ultimately, that I never intended to try to prove. I started this project in another direction, with the intent of showing how such a class that connected my students to me by our modems allowed for what I now call collaborative learning and performance efficiency. I wanted to show that students could exchange messages and help each other, that the computer system facilitated discussion, encouraging students and teachers to send and process many messages. As I review this previous sentence I think I've fulfilled that goal, but not in the simplistic way I once imagined, for then I wanted to show that the network could lead to what Lyotard calls the "games of perfect information at any given moment" in the sense that technology allows for efficient connections of users, with a network in which they can contact each other twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and exchange as much information as they wish. As I've suggested, though, technology is not as purely efficient as we might imagine, especially since narrative keeps things churning.

I do think now that technology is useful for its ability to connect students and teachers and that a network allows these users to collaborate. But the means and the results of such actions are much more complicated than I ever imagined. Lyotard springs paralogy on his readers almost at the end of *The Postmodern Condition*. Trying to understand it as a concept of legitimation, a
concept that could lead to justice, in the classroom, has been difficult for me. It's easy when looking at disagreements and miscommunications in a network to reach a nihilistic view of such a system's value; the first version of my last chapters presented such a view. I had Joe and myself going after each other in a series of skirmishes. And I let this draft of the dissertation end on a fairly negative note.

Rejecting negativism (for I think the class I taught did allow for justice) and embracing narrative paralogy as a legitimation mechanism in a class (for the differences between the users' narratives seem to have enabled the class to function) has been a constructive but complicated act for me. It has made me come to respect the the value of narrative in a way I never have before, and it's allowed me to approach teaching over computers with less hysterical adoration and more cautious curiosity. To end this dissertation, then, I will focus on each of these concepts just a bit more, to emphasize further possible aspects of their implications.

First, let's take narration. Although I've focused my project on the narratives that run through a composition class over a network, I think the implications for using narratives in education are much broader, in composition and many other courses. Whenever I've taught back-to-back sections of the same course, I've always been struck by how different each class can be; one hour's class can have one personality, while an hour later a completely different ethos would seem to be at work. I've also taught classes composed of students from such different backgrounds that reaching some common ground of understanding was quite difficult. Especially at urban two-year schools such as Houston Community College, one classroom can contain the range and wealth of humanity. Aged from eighteen to sixty, born in the United States or in twenty
other countries, well-versed in the politics and structures of education or completely new to them, these students approach each course and each teacher differently.

Viewing either such different sections or such disparate groups of students as a collection of narratives, with the teacher expressing an official narrative and with each student possibly holding his or her own narrative, changing it and rearranging it throughout the course, is useful. Using the concept of narrative legitimation and being aware of the process of narrative paralogy, the teachers could analyze what happens in their classes, trying to understand them. Introducing such concepts to our students could help them assume more powerful positions in their education as well. For either group, recognizing the use of narratives in education could allow us to untangle the web of narrative interactions we have not looked at—not eliminating these interactions—just untangling them enough to understand them better. I've proposed a set of narratives for this class, but I suspect that other classes, especially classes in other fields, would be composed of still other narratives. If, though, the use of narratives in this class is any indication, it's that narrative games are not fixed games; they're games of play and rearrangement. in which what's sacred is not the narrative, the specific position, but the movement between narratives, the action that is the class.

Second, let's take networks. Just as recognizing the importance of narrative allows us to see our classes in a new way, teaching through a computer network requires, I think, a careful wrenching from old ideas about teaching, also. It requires us to rethink our roles as teachers and our students' roles as students. Both groups must learn to play new roles, the teacher sometimes to teach less, and the student to teach and act more. The project of
this dissertation has made me want to teach this way again and again, because I still don't understand this form of teaching completely. If one judges what others have written about it, they don't either. Teaching through computer networks is still so new that its implications are possibly not yet even evident. Networks may be a "dream" way of emphasizing collaboration within groups of students, without the interference of teacher-referees. Teaching through a network may, though, be a form of teaching that, at times, leads to disagreement and "terror."

It is also a form of teaching that turns what has been a sometimes sacred, momentary event into a text. Because this text contains the events of a class, it allows us to analyze them in ways not previously possible. When we look at our work with students, when we analyze our classes and pick them apart line by line, when we consider why we said X, and why they said Y, we are treading on new territory. Certainly, teachers have always had the ability to analyze their teaching, but that teaching has generally been an ephemeral thing. It's gone after an hour and a half. Even video or audio-taping won't work, for such recordings wouldn't capture the students who hide in the corners. However, as more and more courses are offered on networks and more and more students participate in computer conferences, a new body of study-able information will be formed, a body that will allow us to understand what happens, good and bad. Previously, only when a teacher is really important, like Lacan or Austin or Fish, does his or her lectures become written down and analyzed as major texts, and then most likely not for issues related to teaching. Such a tendency still plays into traditional notions that the writing of experts is privileged to that of non experts—why?—because we still believe in the speculative apparatus and its hierarchies upon hierarchies?
I've made an effort here at using the data from a class in however small a way to examine ideas of a "major" writer—Lytard—and several "minor" writers, my students and me included. I think, though, that more is possible. Now and in the next few years, more and more floppy disks and hard drives will be filled with data similar to that I've used in this project. This mass of data is waiting to be analyzed, waiting to break down interdisciplinary boundaries, waiting to illustrate the sheer importance and complication of teaching, waiting to suggest how students motivate each other, about how teachers present concepts, about how we are in the classroom.

How I am in the classroom, even over the network, has become a dissertation. That's a very strange thing to write. Last year, at a cocktail party at The Conference on College Composition and Communication, I talked with my dissertation director and a former fellow student about what it would be like writing about how I am in the classroom, how I teach, how I send and receive signals. I don't remember what I said then, but since then I've learned that analyzing data about me is excruciating. Having every message I sent to my students (as far as possible) is a frightening thing, for in some of those messages I'm the ideal teacher of my dreams; in some I'm an ogre. I've put some of each into this dissertation, and in doing so, or rather in preparing to do so has lain the problem of this dissertation. I discovered that my best examples have been examples that I didn't want to write about, for they're examples that required me to talk truthfully, analytically about myself. It's one thing to analyze the text of another, or even to talk about teaching theory in general, but considering the theory in the practical, when the practical includes me, is another thing entirely. Examining such ideas, much less writing about them was an act of will unlike any I've faced before. I cannot tell you right now how
much I have wanted not to write this dissertation. As the members of my dissertation committee know, I am finishing this dissertation after more last-last deadlines than I even remember; much of the cause for those delays derives from dealing with this text my class produces, from making myself brave enough to write for the public what I, last year, would have told no one.

I tell this story (this little narrative) because I know of other teachers, my friends, who every now and then have let slip about a certain student or a certain classroom situation, perhaps a hostile student or a power game. I don't know if they would want to analyze those structures, but if such events occurred over a network, and if they analyzed them, I think they would learn something about the students, about themselves, about their institutions, about their profession. For too long, such data has been known anecdotally; this form of teaching provides the data that allows for a more systematic examination. I've played with poststructural philosophy here; I can easily imagine other ways to approach the data, and ways for the data to approach other subjects.

Such data will cause amazing problems, for such data are immense. At various times, I've suggested that networks lead to problems with efficiency and control. Think of how data from a multitude of classes could or would be used. One could compare banks of data from one semester for one course with banks of data for another semester. The point could be to improve instruction and make changes, to examine instruction to write articles for professional prestige, to monitor instructors performing their duty, perhaps for achievement awards or for punitive measures. If one maintained records of several different courses, one could monitor an individual student's work through several semesters in several disciplines. One could learn more about how these students functioned, what they did. One could have data then to counsel these students
or others the counselors perceived like them, to help them make better choices. All of this would lead to a complicated series of overlapping uses for the individual data banks a course would create. What's odd and interesting here is that a system that at the start, as it's being developed, seems to be guided by an altered notion of control, and may seem to rely on less overt control by teachers and administrators, through that very means, oddly enough, has more control, and allows for more long-range kinds of control than ever before.

Of course, all of this "control" and masterful "efficiency" could come crashing down on itself, for instead of increasing performativity, all of these uses would create new discontinuities, new complications, new instabilities. In fact, the sheer effort to track all this data could bankrupt the system.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try, for the possibilities are enormous.
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APPENDIX 1

ENGLISH 1301, FRESHMAN COMPOSITION ON THE MODEM
HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM
Spring 1991
Instructor: Robert Ford
Office Phone: (713) 868-0757
Office Hours: MWF, 9 AM to 4:30 PM

Welcome to Freshman English on the Modem! This course will help prepare you for the kinds of writing assignments you will face in your college courses and throughout your career.

In some ways, taking this course via the modem creates special difficulties. Most students in other sections of this course learn how to write by working with others around them. Well, with this course, you may feel that there are no others around you. As you read my words on your screen, you may be alone, at 3 AM, with your array of snacks beside you, your dog at your feet and your favorite music around you—but with no other people near you. Even if there are people around you, they aren't in the course; they aren't going to be able to answer every question you may have about your work.

So how do we solve this problem, so that you will be fully able to improve your skills in writing?

WITH WRITING!

You will correspond with me and with each other through WRITING. If you have a problem, you can send a message to me in WRITING, and I'll respond in WRITING. You will read each other's work, submitted in WRITING, and you will respond in WRITING. You will discuss the readings in our textbooks in WRITING.

Most students in any freshman writing course do a fair amount of WRITING, but it is WRITING confined to a specific arena: the "formal essay." Here, though, you'll WRITE essays, paragraphs, journal assignments, notes, and questions. Any WRITING teacher emphasizes at least two areas when teaching students how to WRITE essays: making the point clear and explaining the point. With formal essays, such areas are often difficult to master, but when, for example, you have a question, I think you'll find that you can easily state your concern and explain it. Doing that will help your WRITING and will thereby help you succeed in this course.

So, I hope I've made my point about WRITING, yes? Good. Before we jump into the course itself, we need to examine/review some more mechanical issues.
CATALOG DESCRIPTION, ENGLISH 1301
A course devoted to improving the student's writing skills. Emphasis on compositions ranging from five to seven paragraphs in length (500-750 words). An accelerated review of sentence structure, usage and punctuation.
Prerequisite: A satisfactory assessment score, completion of ENG 0310, or (for non-native speakers) ENG 0349. 3 credit (3 lecture).

COURSE PURPOSE
English 1301 is designed to help students write multi-paragraph expository essays that have the following qualities:
1. clarity in purpose and expression
2. appropriate and sensible organization
3. sound content
4. completeness in development
5. unity and coherence
6. sensitivity to audience
7. effective choice of words and sentence patterns
8. grammatical and mechanical correctness.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS
1. WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
40% Four major essays
10% Writing Journal
2. READING ASSIGNMENTS (analysis of essays in The Riverside Reader)
10% Midterm Essay Exam (ON CAMPUS)
20% Final Essay Exam
10% Reading Journal
3. FINAL EXAMINATION
10% Departmental Objective Final Exam (50 questions, multiple choice)

REQUIREMENTS
1. Obtain a passing average (70-100) on the essay exams in order to make at least a C in the course. If the average on the essay exams is a D (60-69), the student must receive a D in the course. If the average on the essay exams is an F (0-59), the student must receive an F in the class. This policy is in effect regardless of the student's other work in the course.
   The average of the essay exams is formed by counting the first two essay exams once each and by counting the last one twice.
2. Write a minimum of four essays.
3. Write a minimum of two essay exams.
4. Read all assignments and self-study reviews on principles of composition and grammar.
5. Participate in class via the modem and complete required writing or grammatical exercises designed to teach principles of
composition or grammar.

6. Complete a departmental final examination designed to test mastery of course objectives

7. Obtain the lesson once a week, submitting the required assignments, including essays, paragraphs, and other documents, by the required due dates.

**NUMERICAL EQUIVALENTS**

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**COURSE MATERIALS AND TEXTS**


Thesaurus and Dictionary.

**HCCS HOLIDAYS/CRUCIAL DAYS**

March 25-March 31: Spring Break

Tuesday, April 23, 3:00PM: Last Day for Administrative and Student Withdrawals

May 11-May 17: Official Final Examinations

**MECHANICS OF THE COURSE**

Most of the previous points apply both to this course and to all other sections of English 1301. Because this course is different from the rest, though, we have some slightly different procedures and policies.

1. **OPERATING PROCEDURES**

Instead of a series of lectures and assignments, the focus of a traditional course, this course will consist of a series of files, serving various functions.

Once a week, I will send a NEW LESSON to everyone in the class (by sending it to ENGLISH). You will need to download and print this lesson. Each lesson will include

1. some general information on the writing task you are studying,
2. some analysis and discussion of class-wide work on the previous lesson's assignments, and
3. an assignment for the next lesson.

You will need to obtain lessons once a week, and send in responses within one week from the time you received the lesson. Failure to contact the network for two weeks could result in your being removed from the course. The length of written assignments will be specified by the number of words.
You will respond to a week's lessons by creating two kinds of files. PRIVATE files will be sent to me (my user id is RFORD). In these files you will send all homework, reading assignments, journal entries, creating assignments for essays, and essays. Only you and I have access to these files. I will read what you send me and make the appropriate response (a comment, a suggestion, a correction) within one week and send my response and your message back to you. (I will thus take your file and add comments to it, creating a new file. I send the file to you by sending it to your user id (ENG01, ENG02, etc.).)

At various times, I will ask you to send something to everyone in the class—perhaps a copy of a rough draft of one of your essays for peer review, perhaps an analysis of an essay in the textbook. We will regard this kind of file as a PUBLIC file, since everyone in the class can read it. To send a public file, use the user id of ENGLISH. Note that when you send something to ENGLISH, everyone in the class will receive a copy (including me).

Public files will be most useful for peer review—one of the best ways for writers to improve their writing. Peer review helps a writer judge his or her audience and thereby improve the piece of writing. Comments made about writing in a peer review should be helpful and positive—we learn how to improve by noticing what works and trying to emphasize that part of our tasks. Further, comments should be clearly labeled (see below); they should not change the original text sent by the writer. When you have read a file sent to you by someone in the class and wish to send a response, you will do so by sending the new file (the original one with your comment) to the student who sent it to you. You do this by sending this file to the student's user id (ENG01, ENG02, etc.).

Besides your responses to lessons, you will also send me messages, most likely to ask questions (again, send messages to me to RFORD). I will pull my messages at least three times a week; you will usually receive some response within twenty-four hours. (Note that you can call me at my office; although I would love to talk to you and although I don't want to say "don't call," I want to emphasize the importance of WRITING; send a message.)

You can also send individual messages to each other. As the course develops, you will find yourself discussing essays and assignments with each other—this is how the class will build its sense of connection—it's also how you'll improve your writing skills. Send a message to an individual student by sending it to the student's user id: ENG01, ENG02, ENG03, ETC.

IMPORTANT:
Be sure that any files you send are sent in text-only form: no control codes, no underlining, no boldface, etc.
WHEN I MAKE COMMENTS IN THE FILES, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, I WILL USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, AS I AM RIGHT NOW!
2. **STRUCTURE OF A LESSON**

Each weekly lesson will have the following structure:

**HEADING:**

**DATES OF THIS WEEK:**

**WEEK 2**

Sunday, January 27-

Saturday, February 2

**REPETITION OF PREVIOUS WEEK'S**

**ASSIGNMENT TO PREPARE FOR WEEK 2**

Be sure you read, complete, etc.

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT**

**DATE THIS ASSIGNMENT WAS DUE**

Sunday, January 27

**TOPIC FOR THE WEEK**

The Writing Process

**THE LESSON ITSELF**

Suggestions, explanations, examples writing topics

**ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT WEEK**

**DATE THIS ASSIGNMENT IS DUE**

**ASSIGNMENT TO PREPARE FOR WEEK 3**

Sunday, February 3

3. **STRUCTURE OF MY OTHER MESSAGES**

I will label my messages to you within the messages. For example, when I am sending you my comments on one of your rough drafts, the file will begin with a note such as the following.

Response to Narration Essay

From: Robert

To: Ezra

4. **FILE LABELS**

Each message in our mailboxes has the following structure: Date, From, To, and Subject.

The Date message is the actual date the message was sent, along with the time. You will most likely notice that I send you messages at rather strange times.

The From message will include the user id (RFORD, ENGLISH 01, ENGLISH02) or a particular name (ROBERT, MARK, MARSHA, etc.).

I will name each lesson WEEK1, WEEK2, WEEK3, etc. You will most likely recognize a lesson in your mail because the "To" message will not include your actual name. There will be no "Subject" message.

I will label my responses to your messages as "responses." You will most likely recognize a response in your mail because the "To" message will
include your actual name. The "Subject" message will most likely include a message such as "my response," "messages," "hello from Robert," etc.

When you send me a file, please label it in the "subject" message following this structure:

ESSAYS

"NOTES, Essay 1" (RD=ROUGH DRAFT)
"RD, Essay 1" (RD=ROUGH DRAFT)
"FD, Essay 1" (FD=FINAL DRAFT)
"my response" (response to someone else’s essay)

HOMEWORK

"READING, WK 2" (for analysis of an essay in the text, assigned in week 2)
"PRACTICE, WK 2" (for an assignment made in week 2)

5. MODEM MEETINGS ON CAMPUS

You will need to come to campus several times a semester--for essay exams, one or more review sessions, and for the final examination. For the essay exams and the final examination, you will have a choice of times and campuses--Central, Stafford, and Westchester. These dates have actually already been set, but over the Christmas holidays, I reviewed the course based on suggestions from last semester's students. I will announce our dates soon. (I'm thinking of using some of the on-campus meetings in a different way than I did last time.)

6. GRADING ESSAYS

I will use the HCCS Grading Profile to grade essays. When I grade an essay, I will list the scores for each of the categories; you can refer to the hard copy of the profile contained in the packet. This profile is valuable for several reasons: it lets you know the precise reason for my decisions, it lets you know where you stand in the course, it suggests areas for improvement, and, if you disagree with me, it tells you on what I based the grade and thereby tells you what you must refute. A version of this profile is used in English 1302; for this reason, I will refer to the paper copy: you need to be familiar with it for that course.

7. LATE ESSAYS

Essays and the preliminary assignments leading up to them (creating assignments, rough drafts, peer readings) are due by the dates specified in the assignments. Failure to meet assignments will result in two actions: (1) a reduction of the final grade of an essay (one day past the deadline, minus ten points; one week past the deadline, minus twenty points) or (2) my asking you to withdraw from the course (only in extreme cases, of course). You will receive credit for all late essays turned in, though.

8. OTHER LATE ASSIGNMENTS

You will not receive credit for reading assignments, journal assignments and other assignments turned in late. This course should work like a well-oiled machine. Late work destroys the system.
Well, now you know enough about the course to get started. Here is your assignment for next week and some information about the rest of the semester.

**ASSIGNMENT TO PREPARE FOR WEEK 2:**
Sunday, January 27-Saturday, February 2
DUE: Sunday, January 27

Read *The Modern Writer's Handbook*, pp. 1-50 (the writing process) (You do not to complete any of the exercises in the text.)
Read *The Riverside Reader*, pp. 1-17 (introduction). Especially notice the sample analysis of "Beauty."

Create two files

1. Write your first journal entry following the instructions in *The Modern Writer's Handbook*.
   This time, describe the place you will do the work for this course: your desk, its environment, its surroundings. Tell about what makes the place special (and please understand that I assume that any place is special). Write at least 100 words.
   Send the file to me (RFORD) and to everyone else, to let them get an idea of who you are (send the file to ENGLISH).

2. After you have read the essay "Beauty" and have noticed the analysis, write a short response to the following question:
   Do you agree or disagree with Susan Sontag's point of view in this essay? Why or why not? To what extent do you agree or disagree? Give examples and explain why you feel as you do.
   Send the file to me (RFORD). Label it as "PRACTICE, WK1."