CHAPTER FOUR

The Digital Subject and Cultural Theory

I argue for profound changes in the discourse of critical theory, and of academia in general, as a consequence of the digitization of writing. For, as Sandy Stone (1995) writes, "We no longer live in a world in which information conserves itself primarily in textual objects called books... but inescapably, at the threshold of a new and unsettling age [in which we must] reimagine the scholarly enterprise" (177–78). If what Stone argues is convincing, we must invent the Humanities in relation to digital texts. "Reimagining the scholarly enterprise" does not necessarily entail an improvement. Indeed David Noble envisions digital writing in academia as a decline into capitalist relations. Professors are now, he thinks, becoming automated just as workers have been since the introduction of Taylorism in the earlier part of the past century. With digital writing, the academy, Noble contends, becomes a "diploma mill," subject to the exploitative logic of capital. Distance learning is a euphemism, in his eyes, for speedup. Posting syllabi on home pages on the World Wide Web is theft of labor (Noble 1998; Weiss 1998). And e-mail enables students to intrude at all hours of the day and night upon the lives of teachers, rendering the workday equivalent to the twenty-four-hour day. The Internet also facilitates plagiarism, though Noble does not mention this complaint, by making term papers easily obtainable (Zack 1998).

Since the end of the Cold War public universities have increasingly turned to market principles. Administrators, strapped for funds, eagerly anticipate the economies of on-line courses, often paying little regard to its harmful effects. In noting these trends and connecting them with

digital writing, Noble certainly makes valid arguments. But Noble does not acknowledge any benefits to digital technology. Access of disabled and rural people to higher education through distance learning, extended exchange of ideas among professors through sharing syllabi on the Web, and greater student contact with professors through e-mail are somehow nothing but capitalist incursions. I wonder who the capitalist is in Noble's scenario? Perhaps he, the professor, is the entrepreneur hoarding his great ideas in paper-based syllabi, maintaining his superior social status vis-à-vis students by restricting sharply his availability to them, delimiting his intellectual property to face-to-face classrooms that many cannot afford or access. The Marxist professor needs to remember that his master's lesson is not that capitalist technology is evil but that capitalist relations restrict its optimal deployment.

I hope in this essay to clarify some of the issues at stake in a technological change from print to digital texts. But I hope to do so without the defensive anxiety of David Noble and equally without the uncritical enthusiasm of prophets of progress who greet each new communication technology, from printing and photography to the telegraph, telephone, radio, film, and television, with a certainty of humanity's imminent perfection, global unification, and eternal peace.[1] And yet one cannot deny that the potential for change enabled by digital writing is vast. The point is not to predict utopia or dystopia but to understand what is happening and attempt to shape the outcome in the best way we can.

My attempt to clarify the issue of digital writing confronts a special difficulty because I deploy a predigital form of presentation: an oral, face-to-face format (in spoken version) and print. Although this essay was written on a computer, with the keyboard input mediated by binary code before becoming a graphic, alphabetic representation as pixels on a screen, then a series of ink marks on paper, the machine product has been appropriated by analogue apparatuses of authorship.[2] If you were reading this essay using a browser on your computer to access an Internet site where the work exists, let us say, in hypertext format, my arguments might be more convincing and my illustrations might hit home with greater effect. Instead I am like a reporter returning home from a foreign culture to relate exotic discoveries, except the foreign culture, digital authorship, is right here, to the extent that cyberspace is anywhere. I am not, then, a foreign correspondent but a local informant,

and perhaps you the reader, if you have not already shared my experience, are becoming other, becoming distant, like all analogue authors, within your own discursive home.

Insisting on the Medium

The 1996 Geneva conference of the World Intellectual Property Organization (created in 1967) attempted to reform copyright law to reflect computer communications technologies (Samuelson 1997, 61 ff.). The problem for the group was daunting: to adjust laws originally formulated during the print age of the seventeenth century to the conditions of the digital age. How could the medium of the Internet be reconciled with the media of print and broadcast? Copyright law presumes what has become no longer necessarily true: that the reproduction of information requires costly material casings (books, audio records or tapes, celluloid films), that the dissemination of information entails expensive construction of channels and apparatuses of transmission, and that the audience of information is unable to alter it in the form in which it is received. In Geneva delegates contrived to ignore above all these momentous changes in technological form (Browning 1997, 185). This is the problem I want to address. With the digitization of print, film, radio, and television broadcasts and their insertion into a global network, the media in which intellectual property appears alters the message of its legal integument. Put otherwise, the commodity form of cultural objects and the authorial coherence of individual subjects are shaken by digitization.

A great deal is at stake in the current change of the media of cultural objects, with those most benefiting from the existing arrangements also most resistant to the change and generally least able to discern the significance of what is happening. In current debates, the figure of the author becomes one such rallying point for much ideological jockeying. The television industry, for example, cannot do without the author because without the author there is no copyright protection, a must for broadcasting. Even though, properly speaking, there is no author of television shows, the author stands behind the tube's success (Streeter 1996). In the guise of protecting authors, media moguls—those who have most exploited authors—raise the banner of copyright protection against what they see as the anarchic exchange of bytes on the Internet. A "Copyright Assembly," an extraordinary meeting of leaders of media industry, on

February 17, 2000, witnessed Jack Valenti, spokesman for Hollywood, defending "creative works" against "illegitimate intruders on the Internet who steal copyrighted works" (Snider 2000). Such self-righteous posturing poorly conceals the helplessness of the media industry in the face of the sharing of cultural objects on the Net. The meeting ended with no specific legislative proposals to tame the Internet, a sure sign that the great wealth of the cultural industry is not enough to alter the basic architecture of cyberspace.

If we set aside the tendentious positions of those who wish only to extend existing copyright provisions to include new media such as the Internet, we may then ask, What might actually be the fate of authorship when technology shifts from print to the Internet? Is the figure of the author in fact a good point of defense against alarming technical innovations? Is cyberspace an occasion of strengthening or of restructuring or of abandoning authorship?

This chapter brings together an analysis of the technical conditions of authorship in print and in cyberspace with the theoretical proposals for understanding the question of the construction of the author. In most cases the discussion of these two related issues fails adequately to connect them: either one is knowledgeable about technology or one is adept in social and cultural theory. Those who understand the technology are frequently hampered by an unexamined instrumentalist framework, while theorists who address questions of the media often have limited grasps of their technical characteristics. By bridging the gap between technology and culture I hope to illuminate the relations between them.

Benjamin's Legacy

An important precursor in the effort to comprehend the relation of authors to machines is Walter Benjamin, whose celebrated essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" ([1935] 1969) is a model of technocultural analysis. Benjamin theorized image and sound media (photography and film) in relation to their effects on audiences and authors. He was especially concerned with the extent to which film might construct critical audiences and thereby renew the project of emancipation, reinvigorate struggles against structures of domination by popular forces. He drew attention to the importance of the spatial dissemination of film, its multiple distribution for wide access to the

scenes of viewing (collective, darkened spaces with large, projected images); to the mediation of the camera in the production of the art object and to the audience subjected to its point of view, its scopic regimen; to the mediation of film itself displacing actors from the stage by their recorded image; and to the technique of montage, the stitching together of photographs through an editing process and passing them by a projector so as to create a sense of what we now call real-time motion.

Benjamin's analysis ran counter to the prevailing view that media such as film and radio extended the grip of domination over the masses, distracting them from interior contemplation with identical monologues of image and sound. He criticized the underlying basis of this view by unveiling an aspect of domination in the author figure from earlier high-cultural forms, especially painting. In Western culture the author enjoyed a position of command in part by dint of the technical character of the work. As long as the work could not easily be reproduced, whether as manuscript, painting, or sculpture, it was adorned with an aura. The reader or viewer was put in a position of subordination by the placement of work in a museum or even by the mere existence of a manuscript in a library. The viewer traveled to the work and confronted it in its immobility in an act of contemplative respect. With mechanical reproduction, especially in film, where there exists no original, properly speaking, the aura surrounding the work vanishes, the control of the meaning of the work by the author diminishes, and new, reversible relations become possible between the audience and the author.

As suggestive as Benjamin's work has been, it contains a number of limitations; most noteworthy for my purpose is its focus on the image, whereas I wish to examine writing. Furthermore, he wrote before the birth of computer technology with its transformation of writing and more recently of film. Yet the promising perspective of Benjamin's work deserves attention: he was able to write about media without undue suspicion of popular culture, without technophobia, and at the same time with a sense of the mobility and constructedness of basic cultural forms such as author and audience, detaching these from a foundationalist view that ensconced them within the figure of the Cartesian subject. It is this enormously suggestive spirit of Benjamin's essay that I shall try to carry over into a discussion of writing media.

Above all, Benjamin opened a critique of the function and status of the author before mechanical reproduction, a critique that drew attention to the high authority enjoyed by authors when their names were attached to originals. This aura is a kind of analogue extension of the person of the author into the work. The spirit or aura of the author subsides in the work. The work derives its interest from its inscription of an analogue of the author's creative genius. That analogue is now in question. For those of us in universities and colleges, books are part of our second nature. With the onset of computer writing, linked to networks, we must rethink this basic component of our practice as teachers and researchers and begin to analyze the mediation of the book, what it enables and what it constrains.

Beyond the Author Function

The cultural figure of the modern author begins in the eighteenth century, emerging in a confluence of print technology, a book market, a legal status, and an ideology of individual as creator. Mark Rose (1993) has shown how the inception of the modern author required the preexistence of these elements as well as their convergence into a particular social form (142).[3] The legally defined rights of the author required a print technology that could reproduce large quantities of texts, a market system that could determine printed products as objects for sale, and distribution institutions that could make identical copies available in many places, a discursive regime in which individuals were understood as agents capable of inventing new things and as proprietors with interests in accumulating capital. The interlocking of each and every one of these elements alone affords authorship both cultural recognition and social place. Authorship also required, as I shall argue below, a technology of the analogue: a conviction that what was printed in the book was a direct representation of an author's intention, be it in the form of idea, style, or rhetoric; in short, that the book was an analogue reproduction of an original, authentic author.

Before turning to the possible fates of the author in a digital age, I shall explore the characteristics of what I call the analogue author by briefly reviewing Foucault's position. Foucault has presented the most complex and convincing conceptual articulation of the modern author. What is remarkable in his analysis is not only its rigor and comprehensiveness but also its anticipation of digital authorship. To grasp the full extent of the question of the author, I contend that Foucault's insights are essential.

In his influential and well-known essay "What Is an Author?" ([1969] 1984), Foucault delimits four perspectives on the modern author:

1. The humanist author who governs the meaning of the text. This author expresses, intends, and creates all the meanings that may be read in the text.
2. The structuralist rejection of the humanist author, most notably in Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author." In this view, the meaning of the text has no connection with the author. It is a pure synchronic, semiotic object contained within the external materiality of the printed page. Foucault is here not interested in the shift Barthes enacts in the essay to the position of the reader.
3. A poststructuralist move in which Foucault rejects the structuralist annihilation of the author, returning to recognize the importance of the author but not as the humanist understood him or her. Foucault uses the term "the author function" as the discursive figure and institutional practice of modern society that inscribes the author as a source of meaning. Now the critic can acknowledge the importance of the figure of the author in modern society, but instead of translating his recognition into affirmation, legitimation, and celebration, can turn it rather into an analysis of the construction of the figure. This "genealogy" of the author, as Foucault calls it, would also serve as a basis for its critique.
4. The last perspective on the author Foucault offers is a most uncharacteristic one for him.[4] Foucault sets forth an alternative, future, utopian nonauthor whose position, presciently, bears remarkable resemblance to the position of authors in cyberspace, or what I call digital authors. I shall examine this discursive move in more detail.

Foucault's effort to delineate a post-author-function future reproduces a theoretical problem he did much to counter in the writings of others and in his own projects. As part of his critique of the modern subject, Foucault opposed as a conservative gesture the penchant of "the traditional intellectual" to compose metanarratives that totalized the historical field. In this discursive regime, the theorist produced a discursive closure either by legitimizing the present as the fulfillment of human essence or by predicting a future ("the tenth epoch" in Condorcet, communism in Marx, "the transvaluation of all values" in Nietzsche) that served the same purpose. It is most surprising, then, to find Foucault making a similar gesture, as when one reads the following in "What Is an Author?": "I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment

when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced" (1984a, 119). The passage is maddeningly brief, not indicating which processes are changing or why they will lead to the disappearance of the author function. Yet even in this prescriptive moment of his text, Foucault is careful to indicate that the inconveniences of authorship will be replaced by new constraints. In addition, one cannot, according to him, speculate about the new regime, by time traveling into the future, but must patiently await its appearance to "experience" it before attempting to name and to outline these impediments to freedom. With these caveats, Foucault offers his "tenth epoch" beyond the author function.

Foucault's future eviscerates the author's presence from the text, shifting interpretive focus on the relation of the reader to a discourse understood in its exteriority, without resort to a founding creator, without reference to the patriarchal insemination of text with meaning. His picture of writing beyond the author function would seem to contravene both Benjaminian aura and culture industry celebrity. Here in his own words is the Foucauldian heterotopia:

> All discourses . . . would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking? (119–20)

If one can imagine the future according to Foucault, where so little interest rests with the author's relation to the text, the question of the transition, the hoary Marxist conundrum, raises its head. How would the author function disappear, especially considering that it has adapted itself so well to the change from print to broadcast media? What social

process would work to strip the author from his or her reign over discourse? What conceivable transformation would undo the cultural operations through which the reader, listener, or viewer thinks of little else than "who is speaking"?

Foucault envisioned his post-author-function culture as a heterotopia, as a different sort of space that functions as a critique of established spatial forms. Heterotopias, in his words, "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (1986, 24). How then would some new space be established that would serve this function of undoing the author? How would a discourse arise in a space that uncoupled the links between author and text, author and book, author and reader, author and press, author and government that had been so firmly stitched together in the course of the formation of modern society?

I contend that the practice of digital writing, linked to electronic networks, may be the mediation Foucault anticipated but did not recognize.[5] Digital writing in many of its forms separates the author from the text, as does print, but also mobilizes the text so that the reader transforms it, not simply in his or her mind or in his or her marginalia, but in the text itself so that it may be redistributed as another text. Digital writing may function to extract the author from the text, to remove from its obvious meaning his or her intentions, style, concepts, rhetoric, and mind—in short, to disrupt the analogue circuit through which the author makes the text his or her own, through which the mechanisms of property solidify a link between creator and object, a theological link that remains in its form even if its content changes from the age of God to the age of Man. Digital writing may produce the indifference to the question "Who speaks?" that Foucault dreamed of and may bring to the fore in its place preoccupations with links, associations, and dispersions of meaning throughout the Web of discourse. And this is so not simply for alphabetic text but for sounds and images, as well. The issue rests with the mediation, with the change from analogue to digital techniques.

Foucault's insistence on a "murmur of indifference" to the question "Who speaks?" echoes his critique of Cartesian-Hegelian individualism but also raises difficulties for his genealogical method. He produces in

his writing, within the domains of the book and the author function, an alternative cultural position. Rather than simply delineating the genealogy of the author function and leaving to his readers the task of conceiving and building an other to it, he breaches the limit of theory, expanding its function to trace a direction for political action. Since Foucault did not, and could not, in the 1970s, recognize networked authorship as his future beyond the author function, one may object that he took on too much.[6] To some extent the direction he indicates is highly suggestive. Without the referent of the practice of digital writing in the world, however, his proposal flirts with inflating again the author function, his own, rendering his text an empty proponent of a new culture. Only by reference to the context of networked computing can the indifference to the question "Who speaks?" make a link with a line of practice in a contingent domain of relations of forces. Thereby the author function, in this case my own, is recognized but at the same time reduced and available for a critique.[7]

I introduce, then, the term *analogue author* in place of Foucault's *author function* and *digital author* in place of Foucault's *postauthor utopia.* The terms *analogue* and *digital* are taken from the world of technology and their use here suggests the centrality of the machinic mediation. So much I hope is already clear. But I do not mean the terms in an apodictic, transcendental sense by which certain media would necessarily produce certain figures of authorship. I am not making a philosophical argument but a historical one: that the figure of the author in the modern period is bound to print technology, while in the more recent, perhaps postmodern, perhaps future, computer-mediated, even networked form of writing produces, amid the contingent world of events, a digital author. The chief difference between the two, I contend, is the degree and shape of alterity in the relation of author to writing. Analogue authors configure a strong bond between the text and the self of the writer, a narcissistic, mirroring relation as the text is fundamentally an expression of the author—his or her style, mind, or feelings. The digital author connotes a greater alterity between the text and the author, due in part to the digital nature of the writing. I claim that digital writing is both a technological inscription of the author and a term to designate a new historical constellation of authorship, one that is emergent, but seemingly more and more predominant. So I borrow

from the world of technology the terms *analogue* and *digital,* but I also reconfigure them to designate degrees of otherness in the relation of authors to texts.

Gendered Authors

The change from analogue to digital author systems disrupts the existing arrays of powers that supported and benefited from it. Necessarily this includes the ruling subject positions—from those who directly controlled analogue media (Hollywood tycoons, transnational corporations, and in rare cases canonical authors and artists) to the more generally established powers (men, Western Europeans, older adults). The disturbance of the author function shakes up positions of enunciation and subject formations generally. It correlates with those political movements that, from quite other perspectives, have also challenged the status quo. It may come as a surprise, then, to find some of these social and cultural critics not at all pleased with the utopia envisioned by Foucault; instead they see in it a threat to their perceived opportunities for justice. Before turning to examine the question of digital mediation, I shall pause to consider these objections.

The protest against "the death of the subject" is made eloquently by Nancy Hartsock (1990b):

> Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at this moment in history... that doubt arises in the academy about the nature of the "subject," about the possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical "progress." Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes "problematic"? (206)

Hartsock elsewhere (1990a) even accuses Foucault of "getting rid of subjectivity or notions of the subject" (170), which is the opposite of his effort at a critique of the subject. Foucault does not wish somehow to erase the subject but to make the construction of the subject the center of a historical problematic.

Hartsock's complaint that theories of the death of the author disempower dominated groups was echoed again and again as a defense against the perception of depoliticization in works like Foucault's "What Is an Author?"[8] Here, for instance, is Nancy Miller (1982), who adds to the motif a particular gender allusion: "Only those who have it can play with

not having it" (53). And again Anne McClintock (1995) echoes the concern: "As colonized countries wrestled their way into independence after World War II; and as women and men of color entered the universities in significant numbers, insisting on defining an alternative to the enshrined white male subjectivity; at just that moment, the requiem was rung on the subject. At the very moment that disenfranchised voices forcibly clamored for the privilege of defining their own identity and authority, 'the author' was declared dead" (304). Indeed the argument that the Foucauldian critique of the subject disempowers dominated groups might be, in Foucault's terms, the enunciative gesture that defines a certain form of feminist discourse.

Hartsock and McClintock complain about the timing of the critique of the subject. If it had happened at some other time, perhaps it would be permitted or even applauded. And there is some truth to this feminist critique of Foucault: he does not put into question gender (Diamond and Quinby 1988) or indeed race (Stoler 1995). Finally he does not contextualize his position in relation to the women's movement, decolonization, and antiracist movements more generally. But there is a context to his thought and it is pertinent to understanding his critique of the subject. Foucault wrote after the collapse of working-class movements in Western Europe, and his work reflects this historical juncture. The critique of the subject represents a repositioning of theory toward the question of the culture of modernity. It is an effort to explore its historical development and its remarkable success. In the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Foucault and others recognized the need to get behind the continued presentation, in critical theory, of the resisting agent and the Cartesian ego so that the cultural foundations of the West might be historicized and put into question. It is regrettable that thinkers such as Hartsock and McClintock, not finding the context of Foucault's thought identical with their own, chose not to explore his context and seek ways to deploy elements of his position that might enhance their own, but instead find in him only a challenge to their move, which actually goes back to and repeats the problems of identity that he had already opened to critique.

Some critics countered this defense of the subject by arguing that subordinated subject positions ought not to strive to occupy the place and take on the subject position of the ruling group. Pointing to the danger of such a move, Luce Irigaray and other feminists contend that "any theory

of the subject will always have been appropriated by the masculine" (Irigaray 1985, 133). But Foucault makes it clear that in the first instance he neither defends the subject nor rejects the subject. He wishes rather to develop a method of analysis that elucidates how the subject is constructed so that we become capable of proposing new forms of the self.

I do not wish to engage at length this debate over the gendered character of Foucault's work at the general level of its implications for the critique of the subject but in particular to focus on the question of the effects of digitization on the construction of the author/subject. The shift from analogue to digital authorship is not primarily an effect of theory but a change in the material practices of writing. I do not denounce the author/subject in a theoretical gesture but note its reconfiguration in social space. The theoretical problem posed by digital authorship is the question of how to comprehend these changes so that the most beneficial political outcomes are recognized and seized.

One promising theoretical direction is offered by Judith Butler (1995), who directly confronts the charge raised by Hartsock. Butler writes, "There is the refrain that, just now, when women are beginning to assume the place of subjects, postmodern positions come along to announce that the subject is dead" (48). Butler goes on to argue that speech acts in modern society produced the sovereign agent as a false denial of the way language structures agency in the first place. Butler's important argument is worth citing at length:

> My presumption is that speech is always in some ways out of our control. . . . Untethering the speech act from the sovereign subject founds an alternative notion of agency and, ultimately, of responsibility, one that more fully acknowledges the way in which the subject is constituted in language, how what it creates is also what it derives from elsewhere. Whereas some critics mistake the critique of sovereignty for the demolition of agency, I propose that agency begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who acts (who is not the same as the sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset. (1997, 15–16)[9]

Language here is a material, structuring constraint on identity. A notion of agency that configures the subject as outside of language may offer certain political solace, but it occludes this constraining factor.[10] When the configuration of language undergoes fundamental change, as in the

case of digitization, the failure to recognize the effects of its materiality becomes especially problematic.

Foucault himself had responded to similar complaints about his earlier but similar proclamation of "the death of man" in *The Order of Things* (1966). Lucien Goldmann, a noted Western Marxist theorist, objected to the antihumanism of Foucault's assertion. Foucault's important response makes precise the stakes of the question:

> The death of man is a theme that allows light to be shed on the way the concept of man has functioned in knowledge. It is not a matter of affirming that man is dead; it is a matter of seeing, based on the theme—which is not of my invention [and] has been repeated incessantly since the late nineteenth century—that man is dead (or that he is about to disappear, or that he will be replaced by the superman), in what manner and according to what rules the concept of man has been formed and has functioned. I have done the same thing with the notion of the author. Let us hold back our tears. (1983, 28–29)

Without tears, but also, one might add, without Foucault's ironic smile, we must comprehend the shift in subject construction attendant to the emergence of digital authorship.

The issue at stake in digitization of authorship may now be sharply posed: how is the subject reconfigured in this process? Butler's theory of the performative is useful in exploring the question. Speech acts not only represent things but do things. One thing they do is constitute the subject. But speech acts accomplish this ambiguously, partially, never with certainty, Butler contends (1997, 125). She argues for an analysis of the incompleteness of the performative in constituting the subject, not, as Derrida does, in relation to the formal characteristics of the trace (150) but in the fully social context of enunciation. Speech acts *perform in the world,* Butler reminds us, and therein lies political hope: "The possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative" (161). And performatives are so imbricated in the social in part because they are "never fully separable from bodily force" (141). The body is fundamental, to Butler, in the performative speech act as both constituting and constituted. The role of body, she insists further, is at play in writing as well, although she allows for some difference in this regard.

To summarize then: In speech and writing, performatives incompletely

but effectively constitute subjects in the world and on the body. Yet if Butler insists on the social and political nature of the process, she does not indicate how different body-text relations, in speech, in handwriting, in print, on the radio, in film, on television, and in cyberspace, each configure the performative process differently and produce, incompletely to be sure, different incarnations of the subject. In one analysis, the video of the Rodney King beating by police, Butler (1993) relates her theory of performativity to the medium of video. She points out the dangers in forgetting the medium and presuming that vision is apolitical: "To claim that King's victimization is *manifestly* true is to assume that one is presenting the case to a set of subjects who *know how to see*" (17). She objects to the use by the defense attorneys of the technique of freeze frame, which rips gestures from their "temporal place in the visual narrative" and eliminates the sound track (20). But these examples of Butler's sensitivity to the medium of the performative do not go far enough. Instead of a more extensive examination of the role of the medium in speech acts, she contextualizes them. She points out that "the field of the visible is racially contested terrain" so "that there is no simple recourse to the visible" (17). The deconstruction of the visible in this manner is, of course, necessary. Yet Butler deploys it against naïveté about the medium ("to think that the video 'speaks for itself' is, of course, for many of us, obviously true"; 17) when the medium itself requires sustained analysis in addition to the social context.

Sandy Stone (1995) makes the argument for the importance of the media and the body in performativity: "Most Western theories of the self, even feminist theories, stop just short of tinkering with the framework upon which the idea of gender itself is based—the framework of the individual's self-awareness in relation to a physical body" (85). As soon as we consider the relationship between bodies and selves, she continues, we must take into account communications technologies as these mediate social groups and speech acts (88). And in a further clarification Katherine Hayles (1999) writes, "Whereas in performative utterances *saying is doing* because the action performed is symbolic in nature and does not require physical action in the world, at the basic level of computation, *doing is saying* because physical actions also have a symbolic dimension that corresponds directly with computation" (275). How then does digital authorship differ from analogue authorship in the performative process of interpellation?

Let us take the example of on-line, synchronous communications in electronic communities where participation requires that one fashion one's own identity and gender. In these cases individuals type messages on computers at different locations, watching their own words and those of others on the screen as they are typed. Each individual is a character, and participation is successful to the extent that the character is believable by others. This is disembodied communication just like letters and print, where the enunciation is separate from the body of the sender. But the communication in on-line communities is also like speech in that it is simultaneous. The important question is the way identity is performed in these contexts. Participants are interpellated by each other, suturing identity in performatives, but the construction of the subject occurs entirely on the screen, determined entirely by the words entered on the keyboard. Participants are authors of themselves as characters, not simply by acts of consciousness, but by the interactions that take place on the screen. In these situations, the body, mediated by the interface of computers and the communications network, enters a new relation with the subject, a dissociated yet actual relation that opens identity to new degrees of flexible, unstable determination. The body no longer constrains the performativity of speech acts to the extent that it does in face-to-face relations. These digital authors enact an unprecedented type of performative self-constitution in which the process of interpellation becomes an explicit question in the communication. Instead of the policeman-teacher-parent-boss hailing the individual in a manner that conceals the performative nature of the communication, in on-line communities one invents oneself and one knows that others also invent themselves, while each interpellates the others through those inventions. Unlike earlier forms of mediated communication, digital authorship is about the performance of self-constitution.

In *The Domain-Matrix* Sue Ellen Case (1996) wrestles with the implications for politics of on-line communities, with their screen genders and volatile identities. She first attempts to privilege sexual orientation politics as a point of resistance to the virtual. She writes:

> Lesbian and gay politics, when theorized, raise the issue of the relation of the virtual to the flesh—the relation of desire to social relations.... As the book is challenged by the hypertext, writing by the transmission of digitized images, print culture, in its hermetic, colorless, linear form is intersected by the morphing, multi-spaced environments of new

> technologies, money is abstracted through virtual banking procedures, and fleshly social relations transmit through MUDs, MOOs, bulletin boards, and email courtships, the representation of lesbian and gay relations, their political work, is offering up some of the critical strategies necessary to comprehend the new form of exchange. (64)

Case is determined to come to terms with the possibilities offered up for politics by cyberspace, to connect a lesbian agenda with globalized communications technologies. At one point she argues that "lesbian" is not an identity but a space, a collective space in which struggle is performed, a struggle against "the homogenizing effects of Integrated World Capitalism and tele-presences that register commodification and transcendence" (187). "Lesbian" politics would then attempt to confront the enemy on its newest electronic terrain and claim a space for revolt within it. Yet by the conclusion of the work, Case, in moving passages, confesses that the writing of *The Domain-Matrix* brought her to question the basis of her own political views: "I had a firmer notion of how the body and performance related to the screen and performativity when I began to write than when I finished. As I distributed issues around gender, sexuality, and ethnicity within the field, my critical control of their signification seemed to weaken. The field overcame its subdivisions, and I began to feel as if some form of globalism were overcoming my critique of it" (235). In this brutally honest passage, the radicality of the move to the networked computer screen is registered. The stability of earlier forms of critical agency waver when the body is hooked up, through the keyboard, mouse, and screen, to the Internet.[11] So exigent is the practice of self-constitution in communications in cyberspace, so strongly is agency here mediated by information machines, and so utterly dispersed is the space of interaction that oppositional practices of earlier decades no longer seem able to take hold of the situation. To insist upon agency politics in this context is to bury one's face in the sand of the bygone age of Man.

Digression on the Indeterminacy of Technology

Cultural theorists might raise immediately the objection that I am flirting dangerously with technological determinism by drawing direct conclusions about discourse and practice from the introduction of new techniques. To forestall these skeptics I maintain that technologies are no more monosemic than language or action, that the impact of technologies is never the linear result of the intention of their creators or of their internal, "material," capabilities. The Internet, for example, bears not a trace of the U.S. Department of Defense's purpose in developing it: to ensure computer communications in the event of nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union falls now in the category of proper nouns designated by "formerly," and the Net seems more a threat to the Department of Defense than an instrument of its design. In my own experience with writing technologies, the same contingencies are evident. In junior high school in the mid-1950s in New York City I was required to take a series of courses introducing me to the practical arts. I took cooking, sewing, carpentry, and typewriting. The curricular intent was to train me in manual skills in the event that a middle-class occupation was not in my future. This training was also highly gendered, since women of my generation with a college degree were often hired in professional fields such as publishing with the reduced status of typists. Even with my academic career these basic skills—or at least some of them—have proven useful. In particular, typewriting, considered at the time a menial practice of secretaries, proved invaluable as this technology changed its social status, becoming acceptable first for academics, then, with the introduction of computing in business, even essential for managers and executives. The technology of the keyboard changed within my lifetime from a machine used by low-level clerks to an essential tool of scientists and leaders of industry. With the use of computers in communication, it mutated further into an instrument for sending messages, "chatting" in electronic meeting places, and such. It has also become the source of crippling diseases like carpal tunnel syndrome. This brief exploration of one technology suffices to indicate the complexity of the relation of machines to humans. And we must now move on to consider the question of digital writing.