

**TALK, TYPE, AND TEXT:
CONVERSATION
ON THE
INTERNET**

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ABSTRACT

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On the eve of Y2K, the extent that computers are interwoven with our lives is painfully obvious, yet only relatively recently has the academic eye taken interest in the events going on on-line. Despite this attention, there still remain new frontiers that have not been explored on the Internet. The phenomenon of real-time interaction is the best example of these. Some commentaries have treated the social aspects of MUDs, a special subspecies of real-time interaction, but more pure textual conversations have not been examined closely.

This paper seeks to remedy this. I will, by necessity, place my investigations into the frame of the Internet at large, and discuss websites, e-mail and newsgroups. I will focus, however, on data from real-time interactions which use text as their only channel of communication.

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PREFACE

That's a partiality to remain within the functional infinite. That's a limit; you are the world. "Speaking Machine", interview, Fall 1998

Being the world, creating it—is this a limit? Wanting to or not, how could one not remain within the infinite? This quotation becomes clear in the context of discourse on the Internet—there is a tension among the interplay of new possibilities, limits new and old, and presuming that everything is possible. This wreaks havoc on any broad interpretation of the discourse that is happening on-line: it is perceived, used, and created in such a myriad of different frames that the apparently infinite number becomes very limiting. While doing the research for this thesis, I often compared myself to a kid in a candy store, with money to buy only a few pieces, and the decision was dreadful. In the end, with some guidance from "Speaking Machine" among others, I chose to touch upon most of what currently comprises discourse on the Internet, but to focus upon the most fascinating area—interactive chat, in real-time. These are essentially large conversations among many people carried out purely by typing. I will take an essentially linguistic approach, employing various methods of discourse analysis to try and dissect what is at the heart of Internet discourse. I will use examples from the World Wide Web, e-mail, 'bulletin boards' or newsgroups, as well as the real-time chat.

Real-time chat, as seen on IRC (Internet Relay Chat) will be the focus of the paper. After making connections from these new methods of interaction to more traditional methods of treating discourse, I will turn to what is left over: what types of discourse do not connect well to conventional ideas, how these discourse types have developed, and what they are doing now.

Before continuing, I must point out that one of these new discourse events, passing, produces many unpredictable interactions. Passing is using the discourse style of another to confound age or gender and fit in with a group that otherwise one would be expelled from. Sometimes, however, someone else mistakes a person on-line for something they neither are nor are trying to be. The quote at the beginning, by "Speaking Machine," is truly by a speaking machine—it was generated by my personal computer running a program called "Babble", from various algorithms and previous input by myself (which never involved those words in that order, nor even near necessarily each other).

Welcome to the world of Internet discourse.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1996, I walked into a room of people whom I had known for years. We had traded puns, made toasts, and told some great tall tales. I didn't recognize a single one of their faces.

I was at my first 'RealSpace', a gathering of friends who had met on-line, but not necessarily face to face. In our conversations, we called each other by our on-line nicknames and often referred to events that had transpired solely inside of computers. Despite the group's unanimous familiarity with the on-line 'rules' of interaction, and desire to recreate them in this real-life situation, conversation flowed differently from how it would have on-line.

The purpose of this work is twofold. I will first investigate the connections and similarities between ordinary, real-life discourse and on-line discourse. I will then focus in on on-line discourse and investigate where it departs from normal discourse and traditional ideas about interaction. Naturally, I am not going to group all on-line discourse together any more than I could do the same to real life discourse. My main focus will be on the more immediate, real-time interactions on-line—the discourse that most resembles real life conversations. I will bring in and analyze other, less immediate forms of communication, such as e-mail and newsgroup dialogues, and even websites. We will see not only that each medium is predisposed towards a different style of communication, but also that strict delineations are not possible using these categories.

In addition to the difficulties of differentiating discourse styles in these interactive media, recent advances have hopelessly blurred the boundaries of even one of the originally least conversational media on the Internet, the World Wide Web. Early web pages were simply linear texts with some hyperlinks. Revolutionary though this was for data structuring, it remained in its own niche and did not spread out into other parts of the Internet. With the improvement of web software, however, it has expanded to encompass, in part, e-mail (Hotmail.com), newsgroups (Dejanews.com), real-time textual discourse, or chatting, and even live audio and video interactions. Still remaining, however, are hundreds of thousands of non-interactive sites and academic writings posted on-line that would be as at home on a printed page. Parallel to this web development, most other programs are also beginning to integrate themselves into other

parts of the Internet. Most e-mail and some newsgroup programs today can deal with basic webpages, and Internet chat programs are also becoming more compatible with interchanging graphics, sounds, and webpage addresses.

As we are dragged towards 'Y2K', the year 2000, we find ourselves in the midst of an explosion of new communication technologies which are becoming more interwoven, yet seem to be maintaining their autonomy. Within these new media, communication as we are accustomed to is dissected and reformed in unusual ways.

The Importance of Community

A question that various critics have raised is whether or not genuine conversations take place in these new media. The objections rally around the lack of physical space in which conversations traditionally take place. It is the nature of the Internet that not only is there no real space for conversation, but not even a central locus of the conversation. When two people are sitting in a room and have a conversation, we can say that it takes place in that room. However, when the same two people have a conversation over the Internet, the data of their conversation may take five different paths between them for one sentence, then five different paths for the next. It may take a roundabout route or a more direct one, even if they are geographically close. Also, one speaker may be in North America while the other is in Australia. Not only does the conversation traverse half the globe, it also spans two days from the perspective of the participants.

Tharon Howard, in *A rhetoric of electronic communities*, presents the argument that face to face, unmediated interaction may be required for the formation and maintenance of a community within which to converse. Howard's requirement is based on Taylor's theory that responsibility and contribution are the primary factors for community building. On-line, both of these factors are difficult to attain, due to the anonymity and ease of escape in on-line forums. Also supporting this view is the fact that many on-line groups that have existed for a long time have organized activities such as the "RealSpace" I began with—face to face meetings. Is this the requirement of unmediated interaction, or merely a fun activity for the participants? There certainly exist strong groups which have maintained themselves without even having such a meeting.

There is evidence that communities similar to those in real life do exist on-line. The members in these communities participate and are held responsible for their actions. In virtual settings such as MUDs or chat rooms, a misbehaving persona (see below) may be banned from future use of the area. In MUDs, experienced characters are called upon to take an active part in the construction of the virtual space. One community that is getting more attention in mainstream media exemplifies the idea of contribution. Programmers who work on Open Source Software such as Linux contribute programs or parts of programs to the group without requesting payment for them beyond the opportunity to ask the group at a later date for help in-kind. These programmers often work in collaboration to create programs of commercial quality, available for free. Kitchrin argues that in groups such as these, there does exist a fictional ‘social space’ (17) that allows for an on-line community. One can easily find a large number of support-style groups on-line, ranging from serious issues of cancer to lighter advice about pet care and brewing. These groups form strong connections. Also, especially in the more serious groups, there is a high degree of personal accountability for bad advice. The existence of such groups is a strong argument against the lack of on-line community.

Following the idea of fictional spaces, we come to yet another argument for the existence of community. We find its roots in the science-fiction work of William Gibson. In his famous novel, Neuromancer, he explores (and coins the term) cyberspace as a virtually real space that exists within computers. Drawing from this work, Marcos Novak writes about cyberspace as a combination of computer technology and the imagination:

Cyberspace is a habitat of the imagination, for the imagination. Cyberspace is the place where conscious dreaming meets subconscious dreaming, a landscape of rational magic, of mystical reason, the locus and triumph of poetry over poverty (Novak, in Benedikt, 226)

Continuing in this thread, common metaphors to use in discussion areas on-line, especially chat areas, are metaphors of rooms—chat rooms, or even specific types of rooms, as we will see later. MUDs are based on the idea that virtual spaces can be created through text. While there might not be a real, graspable location in which conversation takes place, the participants share a common approach to the media in perceiving their interaction to take place in ‘cyberspace’.

Beyond these objections, the claim that true conversation cannot take place on-line due to the lack of actual community space is best seen in the light of the sheer quantity of discourse that takes place every day on-line—in 1995, an estimated 25 billion e-mails were sent (Encarta

Encyclopedia). Naturally, this discourse is not the same as normal discourse due to the nonspatial aspect of the media, but this is not to say that it is not discourse. Rather, these differences will help us to see how normal and on-line discourse correspond, and perhaps even refine our views of what normal discourse consists of.

Background

Before continuing, some preliminary information is required—a quick history of the Internet, and, more importantly, a discussion of the fundamental technical terms this work will use. I will then be able to discuss the primary data sources and the ethics of recording them without the explicit consent of the authors.

A short History

In the late 1950s, the United States government created the Advanced Research Project Agency Network, or ARPANet, to speed up research in response to the successful Russian launch of Sputnik. By 1964, the technology had been improved by using a technique called ‘packet switching,’ which created a network with no center. Even if a large part of the network were destroyed, the rest of the network could function without problems. This technology has proven itself to be true to its design, and forms the heart of today’s Internet. By the end of the 1960s, ARPANet systems had at least two paths between each system, and four main computers. In 1972, dial-up access, a standard of today, was available to a select few. In 1983, TCP/IP, another important step towards the Internet which allows computers of varying speeds to trade data, was adopted as the standard across ARPANet. Between 1983 and 1990, the Internet as we know it today took shape. The National Science Foundation built a network to connect many more universities. In 1990, the remaining systems of ARPANet were decommissioned, and the Internet was all that remained.

Software, such as e-mail evolved parallelly. E-mail itself was available since the mid-1960s for the connected elite, and was immediately popular. It was not until the late 1970s that USENet, today’s newsgroups, came into being. Privately owned Bulletin Board Services (BBSes), also became popular in this time. A BBS is a computer with a few modems and phone lines attached that other privately-owned computers can dial into.

In 1989, Timothy Berners-Lee developed a new method for the interchange of data at the Swiss CERN laboratories. This method evolved into the World Wide Web, or WWW. It was not until 1992 that the WWW began to attract the attention of the public.

The main source of data in this paper, Internet Relay Chat, is approximately the same age as the web, originally designed in Finland in 1988. The two largest IRC networks boast a population of 30,000-50,000 users at any given time. As the IRC media is new to many, I will here take an excerpt from an interaction and explain it:

```
[22:58] * Pixld- curls up in a ball on carol's lap
[22:58] * Carolin smiles "thank you love"
[22:58] * Carolin laughs
[22:58] <Gisele> GJ: I'll drink to that.
[22:58] <Shark> :)
[22:58] <nutty> kat's tongue is FUN!!!!
[22:58] <GriffJon> damn, it's crowded in here!
[22:59] <Midg> Doc: how long til the youngest graduates high school?>
[22:59] <Doc> HH: Not you, silly.
[22:59] * Carolin gently skritchies Pixel behind his ears
[22:59] <Doc> Midg: Four and a half years.
[22:59] <Doc> Not that I'm counting.
[22:59] <bun> Mike, fortune
[22:59] * Callahan gives bun a fortune cookie, which when opened reads...
"Worry casts a huge shadow on a small problem."
[22:59] * Stormy looks at nutty. "Have we met?"
[22:59] * Pixld- purrs warmly at his love, and snuggles closer
[22:59] <Shark> Mike, why aren't you here more often?
[22:59] <HoseH> nutty: I wouldn't know
[22:59] <Callahan> Why? Why is the sky blue? I don't know...
[22:59] <HoseH> Doc: Silly? Watashi?
[23:00] * Cym thinks for a minute and *poof* a midnight blue velvet recliner
appears in the corner near the fireplace .... *poof* Al is now sitting in the
recliner and Cym is cuddling in his lap
#Callahans Thu Dec 17 1998
```

First to the technicalities. This is a type of transcript of the interaction, but unlike normal linguistic transcripts, it contains the full extent of the interchange. The bracketed numbers on the left are time-stamps of the 24-hour time, accurate to the minute. To the right of that is either a angle bracketed nickname or a nickname preceded by an asterix. When the nickname is surrounded by angle brackets, it is a 'spoken' utterance. The asterix indicates that the persona is performing an action. Looking on such a transcript for the first time, it probably will make little, if any, sense to the reader. When reading these, one must remember that there are many participants in many conversations, all of which are recorded linearly in one lump here. Even I, a seasoned veteran of IRC, have trouble going back to recorded transcripts. I find that reading

them backwards, from the most recent statement to the oldest, gives a better sense of the conversation. This allows you to know the result and look for the likely cause, as opposed to knowing the cause and not knowing if there will be a result, or if it will be as one would normally expect. If the above transcript still looks more like random babbling than coherent speech, do not be alarmed. If it were so easily reconcilable with our normal perceptions of conversation and interaction, this paper would be much shorter. If some of the terms I have used are confusing, again, do not worry. Those that I do not treat in the next section I will explain when I get to a more important juncture.

Terms

There is a joke that claims that PCMCIA, the name of the expansion card style for notebook computers, actually is an acronym for “People can’t memorize computer industry acronyms.” In addition to the numerous difficult acronyms used with computers and the Internet, there are also many neologisms and new denotations of existing words. An understanding of some of these terms and acronyms is essential, however, to discuss the on-line activities.

Too often, the Internet is seen as the same entity as the WWW, where in truth the WWW is but one part of the Internet. The Internet is nothing more nor less than the vast array of hundreds of thousands of interlinked computers, transferring data amongst themselves. These computers have software which support various “transfer protocols”, or languages with which to communicate. If a friend asks you to draw a map to a house, you would neither begin verbally describing the path or get out an atlas. Rather, you would find a pencil and paper and draw the map. Similarly, on-line, when one computer requests a web page from another, the computer does not send the petitioner an e-mail, rather, it sends the requested web page. The most popular protocol is naturally the World Wide Web which uses hypertext transfer protocol—possibly the acronym, http, is more familiar. Most e-mail uses SMTP, or simple mail transfer protocol, newsgroups use NNTP, or network news transfer protocol. For file transfer, FTP, or, obviously, file transport protocol is most used. Most other interactions on the Internet use variations on telnet, which allows a person on one system to connect to a remote system and have access to its resources and programs.

The WWW, as already mentioned, is the newest major part of the Internet, the fastest growing, and the most well known. It has begun to incorporate other sections of the Internet. It is not a medium primarily for interaction. The WWW is primarily a way to put unchanging writing and images on-line with links to related pages. Newsgroups, e-mail, and the variations on telnet all are protocols that tend towards interaction. Newsgroups are forums for public discussions, as is e-mail at times. E-mail is primarily still for private interaction between two people. The telnet variations which are most commonly used for interactions are IRC and MUDding. MUDding allows you to interact with many others in a 'textual reality', an area described by, and interacted with purely by text. MUD is yet another acronym, for Multi-User Domain. IRC, or Internet Relay Chat, also allows for many people to interact with each other in real-time, but it is not connected to a text-based reality; In IRC, people group together by interest, not virtual location. Real-time is an important term used to describe conversations on-line that are immediate, with little or no time lag. A correlation to real life is the difference between a phone conversation and an epistolary one.

More important than these specific protocols is what is being done with them. Naturally, each part of the Internet has its native form of communication, but as technology advances, the lines blur. To speak about types of discourse and writing on-line, then, we have a separate set of terms. First, we must make the distinction between activities which take place using a computer, CMC or Computer-Mediated Communication, and those which happen without computers, real-life or normal communication. On-line activities are those using computers connected to other computers or a larger network, such as the Internet. Real-life interactions are then those which occur normally, in the real world.

A distinction which will prove to have fascinating effects is the difference between the person typing at the keyboard and the character, referred to as the *persona*, he or she creates on-line. The persona may or may not be the same age, race, socio-economic level, or even gender as the person typing. A person may have one, two, or more personae, and in some cases these personae may interact with each other and others at the same time.

Sources

This is a new field—comparably little work has been done with communication and computers, and even less on the effects of the Internet. Most of the work done on

communication over the Internet has focused on e-mail and newsgroups. This paper is most interested with on-line real-time interactions, especially those outside of MUDs—a topic which has been barely broached at the time of this writing.

Howard wrote in A rhetoric of electronic communities that comparing dialogues from the Internet to conversations in real-life is “tacitly imposing standards and metaphors from oral media on this new medium,” and similarly, to label Internet discourse ‘writing’ is implying “that we are dealing with texts that happen to appear on computers” (p.3). We should take his warning to heart, but not as a law—the comparisons are often valid, but can confuse us if we forget the media we are dealing with. Also, Howard was dealing primarily with e-mail and newsgroups, to which conversational and written metaphors do not often apply.

Due to this lack of previous research, especially in real-time conversations, many of my secondary sources will be from the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language. Despite Howard’s warning, these fields have much to offer to help us understand what is happening in on-line interactions. While these interactions may be taking place in new media, we must remember that they are being performed by human beings, who bring their ideas of normal conversations with them when they are typing at the keyboard.

Primary Data Sources

My major sources of data are two IRC chat rooms, or virtual gathering places, #Callahans and #Poetry. On-line these chat rooms are also called channels, and some of the participants will refer to them as such, but to avoid confusion with linguistic channels, I will refer to them only as chat rooms or sometimes only rooms. These two rooms exist on the Undernet, the second-largest IRC network in the world, behind EFnet. #Callahans is based on a fictional bar created by author Spider Robinson in his series of books beginning with Callahan’s Crosstime Saloon. This book introduces the bar:

If you've never been to Callahan's Place, God's pity on you. Seek it in the wilds of Suffolk County, but look not for neon...
Inside, several heresies.

First, the light is about as bright as you keep your living room.
Callahan maintains that people who like to drink in caves are unstable....

Not too surprisingly, it's a damned interesting place to be. It's the kind of place you hear about only if you need to—and if you are very lucky. Because if a patron, having proposed his toast and smithereened his glass, feels like talking about the nature of his troubles, he receives the instant, undivided attention of everyone in the room....

I don't want you to get a picture of Callahan's Place as an agonized, Alcoholics Anonymous type of group-encounter session ... Hell, many's the toast provokes roars of laughter... (Robinson, 1-3)

#Poetry is a chat room which I founded in 1995 and for which I remain the 'channel manager'. I have been an active participant in both of these rooms for four or more years, and have recorded many of the more interesting events which have taken place in both of them over this time period. I will also take data from various web-sites and from the more interactive e-mail and newsgroups. I will also use data from a course being taught for the first time in the spring semester 1999 at the University of Texas at Austin, *Technology, Literacy, and Culture*, which seeks to integrate computers into a liberal arts class to investigate the impact on our culture that new media are having. During the course of my research I have also informally interviewed many people who have expressed interesting views about their interactions with the Internet.

The Ethics of Quoting

I will be using this data without the explicit consent of the participants who created it. This may seem odd, until realizing that all of these new media, unlike traditional modes, can automatically record all content, and that this recording is commonly done by the participants. Following Howard (p. 125) and others, I will change the names of the participants, excepting cases in which I have received permission not to do so. In the cases of web pages and publicly displayed messages, such as with newsgroups, I will not change the information as it is in the public domain. I will not change my own nickname in the data, and will appear as 'GriffJon', which is my 'handle,' or nickname, on-line.

This automatic, invisible recording has an interesting effect on the dialogue. All the participants know that it is possible that they are being recorded, but they almost unanimously ignore it—this is a significant departure from traditional linguistics studies. Even when a participant momentarily forgets the recording, it remains a factor, as seen in Staehle's "Teasing and Conversational Rapport," when one of the participants calls another "Asshole," then remembers she is being recorded and says "Oh," then laughs (Tannen: 1993, p.218). On the Internet, the recording is invisible to other participants, but is acceptable as long as it is not used to slander someone or spread gossip.

An Outline of the Rest of the Paper

I will begin by discussing current approaches to real-life discourse analysis and the philosophical views which are involved in these views of language. I will then examine the standard characteristics of spoken and written discourse. Taking this information, I will stretch Internet discourse over this frame, first looking at various types of Internet discourse as written text, then as conversational, and finally as a combination of both styles. This section will reveal some exiting parallels between Internet discourse and real-life discourse. It will also uncover the truth in Howard's warning—though often comparisons can be made, the media of the Internet are simply different from traditional media at a very fundamental level.

The second half of this work will treat these inherent differences, and explore the discourse produced with them. This section will see the new forms and methods available for communication, and the speech play that has evolved out of them. These discoveries will shed light on how people think about communication under vastly altered circumstances. This in turn will hopefully lead to new insights on some traditional views of communication.

PART I: FROM TALK TO TEXT

[She] jumps from topic to topic, ... and assumes different voices and different footings. Ribeiro shows, however, that everything she utters ... is perfectly coherent within the scenario created Ribeiro also examines a lower level of framing and its relation to the higher level: the types of moves performed in [her] discourse that make up the various interactive frames ...
(Ribeiro, in Tannen:1993, 7)

In seeking theories that best describe on-line discourse, the above source was frighteningly accurate in its portrayal. In this study, Branca Ribeiro examined the dialogue between a mental patient and her doctor. Ribeiro found that using multiple frames of conversation, within each of which a separate conversation takes place, the discourse of the mental patient becomes sensible.

In these next chapters, I will first look at a selection of approaches to discourse analysis, then pick and choose theories which should be useful in explaining on-line discourse. We will then compare our theories to data from the Internet, and see how they fare. Afterwards, we will try to place on-line discourse styles in the scale of written to verbal: is a website more like a soapbox monologue or an essay? Is e-mail closer to two people talking in a bar, or an epistolary interchange of letters? Is real-time chat amend a crowd like a normal conversation or note-passing at the back of a class?

Part I seeks to use the goggles of modern discourse analysis, as applied to 'normal' conversation, and look at discourse and writing produced on the Internet with them.

Chapter 1: Analysis of Internet Discourse

Schiffren's List

In Approaches to Discourse Analysis, Deborah Schiffren discusses various methods of discourse analysis. I will quickly present these approaches so as to give more meaning to the methods I will select to apply to on-line discourse. Schiffren organizes the methods into six general categories; Speech Act theory, Interactional Socio-Linguistics, Ethnography of Communication, Pragmatics, Conversational Analysis and the Variationist Approach.

Speech Act theory comes from the philosophy of language and was developed by Austin, Searle, and many others. They see language as performative—when one promises something, it is an action performed by the speaker and recognized by the hearer. Even when one is not performing an explicit act when talking, there still are speech acts of communication or persuasion taking place. In Interactional socio-linguistics, the social and cultural backgrounds, specifically the culturally governed roles and institutions, determine the interpretation of discourse (Schiffren 7). Gumperz investigates what information must be shared between two speakers so as to make conversation possible. Here, language is a tool of a culture to assert the role of the speaker. Furthermore, it is only one of a number of methods which locate one's social standing (Schiffren 103). The Ethnography of Communication approach is championed by Hymes who sees language within culture, but further seeks to find the organizing structure of it (Schiffren 185). Grice's logical approach to language forms the category of Pragmatism. In trying to correlate natural language and logic, Grice created a detailed account of communication based on implication and the idea that the goal of every conversation was to communicate in some fashion (Schiffren 227). Conversational Analysis, as treated by Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson, sees a link between language and societal rules. This approach focuses on the details of actual events (Schiffren 232) and adjacent pairs of remarks, such as formalized greetings. It sees the separated nature of discussion, as opposed to the other theories which look towards the whole as being a joint production. Schiffren's final category, the Variationist approach, is from the work of Labov. It posits the existence of formal patterns in texts and narratives, and sees variation from these caused by social patterns (Schiffren 10). The uttering or even writing of a

gerund with 'in' instead of 'ing' is governed by the social constraints of the situation (Schiffren 278).

Two other approaches, not seen explicitly in Schiffren, are Stubbs' discourse analysis and Goffman and Tannen's framing. Both of these will prove important in treating on-line discourse, so I will touch on them here as well. Stubbs' discourse analysis treats conversations as highly ordered events, but ordered much differently from written texts. He sees a structure in discourse above merely the sentence level. Conversations are joint productions of the participants, and rely on metacommunication between them to direct and control the conversation. Tannen's frames bear some similarity to Labov's Variationist approach in that a person's discourse is contained within the frame of the cultural surroundings. Goffman and Tannen go further, however—frames can be much more specific, and by contextual and nonlinguistic clues we can understand and speak in a multitude of frames within one conversation.

The Choice

Not all of these approaches are applicable to on-line discourse. Speech Act theory is a useful tool in understanding the dynamics of a text-based reality, and uncovers an interesting detail of it. Interactional Socio-linguistics and Hymes' ethnographic approach, in their emphasis on culture above language, are fascinating, but would take a book by itself to investigate the social backgrounds of the faceless and 'placeless' participants outside of the Internet. I will eschew this approach; though I do believe that such an inquiry would be valuable, it would by necessity change the focus of this work. Gumperz, one of the contributors to this theory, emphasizes not only the cultural background of the participants, but also the importance of intonation and emphasis in speech. Surprisingly, these verbal elements have excellent resonance in on-line discourse, which I will treat more fully later. The variationist approach does not heavily emphasize culture, and will be incorporated into the paper, but not used primarily. Gricean pragmatism gives us another useful tool that functions on-line close to as it functions in real life, but there is a consistent problem with applying it. Naturally, Stubbs's conversational analysis and Tannen's frames will be explored.

Gricean Pragmatism

While some aspects of Grice's theory do not translate into on-line discourse analysis well, what remains is highly useful. His theory of communication is based on the cooperative principle, which presumes that the participants are cooperating to produce a cohesive whole, or towards a goal (Martinich 158). On the Internet, this can be difficult to see. Not only are there often many people conversing, there are also others participating in separate conversations, and some who try to interrupt the flow of the dialogues.

The cooperative principle in Grice's construction contains four categories of maxims which participants in a conversation follow to produce a successful dialogue. I will discuss the maxims and how they break, and then map them to Internet discourse.

The maxim categories are Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. A participant fulfills as many maxims as possible given his or her information and situation. To obey the maxims of Quantity, one must give as much information as was requested, and no extraneous data. Quality requires that the information given be truthful and evidenced, to the extent of knowledge of the speaker. Being relevant to the topic of conversation fulfills the maxims under Relation, and Manner merely asks that the participant frame the statement appropriately for the conversation. Grice mentions the possibility of another category, that of politeness, but does not expand on it (Martinich 159).

Grice explains how these maxims are commonly broken. One may violate a maxim by unobtrusively not fulfilling it. This is done when one lies—a violation of the maxim of Quality. Opting out of a maxim is to signal to the audience that you cannot or will not fulfill a maxim. This is related to flouting a maxim, in which the speaker makes a ridiculous or hyperbolic statement that is so exaggerated that the audience could not reasonably take it as a serious statement. In some cases, a clash of maxims will occur. This is to say that in fulfilling one maxim, another must be broken. Grice's example relates the clash between quality and quantity. If an interlocutor is asked for some information, but does not know the full amount of information requested, he or she must break either the maxim of quality and fill in, fallaciously, the missing information, or the maxim of quantity, by not giving all the information.

Taking this theory to the Internet, we encounter two main dilemmas. The first we have already touched upon; the multitude of conversations happening in the same place and time in on-line forums such as IRC. This is resolved by taking extra care in analyzing data, and

realizing that separate conversations may intersect and participants can, and often are, in multiple conversations at any one time. Within a single conversation on-line, the interlocutors will follow the rules and be cooperative. Interference from other conversations or from troublemakers; "drive by spammers," as they have been dubbed in #Poetry, can change the course of a conversation. These interruptions are external, and do not cause participants to break any maxims any more than events in the real world, such as the ringing of a phone or doorbell, might interrupt a conversation. The second difficulty is more serious. Oftentimes people participating in on-line discourse violate maxims, especially Quality by lying, either to create an alternate identity or maintain some secret. Stone writes about such an event in "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?". In this instance, an accepted member of an on-line women's group was discovered not to be the disabled older woman the group had known, but rather a middle-aged male psychiatrist (Stone, in Benedikt, 83). A similar event took place in alt.callahans, a newsgroup which pre-dates the IRC chat room (and out populates it, with a total readership of an estimated sixty thousand). A pillar of this on-line community who maintained an extensive list of birthdays of the members, and who was irrepressibly cheerful was exposed as not having the terminal brain cancer she claimed.

In both of these situations, the reactions centered around the difficulty that while these participants had carried on an extensive lie for years and had hurt many other participants by lying to them, these participants had been active, accepted, and in the latter case, very important members of the community. Another instance of this second problem occurred in the newsgroup alt.religion.wombat. Subscribers of the newsgroup alt.look.at.me.i.am.a.fish decided to invade alt.religion.wombat by posting large quantities of messages such as this:

Subject: Fish

Date: 09 Nov 1998 00:00:00 GMT

Newsgroups: alt.religion.wombat, alt.look.at.me.i.am.a.fish

Fish are much better than wombats
'cuz fish are swimmingly free!
Fish come in all kinds (even cats),
And fish are both large and wee!

The subscribers of alt.religion.wombat responded, not with flames and complaints, but in character, as 'priests' and 'scribes' of their (fictional and comical) religion—they did not break the adopted methods of discourse for the group, claiming things such as the following:

Subject: Wombats can fight Clam-style, as well
Date: 07 Nov 1998 00:00:00 GMT
From: griffjon@my-dejanews.com
Organization: Deja News - The Leader in Internet Discussion
Newsgroups: alt.look.at.me.i.am.a.fish

I have looked deep into our Thrice-Naked holy texts from the Wombat, and yea, there is foretold the coming of the Fish, in the form of the Red Herring. Yea, the modern translation of the Red Herring Scrolls was penned in the year 1995. It places the Red Herring as the Enemy of the Wombat, and as the eternal loser to Him, The Wombat who sayest nought but "Dweefil".

Here, quoted for your weak, non-mammalian brains to comprehend are seen quotes of import from the Red Herring Scrolls. For ifst thou read the full scrolls, no doubt as to that it would fry your brain in oil and batter, to be served with lemon and the sauce Tar-tar.

Even in private communication through e-mail, the subscribers of alt.religion.wombat kept in character;

From: Jon Camfield <GriffJon@Mail.UTexas.edu>
Subject: Our Hour of Truth is upon us!
Date: 11/7/98

Hail, brother of the Furriest One, whose Word is Naked, Naked, Three Times Naked!
Readeth thy not the Holy Newsgroup? Seest thou not the Heretical Invasion of the Fish, as foretold in the Red Herring Scrolls? Has the Herring obtained SPAM? Fear the possibility, and cry unto the Wombat for guidance in these troubled times.

The damned and evil members of the heretical newsgroup, alt.look.at.me.i.am.a.fish have taken it as their UNholy jyhada to takeover our newsgroup, and others!

I have taken up the pen (mightier than any sword) and begun furiously posting back, but I fear that one against a torrent of Fish is doomed to, if nothing else, smell really badly afterwards.

Admittedly, near the end of the invasion, after the in-character responses had failed, some members broke character to discuss strategy.

Still, these examples lead to a solution for the existence of such repeated breaking of maxims. If we posit another maxim which takes precedence in clashes, like Grice's Quality maxim does in his examples (Martinich 162), these breakages all now can have a reason. The new maxim is Character, and it instructs us to maintain a consistent character within each context. This maxim doesn't come into play in the real world often, because maintaining a character which is not near to reality is significantly more difficult, and is not normally done via discourse alone even so. On-line, however, the vast majority of knowledge about a person that is accessible to others is what that person tells them or performs for them with text. This

encourages the production of personae which do not correspond to the person at the keyboard. Returning to the examples, the liars chose to fulfill their maxim of character when it clashed with Quality and Quantity—they either did not volunteer information about themselves or actively lied about it to maintain a consistent character.

Framing in Discourse

The linguistic use of framing to analyze conversation is very powerful on-line, where often the frames of conversation, which we differentiate using metamesages and non-linguistic clues normally (Straehlein, in Tannen:1993 213), will appear as real entities on-line in the form of a private message or separate method of discussion.

A frame is a set of interpretive tools based on culture and conversational experience (Tannen:1993 21). Frames, like the Gricean Maxims, help us to understand a situation when an unpredicted event occurs. Tannen gives the example of talking on the phone with a friend when the friend suddenly shouts "You stop that!" Using her knowledge about this friend's activities, Tannen correctly interprets that the friend had shifted frames to command a dog (Tannen:1993 61). As participants in a conversation, we use metamesages to indicate frame shifts. In the example above, the friend used a different tone and more volume when commanding the dog. Non-linguistic cues, like eye contact or other body language, can also be used to indicate frame shifts. Framing on-line adds yet another level of complexity to this. As in normal conversation, on-line conversation makes use of metamesages and textual decorations for nonlinguistic communication to frame dialogue. The distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic (nonverbal) metamesages is naturally blurred because all the interaction is textual. Still, some definite distinctions may be made. In this example, a 'spoken' metamessage, "Stormy gently removes Blackavar from the keyboard" is used to change frames:

```
[23:03]<Stormy>
+++++
[23:03] * Stormy gently removes Blackavar from the keyboard
[23:03] <Bekka> Stormy??
[23:03] <GriffJon> Stormy: and in addition....?
[23:04] <kay> Stormy... tennis net?
[23:04] * Doc looks both ways for the train.
[23:04] <Midg> Stormy: I forgot you had a black bunny. :)
[23:04] <Stormy> Rabbit on the keyboard. We're better now.
[23:04] <Stormy> [feed me!]
#Callahans (Thu Dec 17 22:56:44 1998)
```

Stormy had to explain why she had uttered the string of addition signs, which did not fit into the conversation, by guiding the rest of the chat room through a frame shift—her pet rabbit had gotten onto the keyboard, in this case. In the case of nonverbal cues, the infamous emoticon, or smiley, is the method of choice to indicate the meaning of a message which is unclear from the context, such as in these cases:

```
[23:50] <Ladybug> G'night, Garg
[23:51] * Garg` types at various speeds, depending
[23:51] <Garg`> lady: trying to get rid of me?
[23:51] * ilianna is STILL contemplating the dvorjak keyboard option
[23:51] * Don- just got a pII-350 for work
[23:51] <Ladybug> Computers ruined my typing accuracy, although I still type
very fast.
[23:51] <Ladybug> Garg: No, I just thought you were leaving. ;)
#Callahans (Fri Nov 27 23:27:56 1998)
```

Here we see a normal conversation about typing speeds get thrown off a bit as Ladybug misunderstands an earlier action of Garg`. Garg` takes (probably not seriously) the "G'night, Garg" as an 'invitation' to leave, and Ladybug clarifies her remark and adds a ;) to indicate that it is in a joking frame, and should not be taken as an insult. In this next example, there are a multitude of nonverbal cues meant to ensure that the utterances are not taken seriously:

```
[22:11] * ilianna thinks she is still a youth at least in heart <griN>
[22:11] <GriffJon> DN: well, did you toss your cookies, or not? ;)
[22:11] <Deity> Mess, I like spec ops
[22:11] <DN> thought you only tossed salad
[22:11] * Valkie wishes everyone the seasons best as she heads for the door to
go do some xmassy stuff :)
[22:11] <GriffJon> ilianna: me too. that's 'cuz of the transplant in my case, at
least (j/k)
#callahans (Thu Dec 24 22:08:37 1998)
```

Another form of 'nonverbal' cues on-line is the choice of how to convey the message. The author of a reply to a posted, public message from a newsgroup chooses whether to reply in kind, with another public message, or with a private e-mail. In chat rooms, participants often prepend the nickname of their target listener, as also seen in the above examples, like with "<Ladybug> Garg: No, I just thought you were leaving. ;)," where Ladybug addresses "Garg" by prepending his name to her utterance. These choices parallel eye contact determining audience in real life conversations.

In on-line communications, however, there are a myriad more of other channels of communication, each of which can be a frame in itself, and can also contain frames as well. My favorite example of this has sadly been deleted, but the situation was roughly as follows. I was

to meet a friend on-line in a chat room we named after our mutual home-town, Huntsville, Texas. I entered into the chat room before my friend, and soon received a private message from him trying to find me. We then met in the chat room, but kept talking in the private message window as well, holding two distinct conversations, in two separate frames. A few minutes into this, a random persona entered the chat room and asked if it was a room for the discussion of Huntsville, Alabama. My friend and I then opened up yet another channel of communication, a hidden discussion within the chat room that only we two could see. Each conversation had its own frame, and could contain frames if other devices were used within it. Oftentimes, private messages will be used for more personal information while the public chat room is for more bantering or other non-private discussions. Another example of this will be seen later on, when the differences between frames in the separate channels of communication are so great that it is two separate personae. This is not to say that we do not have separate channels in real life. Indeed, Goffman treats the "multiple channel effect" (Goffman: 146), which is a separation of different sensory inputs (sight, smell, sound) into quickly-formed frames.

Another phenomenon is that one frame of discourse can stretch across different channels of communication, as in this example:

[Raven]	[#Callahans]
[22:00]<Raven>hi *ravenhugs*(TM)	[22:02] * Raven lands on
[22:02] <GriffJon> heya	Griffjon's shoulder
[22:02] * Raven lands on your	
shoulder	
[22:02] <GriffJon> *LeftyHugs*	
Raven Mon Nov 16 1998	#Callahans Mon Nov 16 1998

The left column is a private dialogue between myself and Raven, whereas the right column is from the public chat room #Callahans. Notice the time-stamps to the left of the dialogue, which match up exactly with the utterance of Raven about landing (she has taken on the persona of a raven) on my shoulder.

IRC does bear some resemblance to how Goffman sees dramatic text, such as that in novels or scripts:

...what is handled in a novel by the connective "John replied, 'no,'" and is managed in a play by having the actor playing John say, "No" (thereupon allowing sound source to server as the connective), is managed in the play text by merely placing the name of the character on the left-hand side...Also the author can add expression directions at the beginning of various speeches... (Goffman 229)

In such performances, there is an intermingling of the out-of-frame instructions and the in-frame speech of the actor. In IRC the stage directions are at the same time in-frame and out-of-frame; they direct action yet are part of the conversation as much as any other utterance. The issues of channels and actions will recur throughout this investigation. One can see that frames provide a powerful, if at times mind-boggling approach to interpreting discourse on-line, especially when dealing with real-time communication.

Conversational Patterns: Stubbs and Erikson

Stubbs and Erikson write about the joint production of conversation; how the participants socially interpret and maintain a topic.

Stubbs focuses on structure above the sentence level in conversations. He shows that there exist particles (Stubbs 68) that provide structure and transitions to the discourse without being explicable by grammar. Particles like "Well..." and "Um..." as well as discourse markers like "now" and "then", help participants to determine turn-taking. Other mechanisms such as repetition, time synchronization, and structural markers form the systems which move conversations along. Metacommunication, communication about the dialogue, helps participants to direct the topic of the conversation (Stubbs 48). These various tools allow for predictability in conversations for the participants. Nowhere is this more true than with on-line conversational forums. In newsgroups and chat rooms these devices are often employed to maintain a topic. Participants will build on the actions of previous speakers or simply reply to them in such a way that the conversation is continued. In this next example, we see a jointly produced action in which the participants in a spin-off room from #Callahans decorated a fellow participant who had wandered away from the keyboard, leaving her persona inactive for a long period of time:

```
*G2 decorates the somnolent Mary.
<Gisele> what are we decorrating her with?
<G2> A little drape of garland here... some tinsil there...
[...]
Gryphon2 paints Mary's toes & fingers alternating bright red
and green.
<G2> Not the nails.
<G2> The whole fingers. And toes.
<G2> OK, lights next... did you find some good ones?
<G2> Any bubble lights?
<Gisele> I have the little ones that play eight different carols
when you plug them in?
[...]
Gisele also has holly berries and popcorn strung on thread to
```

wind around her. there's not very many blank spaces where someone,
I wouldn't know who, at the popcorn.
<G2> Maybe we should nail her feet to the deck, and use
her as the official Huzza Hussy tree?
<Gisele> nah.... we shouldn't nail her... it's bad for the teak. I
have one of those stand thingys to put around her ankles, then we can
just tighten it and pour water on her roots.

Characters manipulate what is happening by stating that they are about to put on lights, or suggest ways to secure the 'tree,' and the other participants respond by suggesting a method, and the interaction (and the reality of the personae) progresses.

Discourse markers can also be used to highlight a current topic or move on to a news one. An accepted method of preserving a conversation in a newsgroup or chat room is to make it the topic of the posting, or, in the case of chat rooms, each room has a declared topic, and users may change this to highlight the current conversation or event; as seen here:

[23:24] Doc changes topic to *'Surgery...Half Price! This offer won't last long!'*
[23:25] DN changes topic to *'Surgery...Half Price! This offer won't last long!
Here, fill in a Norwegian cookie form...'*
[23:25] <Maiden> Lon-line
[23:25] * Gisele looks in shock at the sign! Half price?? Ah, won't last long,
do you mean as in "Won't last till we send you the bill?"
#Callahans Mon Nov 09 22:58:53 1998

Applying Stubbs' ideas to Internet discourse reminds us that even in the jungle of conversations on-line, structure exists that the participants cue in to, even if it is often difficult, to go back and look at an event and understand it.

Erikson uses the idea of a conversational floor which provides participants the ability to create a cohesive conversation. Interlocutors must consistently participate "to maintain their position on the floor" (Tannen:1982 49). Multiple conversational floors are allowed, and in fact one of the main tasks of a speaker is to recognize how many floors there are (47). The cohesion of a conversation is based on three resources for Erikson: immediately local items like the setting or previous parts of the conversation, local resources once removed such as shared information and biographical knowledge, and the nonlocal resources of cultural information and default topics (the Stormy, for example) (45-46). These factors are possibly less useful on-line, but still find some parallels there. Local resources on-line tend to be other on-line objects, such as virtual objects in the discussion area. These are especially prominent in MUDs where often friends will band together to achieve some task in the virtual world. Another common activity is to refer to web pages so as to talk about them, as seen here:

[23:00] * GriffJon is snickering uncontrollably. Anyone with a decent connection (33.6 ish) check out <http://www.hamsterdance.com> next time you're surfing—it's just silly.

[...]

[23:00] <bun> GJ, I know that one... it's hilarious

[23:00] <Ryl> hamsterdance.com? Is it the same as the other hamster dance?

[23:00] <GriffJon> Ryl: may be. a lot of animated dancing hampsters and asoundtrack?

[...]

[23:00] <Ryl> GriffJon: that's the one

[23:00] <Ryl> I dig that :)

[23:01] <Biff> I wonder if it's like the M.C. Hamster?

#callahans Tue Feb 09 22:57:41 1999

The idea of a conversational floor maintained with the various resources can be useful on-line, but is generally superceded with frames.

Speech Act Theory: Action Verbs as Illocutionary Acts?

Speech act theory, as developed by Austin, Searle and others, has an interesting mutation when carried on-line. In normal discourse, only a small set of utterances can actually perform actions. For example a person saying "I'm going to the store" does not perform the act of going to the store, yet if the person said "I promise to go to the store," the act of promising was performed. Utterances fall into three categories: locutionary acts which are descriptive and refer to object and relations in the world or are merely sounds; perlocutionary acts, or persuasive speech; and illocutionary acts, which add a force within a structure of rules (Searle, in Martinich 131). This illocutionary force causes the utterance "I promise..." to actually promise something, and "I approve..." to approve of something. An example from Euripides commonly used to illustrate the distinction is that "My tongue swore to, but my heart did not" (Austin in Martinich 122). Updating this to the Internet, we might say "My persona swore to, but my human did not" (Camfield:1998 5). This statement works no better (with some dramatic exceptions below) than Euripides', and uncovers the exceptional closeness of the persona to the person—the person is, in many cases, the persona. This allows many normal illocutionary acts performed in everyday conversation to also take place on-line.

The medium, as we keep reminding ourselves, plays an important role, and rarely is it more visible than with speech act theory. Excepting web pages and "VRML", which creates pseudo three-dimensional environments for one to navigate, all virtual reality is textual reality. Indeed, even web pages and VRML (Virtual Reality Modeling Language) are written more or

less in English. To the extent that any actions are performed in these textual realities, they are performed by people typing at keyboards. In a textual reality, words are the world, and a chair is an invitation to sit down. Take, for example, this excerpt from #Callahans:

```
[20:24] * Pixld- goes over and offers rose a hug
[20:24] * ELk grumps.
[20:24] * Faithful goes over to Rose and offers her a lap to curl up in
[20:24] * GriffJon steps up to the line
[20:24] * MaxCat listens to GriffJon.
[20:24] * Callahan looks up, passes around drinks to those who need
      them and listens to GriffJon at the line.
[20:25] * Grey listens
[20:25] <Conf> Mike, an eggnog please
[20:25] * Rosy hugs pixel tight and listens to GJ
[20:25] * Callahan gets an eggnog for Confucius
      #Callahans Thu Dec 25 20:08:17 1997
```

Within the textual reality of #Callahans, one would say that these actions took place as indicated. It would be no more valid to say "no, I did not actually do this" for any one of those actions than reneging on a promise. Despite the closeness between person and persona, it is still strictly true that with action verbs the speaker is not the performer. In this view, the persona seems more like a puppet than an extension of the person. Further, in MUDs one can find marriage ceremonies between personae, vows included, which do not duplicate themselves in real life between the two people controlling the personae. Within the textual reality, nevertheless, these marriages are marriages. The only perceivable acts are those of the personae uttering, and by uttering, performing. To argue this point further, we return yet again to the example of Euripides; the tongue, like the persona, is no more than the outlet through which the act is performed, while the heart is the origin of the act. To add another layer of complexity, there are programs which have no human puppetmasters, yet react to other participants on-line. These bots are defined by The New Hacker's Dictionary as follows:

```
An IRC or MUD user who is actually a program. On IRC, typically the robot
provides some useful service. [...] Also common are `annoybots', such as
KissServ, which perform no useful function except to send cute messages to
other people.
Service robots are less common on MUDs; but some others, such as the `Julia'
robot active in 1990—91, have been remarkably impressive Turing-test
experiments, able to pass as human for as long as ten or fifteen minutes of
conversation.
```

New Hacker's Dictionary,
http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/jargon/jargon_33.html (2/13/98)

In the above sample from #Callahans, there were two 'bots' in action; MaxCat and Callahan. MaxCat is designed to behave more or less like a Cat, while (Mike) Callahan serves as a

bartender. These bots perform actions which other personae accept and act upon; as seen with this interaction with MaxCat:

[11:47] * Woscoe sniffs at Kate-'s sandwich and wonders why he just has these herrings.
[11:47] * Woscoe tosses Max a small herring.
[11:47] * MaxCat catches the small herring.
[11:47] * MaxCat thanks Woscoe, but he is still eating the small herring.
[11:47] * MaxCat will save the small herring for later.
[11:48] * Kate- tosses Woscoe a turkey club sandwich.
[11:48] * Woscoe grins and chows down.
[11:49] * MaxCat finishes eating the small herring.
[11:49] * MaxCat jumps from the floor onto Woscoe's lap and starts purring louder.
[11:49] * Woscoe skritchies Max under the chin.
[11:49] * MaxCat vibrates like a badly loaded washer.
[11:50] * Woscoe strokes Max for a while.
[11:50] * MaxCat buzzes like a defective pager.
[11:50] <Woscoe> I could get used to this...
[11:50] <Woscoe> So could Max, I imagine. :-)
[11:50] <Woscoe> Too bad I can't do this with real cats for long, if I want to keep breathing!
#Callahans Fri Oct 03 11:42:24 1997

The liquidity of textual realities throws another wrench into the works—an action can be edited and modified even after it is performed. Imagine one interlocutor saying "I sit down." A second speaker could say that he or she pulled the chair out from under the first. The first speaker could then continue and claim a variety of things, that he or she moved back as well, sat down on thin air and hovered in a sitting position, and so on. Even more confusing is when two interactions contradict each other, as we will see happen a lot in the round-robin story from #Callahans later on. When this happens, it is the other members of the room who decide which event is true in the long run.

The application of speech act theory is problematic, at best. Not only are we faced with two interacting 'realities,' in which some actions cross over while others do not, we are also forced to deal with the person/persona combination, straddling these realities. Do we see illocutionary acts done with action verbs, or is the persona separate enough from the person that it is merely a puppet, whose actions are being described by the participants in a work of public fiction (Camfield:1998 7)? If it is merely descriptive, what, then, are the programs 'doing'? It seems best to make this problem one of perception. From inside the textual reality, action verbs usually are illocutionary acts. From the real world, they appear more as descriptions which happen in real-time. This is also supported by the evidence. Sometimes, personae within the

textual reality will describe what the person at the keyboard is doing. From within the reality of the personae, it is a description, yet the person is performing the act. Common examples of this are 'lol' and 'brb', which stand for "laughing out loud" and "be right back", respectively. In these lines from #Callahans, we see a more detailed description:

```
[11:25] <Bill> Come of think of it, coffee is an excellent idea
[11:25] * Bill will BRB
[...]
[11:25] * GriffJon has already had his 2 cups
[...]
[11:27] * Bill is back, coffee in hand (well, in cup, actually)
#Callahans Thu Oct 02 11:19:40 1997
```

Intonation on-line?

Gumperz focuses on social conventions and intonation, placing a significant amount of the meaning of a spoken utterance in how the speaker arranges the emphasis and tone. He builds upon Goffman's idea of frames and sees meaning in a conversation as based upon interpretation of "several levels of generality" (Gumperz 12). Participants judge current meaning based on previous dialogue, physical setting and background, and the relation of the situation to familiar activities. The meaning is fluid and subject to "constant modification" as the interaction continues (Gumperz 101).

Beyond this, Gumperz continues his analysis to include tone and accentuation. Following Crystal's 1975 study which found that 80% of the time the accent fell on the same part of an utterance (111), Gumperz looks for cultural explanations for variance from these cases. In syntactically ambiguous phrases the tone, more than the context, determines the meaning for the hearer. In good conversation, participants appear to 'tune-in' to each other and establish a rhythm of conversation in their emphasis and other verbal and non-verbal signs (167). A failure to do this, particularly when varying cultural backgrounds cause difficulties, leads to mismatches in interpretation and reduces the predictability of the conversation (143).

Particularly relevant for Internet discourse in this theory are Gumperz's emphasis on tone and accentuation, absent as such in on-line discourse, and also his statement that grammar and conversational skill are separate. In on-line discourse, tone and emphasis exist only in the form of text decoration or, as we see in the last line, by speaking in the third person and using literary devices:

[00:17] <Jeff> Oooh, I give up. What *is* your weakness?!

[00:17] * kitty bites down just enough to hold on and is dragged across the floor

[00:17] <Owl> weakness? Chocolate, of course.

[00:17] <kitty> kind of like sledding when one's feet are furry

[00:17] <Jeffrey> "Never tell the villain how to trap you in a cage!"

[00:17] <Jeffrey> You probably shouldn't have helped us build it, either.

[00:17] <Jeffrey> "I know! Dumb! Dumb!"

[00:18] * Ghost- hides behind a chair, thinking that he's eluded the kitty with the cat 'o nine

[00:18] <Jug> good night all

[00:18] <lass> "You probably shouldn't have helped me build it, either."

[00:18] <Ghost-> nighters jug

[00:18] * Jeff ^5's lass. :)

[00:18] <Atos> "I'm a cat person myself," She said vaguely. A low-level voice said. "Yeah? Wash in your own spit, do you?"

#Callahans Mon Nov 02 23:28:26 1998

Something we will return to is what these decorations say about the amount of meaning that intonation has in normal discourse. In on-line discourse, not only the meaning but also the nature of the information is based on the interpretation of the hearer—the speaker can only indicate which word receives emphasis, the hearer must decide, using context clues, biographical background if applicable, and any other data they might have access to in order to correctly interpret an utterance. Notice the similarity between what the on-line participant uses to interpret a statement and what Gumperz described—they employ similar data, but use different channels of communication to get that data.

Gumperz also states that the ability to understand the conventions and apply meaning correctly can not be implied from the ability to produce a grammatical sentence (Gumperz 209). This is darkly humorous when discussing on-line discourse, as grammar and spelling on-line tend to be somewhat lacking. In a realm where one presents oneself solely through text, it is at first surprising how badly formed some utterances are. Often one will find participants speaking in a non-native language, which explains some of the grammatical errors, but many native speakers will make common blunders over mistakes. Seen here is a participant puzzling over an ill-formed (and, in this case, ironic) error for the benefit of the room:

[00:05] * Valkie ponders the sentence "Use you're grammar correct and people will not think you so stupid"

#Callahans Thu Nov 19 23:36:43 1998

Both #Callahans and #Poetry have self-titled "grammar fascists" who habitually correct grammatical errors.

Gumperz's theory has significant connections with other discourse analysis methods, especially those of Erikson and Tannen. What is interesting is his particular emphasis on the importance of tone and accentuation in meaning, whereas in on-line discourse, these elements are reduced to their bare minimum.

Conclusion

Each of these theories resonates with on-line discourse in its own way. In some cases, the theory gives us a frame of interpretation that clarifies our perception of what is happening. In other cases, the theories collide with the data from on-line events, forcing us to modify the theory to take into account some feature of on-line discourse. The connections and failures between these theories and the texts from the Internet show that comparisons can be made between on-line and real-life discourse. Nevertheless, we must remember that though the discourse can often be very similar, even to the level of using the same theories of discourse analysis in some cases, the media, the contexts for the content are different at a very basic level. This produces unpredictable results in many cases and is the cause of the clashes between the theories and the data.

Chapter 2: Type Between Text and Talk

The previous chapter looked through the goggles of discourse analysis to see Internet discourse as something resembling a conversation, and we found much evidence to support this. This chapter widens the scope so as to take into account other phenomena on the Internet and give us a better understanding. Our frame of interpretation will be to place the various methods of communication on-line onto the scale from written to verbal (text to talk) communication from real-life. We will now look at websites, newsgroups, e-mail and others of the media, in addition to real-time interactions.

The World- (and style-) Wide Web

There is a reason that the WWW is often mistaken as a synonym for the Internet—increasingly, the WWW is incorporating elements of the other neighborhoods of the Internet. Web-based e-mail is now common, and the two major browsers both have internal support of traditional e-mail, newsgroup browsing, and also FTP. Some websites using recent technologies have even incorporated real-time chat for their users. The more traditional websites, however, include what we would consider merely written text that happens to appear on-line. Examples of this abound with academic papers, short stories, and over one million poems (an AltaVista search returned 1,155,410 matches) that appear on websites. Some websites contain similar content to normal written communication, but presented consciously within the context of hypermedia—employing options available with webpages, such as sound, images, colors, and hyperlinks to other webpages. Most 'e-zines' and other electronic publications are written like this, with the medium in mind—one need only compare the styles of the print version of the magazine *Wired* with that of its sibling, native to the on-line environment, *HotWired* (www.hotwired.com). Both types of webpages, posted text and posted text employing hypermedia, are easily identifiable as being in a written, as opposed to a verbal, style. Still within the realm of traditional websites, however, are the more recent phenomenon of the personal homepage, written in an almost conversational style at times, as if the author was speaking to the reader, as with this page:

Hi! My name is Sandra Fried and I'm a sophomore at Tufts University. That's right, I'm living up here in Medford (aka Mehd-fuh), MA, still working hard, just trying to get from day to day. I can't wait until the Stormy gets nicer.

[...]

Anyway, to tell you more about me, at the beginning of last year, I decided that despite the enormous amounts of work I have, I've got to keep busy. What better way than join clubs? I joined The Tufts Daily, the Debate Team, and some other various clubs like the chess club, and Student Outreach. I'm also a tutor for the ARC (English for Tufts students, but I LOVE tutoring high school math) and I have a job as an RCC (Resident Computer Consultant) —I do Macs, so don't come to me with your PC problems (you have a PC, you deserve them!) j/k. It's all fun and gets me out of the room. :)

About me...well, I graduated from Great Neck South High School in 1997 and I'm very happy here at Tufts, so if you've got any questions, please feel free to e-mail me! At the end of freshman year I declared a major in American Studies and a minor in Communications and Media Studies —I'm an interdisciplinary kind of person, I suppose.

(<http://www.tufts.edu/~sfried/>, Accessed on 3/3/99)

These texts fall on the written end of the spectrum, in that they tend to consist of grammatical sentences with normal punctuation. They use a more verbal, conversational footing (Tannen:1984 28), but the style does not mutate into a transcription of a monologue, or even (in most cases) the Internet equivalent of a speech.

Moving Towards Dialogues

On the more interactive websites, in the newsgroups, and certainly in e-mail, we see another type of text. These sources provide discourse which, while tending to use a more written style, occasionally dip into conversation. They are best grouped together as similar to the real-life epistolary style, but this is a loose collection.

The phenomenon of 'bulletin boards' and 'guestbooks' on 1980s-era BBSes and more recently, webpages, has developed a discourse style with a letter-writing, interactive style. As with newsgroups, these interactions tend to follow 'threads,' or topics, which can be very complicated at times. This image follows one such thread—each '>' indicates a reply to the previous, less indented one.

n41481	02/14	The Trinker	31	Re: ... In which the Trinker gets a Valentine's Gift
n41488	02/14	The Trinker	66	>
n41668	02/15	Bill Gawne	46	>
n41688	02/15	The Trinker	87	>
n41726	02/15	Michael Hugen	106	>
n41756	02/15	Bill Gawne	62	>
n41828	02/15	Michael Hugen	75	>
n41698	02/15	Droewyn	74	>
n41491	02/14	The Trinker	62	>
n41536	02/15	Michael Hugen	76	>
n41686	02/15	jiri@baum.com.au	11	>
n41727	02/15	Michael Hugen	13	>
n41492	02/14	Rebecca Schoenberg	49	>
n41960	02/16	Beth Jackson	24	>
n41496	02/14	KevAhearn1	26	>
n41510	02/14	Droewyn	33	>
n41531	02/14	The Trinker	33	>
n41511	02/14	Droewyn	25	>
n41729	02/15	Michael Hugen	25	>
n41908	02/16	Uncle Misha	45	>
n41537	02/14	Jeanne Burton	30	>
n41552	02/15	Martin Julian DeMel	23	>
n41562	02/15	Droewyn	20	>
n41597	02/15	The Trinker	77	>
n41646	02/15	Rivka	50	>
n41740	02/15	Bill Gawne	60	>
n41884	02/16	Freyja	27	>
n41687	02/15	jiri@baum.com.au	18	>
n41728	02/15	Michael Hugen	20	>
n41762	02/15	Lee S. Billings	16	>
n41769	02/15	Lee S. Billings	22	>

(newsgroup alt.callahans, 2/16/99)

These interactions approach conversation in two ways. This first way is by style and speed of interaction—participants can speak as if these forums were merely slow chat rooms, such as with this 'quick' interaction, in which the current speaker interjected her comments into the previous speaker's text. These comments were posted to the newsgroup within a few days, but retain the appearance of a more rapid interchange. Other newsgroup postings can be found that are posted within thirty minutes of each other or even less:

From: nolan@catnip.org (Nolan)
 Newsgroups: alt.usenet.kooks,alt.flame.net.illiterates
 Subject: Re: Spanked? (Was: VICTOR: Is it true? That you've devoted your life to Gary?)
 Date: 3 Feb 1999 23:38:03 GMT

On Wed, 03 Feb 1999 03:40:40 GMT, Belinda <eridani@datasix.com> wrote:
 >In article <slrn7bek0v.qo0.nolan@foxtrot.rahul.net>, nolan@catnip.org
 >(Nolan) wrote:

>>
>>What makes you think he has a job?
>
>Hhm. Well, he does something during the daylight hours that keeps him away
>from the computer. But you're probably right, it's hard to imagine him
>gainfully employed.
>
>BTW, notice how he dodged most of the posts in here? He's back to
>following Gary around to other groups. Shall we declare a spank?
>

It almost seems unfair, considering just how lame Jumping Bean is.

These are what are called 'flames,' or insult wars on-line, and tend to be the best source for rapid-fire discussions in this media. Still, these are a far cry from conversation—in these, a participant can easily, as we see in the above example, go back and speak at length on parts of a previous post, annotating very specific sections of it. Each speaker is guaranteed a turn, but not the inviolability of the discourse produced.

The other method in which these posts approach conversation is much more bizarre. As seen in the following example, these participants are creating what resembles a dialogue from a book, using themselves and other personae as characters in this novel form of communication:

From: Lissa McCollum <lissamc@primenet.com>
Newsgroups: alt.callahans
Subject: a question on earrings...
Date: Tue, 02 Mar 1999 22:48:38 -0700

Lissa is sitting with a puzzled look on her face, then shrugs and addresses the bar at large.

"I've got a male friend who is thinking of getting his ears pierced. He's trying to decided whether or not to pierce both of them, or just one, and if only one which one. I know in the '80's there was some bit about one ear pierced meant you were straight, but the other one pierced meant you were gay..." She looks around the room. "But I'm a bit out of touch with all that now. Is there still a 'code' for earrings? Does it vary by region?"

With these we have encountered a difficulty—the style of the writer is a very traditional and formalized style, that of the novelist writing a dialogue. The style of the persona, often the same mind at work, is that of a verbal dialogue. The point is obviously to convey both the spoken message and the virtual events framing the discourse, but how much of the writing style is there to convey movement and how much is it simply to fill out the writing style? On the scale from written to verbal, the overall style must fall nearer the written side, though we begin to see the

problems in applying this spectrum to text from the Internet. Not only are there so many methods of communication, but also each method has many modes of interpretation. In newsgroups, the above examples showed near-conversational styles, novelistic writing, plus the normal style of posted messages which resembles short notes, and a myriad of other styles, such as the in-character posts from the alt.religion.wombat group from the previous chapter, and this unique style from alt.adjective.noun.verb.verb.verb, in which all 'official' posts use a very specific style:

From: "addicted2words" <addie@addicted2words.com>
Newsgroups: alt.adjective.noun.verb.verb.verb
Subject: alt.old.message.resurrect.re-post.fetch
Date: Tue, 1 Sep 1998 09:00:27 -0400

[...]

(alt.advance.apology.offered.extended.murmured
alt.bastardized.TSElliott.give.give.give
alt.revered.format.warped_a_little.bent_a_bit.twisted_a_tad)

alt.feline.Memory.sing.warble.croak

alt.dewy.sunflower.see.observe.ascertain
alt.new.daylight.arises.dawns.occurs
alt.languid.rose.withers.dies.fades
alt.dawnward.face.turns.looks.emulates_sunflower
alt.new.day.waits.expects.anticipates
alt.old.Deuteronomy.announces.states.wails
alt.overwhelming.silence.cuts_through.feels.is_part_of
alt.Jellicle.cat.announces.states.proclaims
alt.different.Jellicle_life.re-born.resurrects.is_again
alt.your.face.turns.uplifts.gazes
alt.your.memory.leads.opens.enters
alt.elusive.happiness.finds.learns.discovers
alt.new.life.begin.start.embark
alt.all.alone.remembers.remembers.remembers
alt.moon.light.remembers.remembers.remembers
alt.old.days.smiles_at.thinks_fondly_of.longs_for
alt.cat_like.I.was_beautiful.was_lovely.was_young
alt.that.happiness.remembers.remembers.remembers
alt.soft.memory.lingers.wafts.lives_again
alt.longed_for.daylight.wait.wait.wait
alt.new.life.ponder.think_of.long_for
alt.willful.surrender.avoid.avoid.avoid
alt.nighttime.memory.will_be.shall_be.is
alt.new.day.will_begin.will_start.will_be
alt.my.fur.touch.feel.stroke
alt.my.persona.leave.depart.disappear
alt.alone.person.remember.remember.remember
alt.sunny.days.I_had.I-lived.I_was
alt.profound.understanding.will_have.will_acquire.will_own
alt.new.day.has_begun.is.is

This newsgroup plays with the preponderance of newsgroups named alt.os.windows95.crash.crash.crash, alt.plastic.utensils.spork.spork.spork, and the ever-popular alt.dinosaur.barney.die.die.die.

E-mail: The True E-epistolary Style

E-mail is the oldest form of communication on the Internet, dating back to the mid-sixties. By 1984 the possibility of e-mail for the near-average citizen was a reality, as evidenced by the publication of a pamphlet explaining what e-mail is and how it can be used, titled "Understanding Electronic Mail." This pamphlet explains that the Apple III "can handle almost any electronic mail function" (Naegele 31). Instead of comparing e-mail to letter-writing, Naegele links it strongly to telegraphs, as performing similar functions—transmission of text without reliance on a physical courier. A more recent (1994) book compares e-mail to the fax machine as both take normal information and transmit it over telephone lines (LaQuey 46).

This seniority of e-mail over other forms of communication on-line, and the lack of substantive change since its inception (though it can now carry with it images, files, and even webpages in some cases, it at heart is still much the same) have allowed it to take on a certain number of styles that participants employ when writing e-mail. Many e-mails serve the function of 'post-it' notes for passing on a small tidbit of information, a website address, a news story or a short joke. Unpleasant elements of snail-mail (normal mail), such as junk mail (spam) or various pyramid schemes and chain letters have found new life in the e-mail format, where the price of sending blanket messages is no longer a limiting factor.

Improving technologies and cheaper access have increased the normal speed of response to e-mails such that occasionally interlocutors can approach the discussion speed of real-time chatting through e-mail, but this is usually such a hassle that the participants will arrange to meet in an on-line chat forum.

E-mail even has garnered books that depart from the standard Internet help books. There are two books I have seen on writing styles for effective e-mail ([The Elements of E-mail Style](#), [The 3 Rs of E-mail: Risks, Rights, and Responsibility](#)) which promise to give advice on tone, style, typography, formality, and even the politics of e-mail. One on-line style guide, www.fontsite.com/Pages/WritingStyle/W&S1297.html, discusses the origination of the brief,

curt style of much e-mail writing with the early, slow and costly modems. This then gives a few guidelines on good e-mail writing, with tips such as avoiding using all uppercase (it is interpreted as shouting), use of blank lines to separate paragraphs (also seen in webpages), and when to use text-decoration to emphasize a word. A third book e-mail has to its name is actually a work of fiction. Stephanie Fletcher's E-mail: A Love Story shows that e-mail can be a purely epistolary media, for she writes an epistolary novel in which the letters appear as printed out e-mails and newsgroup-like postings.

E-mail, similar to newsgroups, has its own range of writing styles associated with it. Though they share some aspects of on-line and real-life conversation, they nevertheless remain mostly identifiable as written texts.

The 'Spoken' Areas of the Internet

Scholarly work on the Internet has focused on its older media, mainly the newsgroups and e-mail. Mass-media attention is aimed at the more visual web. Real-time chat rooms, though they have received some attention from more alternate sources, have not been studied or given any major attention. These chat rooms form the most purely verbal sections of the Internet today. Conversation in chat rooms travel at very fast speeds, limited mainly by typing skills (or lack thereof) and the occasional lag caused by too many participants on one chat network at the same time. All participants in the conversation are 'present', as opposed to previous methods of communication discussed in which the participants read and post at their leisure. The quasi-conversational turn-taking seen in e-mail and newsgroups is seen in real-time chat at much higher speeds. Herein lies the danger—in IRC, though this turn-taking is sped up to near conversational speeds, it is not the same. In IRC, when a speaker is interrupted mid-sentence, it is a voluntary event; it is because during the course of his or her typing of the original thought, an event or topic-change in the room supercedes the comment to be made, and the participant decides to change his or her own sentence in mid-stream, such as seen here:

[22:55] <Boat> QL: they've got direct flights at times I like. I probably could have done Brisih Air twich, or JAL twice, but htis [*sic*] works better. (/me listens)

#Callahans, Nov 10 1998

In #Callahans, there is a tradition that when someone is making a toast, they get the total attention of everyone in the room. In this case, Boat was discussing airline prices with another

participant when another participant began the ritual actions associated with making a toast. The "/me listens" is the commands one would type for the persona to 'perform' the act of listening. Boat is presuming the audience's familiarity with the commands of the medium in typing this. In the #Poetry room, I see (and struggle against) a more 'normal' form of interruption. Normal in the sense that the speaker is not expecting to be interrupted, and it is by no means voluntary. This is possible here because the 'reading' of poems in this chat room, so as to preserve line breaks and other formatting, takes more than one utterance. This excerpt from #Poetry shows both a normally formatted poem, interrupted by the renren and the entrance of mercury, and a one-utterance, non-interruptible poem further down.

[23:15] <Grrl> Specifics
[23:15] <rennie> I wanna be a grrrrrrrl when I grow down
[...]
[23:15] <Grrl> -
[23:15] <Grrl> -
[23:15] <Grrl> -
[23:15] <Grrl> You asked me
[23:15] <Grrl> What would make me smile
[23:15] <Grrl> All I can think of is I don't know
[23:15] <Grrl> Specifics of happiness
[23:15] <Grrl> I just know that love at first sight
[23:15] <Grrl> is a relationship sweater
[23:15] <Grrl> that soon gets replaced
[23:16] <Grrl> by a tee shirt with a hole in the chest.
[23:16] <Grrl> -
[23:16] <Grrl> and you don't call anymore
[23:16] <Grrl> My phone, a useless distant planet
[23:16] <Grrl> My body becomes another still life
[23:16] <Grrl> propped against the fading peach canvas
[23:16] <Grrl> Slouched like dirty laundry
[23:16] <Grrl> My head in my hands
[23:16] <Grrl> holding heavy fruit, no longer sweet
[23:16] <Grrl> -
[23:16] <Grrl> our hands entwined/roots
[23:16] <Grrl> growing into strong limbs
[23:16] <Grrl> The fruit of our labor
[23:16] <Grrl> Heavy meat
[23:16] <Grrl> Now fAlbert into someone else's garden.
[23:16] <Grrl> -
[23:16] <Grrl> HBW 1/7/98
[...]
[23:17] <Galaxy> My name is mine / not yours / my friend's name is my friend's
/ not yours / the stealing of identity / can bring downfall to the entity / that is a
frightened girl / intimidated by the world / a girl afraid / like a girl betrayed / by
one she does not know

#Poetry, Jan 07, 1999.

This odd turn-taking, where a user can sacrifice aesthetics for non-interruptibility, is at a basic level different from normal, verbal turn-taking, though they often can produce similar results.

Another surface similarity between the two is the appearance of the rehearsed aspects of normal conversation (Gumperz 133-4). These elements, such as greetings and partings, are seen in chat as well as other forms of on-line communication. Many of these traditional conversational interchanges have been digitized into abbreviations such as TTFN (Ta-ta for now), TTYL (Talk to you later), and many others. In real-time chat and MUD environments, these formalized exchanges are exaggerated to ridiculousness with the use of aliases. Aliases are simple, easy to remember, user-defined commands which perform more complex actions. A user commonly programs these to reduce typing speed on actions which are done repeatedly—especially in MUD situations, where typing speed can save your character's life. In #Callahans, as previously noted, there is the tradition of making toasts. Many of the patrons have created short aliases of the form '/l', which creates the action of the persona listening to the toast being made.

The reduced amount of punctuation in real-time chat situations is an important link between chat and normal conversation. Outside of Red Skelton sketches, we do not indicate where punctuation in our standard utterances falls. Likewise in IRC, only punctuation used to give meaning to the sentences or maintain basic grammatical structure is carried over. Periods at the end of sentences and capitalization at the beginning is a rarity. Question marks and exclamation marks, naturally, appear to replace the lack of intonation. The capitalization and punctuation are, of course, inherent in the media. When one begins talking, it is the beginning of a sentence, and when one finishes and presses 'Enter,' it is the end.

The idea of conversational cohesion and structure above the sentence level, as discussed in the previous chapter, are both seen in on-line conversation as they are in verbal conversation. Threads in newsgroups, subject lines in e-mails, and the more natural flow of conversation in chat rooms all show some evidence of the participants maintaining topical cohesion. In this example, the conversation is moving slowly because everyone is typing large comments, such that the interlocutors have to give many normal signals to show which earlier topic they are referring to:

<Jessie Burke> Troy, On jobs. yes, it will be essential.

Intonation from verbal conversation has proven to be, as Gumperz suggested (111), vital to the meaning of certain words when the context is ambiguous. On-line, interlocutors use text decoration to convey meaning in the absence of verbal cues.

On the spectrum between written and verbal, it appears that chat rooms and similar real-time interactions on-line offer what can best be described as the conversational end. However, the phenomenon of posted text that we saw with websites recurs in chat rooms as well. The poems in the #Poetry room, though the participants refer to it as 'reading' a poem, are nothing more than text files being sent to the chat room in most cases.

Conclusion

Websites offered primarily written texts, but some had interactive bulletin boards or even chat rooms built-in. Newsgroups and e-mail partook of both written epistolary style and some conversational conventions. Chat rooms and MUDs are mostly home to real-time conversation, but they also have instances of merely posted text. The scale of written to verbal offers a decent general framework to view Internet discourse as, but it falls apart under scrutiny.

Chapter 3: Through the Looking Glass

Perhaps we have not been approaching this question appropriately—we have been placing Internet discourse within pre-existing frameworks. These have helped us understand discourse on-line, but we keep returning to focus on not how well they match, but how Internet discourse fails to be so easily constrained. In this chapter, I have changed tactics—I will investigate Internet dialogue from perhaps the only angle that is appropriate for this new medium—the perception of those using the medium. In "Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace," Marcos Novak poses this riddle:

"If a body of data seen one way conveys different information than the same body of data seen another way, what is the additional information provided by one form that is not provided by the other? Clearly, the answer is *pattern*, that is, *perceived* structure. And if different representations provide different information, how do we choose representations? (Novak, in Benedikt, 235)

This chapter looks through the eyes of three different groups of people at what is taking place on-line in order to break down where only perceived structure is and what is at the heart of information traded in conversations on the Internet.

Looking in from Outside

The first relevant view is that of someone looking in from outside, a non-participant or a first-time participant who is not versed in the 'literacy' of interacting in on-line environments. This view will help us understand the qualitatively different experiences and perceptions of active participants later on.

When asked why they do not participate in chat rooms, many people will reply with comments such as these:

<Jessica Jakubowski> i have many friends who like to meet people online, but i'm not into that, personally. I think it's kinda creepy because you really have no idea if people are telling the truth or not
<Julie Sederholm> I have never been involved in a chat room situation-I think it's creepy too!!
DIWE Conversation, TLC, 1/21/99

The irony of this situation is that it took place in a chat room where participants were asked to discuss their interactions with computers. These interlocutors continued explaining their fear of chat rooms as being largely based on the lack of identity of the other participants. These same

people, however, had no difficulty with using e-mail, both with people they have known previously and with people they only know via e-mail. The fear over the lack of identity is something that experienced participants have no concept of—they have adapted to the situation, and usually take advantage of it.

Another problem the first-time user or onlooker experiences is that he or she realizes their lack of literacy in the various media of real-time textual communications. The statements appear disjointed, random, or otherwise simply incomprehensible. By far the best description of this effect that I have found in linguistics is the aforementioned research by Branca Telles Ribeiro. Ribeiro explores the seemingly random utterances by a patient in a Brazilian psychiatric institute using frame analysis. She finds that the patient, Dona Jurema, is speaking perfectly coherently, only in multiple frames (Tannen:1993 7), exactly what the de-contextualized utterances of a chat room participant involved in possibly a second chat room and a few private conversations concurrently would appear as. Psychotic discourse was defined as when "the patient does not follow the turn-taking rules ... the patient fails to refer to what the doctor is talking about. In addition, ... the patient brings in several imaginary addressees who are not legitimated or ratified by the doctor. ... there is only a small degree, if any, of a jointly accomplished interaction" (79). Ribeiro dramatically revises this with her research using frames. She shows that the various personalities that Dona Jurema has taken on provide relevant responses at all times during the interview (100). Outside of chat rooms, without even the multiple channels of conversation often found with them we can see a prime example of 'psychotic' discourse on-line. In the following example, the author uses three separate voices to portray the events most accurately. The narrator, with help from some imaginary secondary characters, describes the setting and action. Susan is the author, but cannot herself speak the story. Gary and the older woman are the rational speakers who explain the situation to the audience:

From: Susy
Newsgroups: alt.callahans
Subject: DANGER ROOM: Bad Mother!!
Date: Tue, 02 Mar 1999 13:20:21 -0500

The Patrons are startled as the front door slams open & Susy flies in. Those few extremely keen-sighted patrons are actually able to catch the strange expression on her face - a mixture of sorrow & anger - as she whips past the bar & snags the keys to the Danger Room. The Danger Room?
But she's going in there *alone....*!

Those Patrons curious enuf creep over to the door - but, a few moments later

discover they didn't need to leave their comfortable seats.

"You stupid bitch!" they hear Susy shriek. It's audible throughout the bar. Cursing?!? *Susy*!?! "What, did you think your kid was *that* special? That you didn't have to bother with her teeth? With your family history, you thought you could just, what? Let her slide?! When did you get your brain replaced by cauliflower?? You know damned well baby teeth aren't expendable - and even if they are, you of all people should know how terrible children's dentistry is!"

"But," comes the weak reply, "the rest of her teeth were *beautiful*! She had some stains in the front - I was working on those, I figured that *that* was the problem! Even the pediatrician didn't catch the really bad one in the back-" She is cut off by the loud, strident voice

"You were just lazy! You were glad you could get her back to sleep with nursing - you just didn't let yourself think of what the milk would do!"

"But it didn't hurt the *lower* teeth, and she wasn't nursing *while* she was asleep - I thought she'd swallow what was in her mouth!" She is answered now not by a shout, but a growl.

"You're just lucky she's not in pain now. And she'd better not suffer after the operation, either."

There is nothing but sobs for awhile, which most of the Patrons try to ignore, out of both politeness & embarrassment.

Bill comes into the Bar, accompanied by a slender, elegant-but-cute older woman with a chic short hair-do and casual but meticulous clothing. She has a worried (but wondrous) expression on her face. As if by mental telepathy, Bill goes right to the Danger Room. The woman addresses the room in a soft but compelling tone. "I'm Susy's mother. I told her it wasn't her fault - Bill did, too, of course - but, you know Susy - or perhaps it's mothers in general - " a rueful, knowing smile.

"She just can't accept it." At the blank looks before her, she blinks & explains. "I thought you all must have found out by now - Beth's top two back molars have been badly damaged by all the breast milk at night. She needs her teeth capped, and, since little children tend to fight the dentist, she's going to have to have out-patient surgery. Susy is, understandably, a little upset right now."

Bill has managed to get Susy to open the door, but, as the Patrons can see, she's not very happy to come out & face everyone.

This reads like a chapter from a book, a narrative story. Remember, however, that this is a message from one person conveying the event, not from three different people conveying the same event. It is not a story in the traditional sense, but closer to a short speech in nature, if not appearance.

Others have also noted this psychotic aspect to on-line discourse; "Cyberspace is the name for such a psychotic environment, where the boundaries between wish and reality are blurred." says Peter Weibel in 'Virtual worlds: the emperor's new bodies', (Hattinger, 190). It

has been my experience that there is a chasm of difference between interacting with the computer immediately and watching another interact. As simply an observer, one does not follow the conversation as closely as the participant who feels obligated to interact. There is undeniably something more than just the trading of text going on in these interactions—there is mental action interpreting the events for the participants that does not happen for outsiders looking on, or even the participants at a later date. An excerpt from one evening in #Poetry is a prime example of this. The operators were using a message that only they would see, and a participant, "janey," had maneuvered herself into being the object of ridicule for the operators and most of the rest of the chat room in an extended joke. A near complete treatment of this event is in Appendix B. During the event, I and by all evidence other operators were sincerely laughing out loud. Many of us logged (recorded) the event to send to our friends and other operators who had not been present. Upon re-reading the log of the event after the fact, however, it was simply not as funny—'you had to be there' applies on-line as well, it seems. Even though every utterance, and everything that passes for extra-linguistic actions, is present in the log, it does not have the same impact as the event itself.

The Life of the "Newbie"

The view of the inexperienced participant provides a perspective that I can no longer give—the 'newbie' must learn quickly the rules of participation. Different from the outsider or on-looker, the newbie is participating, or trying to, and is usually getting a crash-course in the lingo, manner, and style of on-line interaction. The New Hacker's Dictionary offers us this definition for 'newbie':

[orig. from British public-school and military slang variant of 'new boy'] A Usenet neophyte. This term surfaced in the newsgroup talk.bizarre but is now in wide use. Criteria for being considered a newbie vary wildly; a person can be called a newbie in one newsgroup while remaining a respected regular in another. The label 'newbie' is sometimes applied as a serious insult to a person who has been around Usenet for a long time but who carefully hides all evidence of having a clue. See BIFF.

Newbies often receive special treatment. In MUDs, they often have access to easier areas of the fantasy realm. Both #Callahans and #Poetry are very accepting of newbies and take special care to help them along by showing them where to find answers to their questions and other practices.

Here is an excerpt from a #Poetry conversation where the chat room answers the questions of a new member:

```
[23:04] <_jane> Can ppl just share their poems here? Any time?  
[ ... ]  
[23:04] <_Golf> yes jane  
[23:04] <_jane> Or is there some kind of schedule?  
[ ... ]  
[23:04] <Vladimir> Jane..its a turn taking thing  
[23:04] <GriffJon> jane: well, not quite anytime, there's often a line of poets  
waiting to read, but otherwise, yah, you can read anytime w/ the channel's  
permission
```

Most on-line communities have some agreed-upon document which serves as an effective constitution in some cases, which consists of guidelines, laws, and usually some basic information—a description of the community, and answers to frequently asked questions (or FAQs) The FAQ for #Callahans answers a variety of questions, from the simple "What is #Callahans?" to a finer point of acceptable affection with "Someone said this place isn't #netsex, yet there's so many people snuggling?" (<http://www.unkaphaed.com/callahan/allabout.htm>, 2/27/99). The #Poetry "Official Stuff" page begins with a mission statement and then discusses policies, rules, and some instructions on how to interact (<http://members.tripod.com/~ircpoetry>).

Newbies do not always receive such kind treatment, as the definition indicated, it is often a title of disrespect. Some groups have little or no patience for inexperienced participants, and will verbally harass, or flame, 'newbie-esque' comments that ask basic questions, or questions that are answered in the FAQ. A common abbreviation used to this end is "RTFM", or "Read the Fucking Manual."

Another class of 'newbies' exist; those that have experience with the basics of Internet discourse but who are new to a particular group. Some of these people will 'lurk,' or watch without interacting, until they learn the etiquette for the community:

```
From: "Rhonda Nester"  
Newsgroups: alt.callahans  
Subject: Hello  
This group has been recommended to me by Freyja and Unicron... a couple dear  
friends. So (smile) Hello everyone. As soon as I figure out what I am  
doing in here, I will try to be a little more contributory.
```

These experienced newbies know that there will be peculiarities to the specific culture of the group they are ingratiating themselves into, and use the FAQ, in addition to lurking, to find out these rules of interaction.

The newbie is a bridge between the outsider and the experienced user—they are aware that order exists on many levels in these on-line communities, and are trying to understand this order, which we will now turn our attention to with the knowledge of the experienced user.

From the Inside

What was originally supposed to be an exploration into the nature of what on-line discourse is perceived as has mutated into more of a discussion of the cultural rules of speaking in it, presuming it as an interactive and at times conversational media. This is itself instructive, in that excepting the outsider, interlocutors perceive this as such and move on, quickly, to more immediate concerns of becoming part of the community. Continuing this thread let us now turn to the experience of the accustomed participant who is used to having the media be a transparent conduit for his or her utterances.

These expert users lean towards the conversational metaphor—in recent news, the hacker group Legions of the Underground held a 'press conference' in IRC to discuss the facts and rumors about their recent activity against some Chinese government web servers. Also recently, Linus Torvalds, creator of the Linux operating system, was 'interviewed' in a similar IRC conference. This adoption of conversational events displays the participant perception of a media that is most compatible with conversational comparisons.

We must be ever-wary of this comparison. As I have said before, though the medium lends itself to it, and is often seen by participants, as similar to real-life conversation, there remain subtle differences. A competent conversationalist in real life can be a terrible interlocutor in a chat room, or fail to even participate. In Playing the Future, Douglas Rushkoff discusses a new type of literacy born of MTV and channel-surfing. This emerging literacy is a shift from long, focused attention spans to one of multi-channel, short, individual timeslice-attention more suited to the modern world of the Internet and TV. I have noticed in myself an occasional desire to 'shuffle off this mortal coil' and carry on multiple conversations in real life as I do on-line. This idea resonates with the earlier point in this chapter of something that the participants in a situation perceive and interpret differently from mere on-lookers, or even themselves looking back on the static record of the event. At the instant, the participant has engaged his or her new form of literacy and is interacting on a number of channels within the real-time chat situation, in addition to doing other activities within or without the computer—web surfing, listening to

music, or even watching TV. When the experienced user returns later to look at the log of the event, however, it is a different experience, requiring the more traditional form of literacy. Another instance of this change in literacy in the medium is the ability to understand what other participants are referring to, whether it be in the textual reality or in their physical environment, from context clues. In a chat situation, the speaker may be referring to him- or herself at the keyboard, the persona in the textual reality, or any of the features, real, virtual, or imaginary of either of the locations. In this example, the characters switch between referring to their personae and to their 'meat bodies' in the real world:

```
[23:57] * Don` waits for coffee to finish brewing
[23:57] * Maiden considers turning the tv off, completely disgusted with the
Sharks
[23:57] * Gaijin considers making some tea.
[23:58] * Carolin removes her clothes and tries to warm up in the hot tub
[23:58] * DJKJ grooves to the ballad of orson wellles
#Callahans, Dec 30 1998
```

While this literacy may be of a new media separate from previous forms, these experienced participants treat it, or try to treat it, as a primarily conversational medium. Even in e-mail and newsgroups, conversational elements appear. In IRC and other real-time chat forums, the conversational metaphor is dominant, as with the use of terms like press conferences and interviews describing the events.

Nevertheless, we must also include times when these participants make conscious comments on the media of real-time chats, both pointing out this conversational image and also when the interlocutors notice the differences of the media from conversations:

```
[00:44] <EMPulse_> You don't speak like people do today
[00:44] <EMPulse_> in your poems
[00:45] <Spring> i'm not speaking, i'm typing
#Poetry Oct 10 1998
```

Conclusion

This chapter sought to find the 'truth' in the Internet by seeking how three different classes of users perceive it. The first two types, the outsider and the newbie, gave interesting viewpoints, but the lack of understanding of the media that they share limited their usefulness. The extreme difficulty that the outsider or on-looker has in following the texts led me, in the discussion of the experienced user, to play with the idea of a new form of literacy. True or not, there is undoubtedly some skill born of familiarity with the media. This familiarity correlates to

a common view of real-time chat as near to a conversation, evidenced by both conscious and unconscious treatment of the typing as talking for many users. A possibility for further investigation could take a sampling of data and find which participants used conversational comparisons, then poll the users to determine how long they have been using the Internet, and how long in real-time chat situations, and see if there is a strong correlation.

Conclusions from Part I

Discourse on the Internet is viewable through the lenses of theories which apply to normal discourse, but none of these theories fully captures its essence. Internet discourse seems to be above, on between, written and verbal styles. It partakes of some aspects of both, without being necessarily closer to either one. Different participants see different things in on-line dialogues, though many find conversational metaphors to be more appropriate.

In this first part of my thesis I have tackled the arduous task of defining Internet discourse. I first analyzed it by using some traditional theories of discourse. I then took a step backwards and worked with data from all across the Internet, treating it in the spectrum from written text to verbal conversation. These both showed some wonderful insights into discourse on-line and how it fits within these frameworks, and often more telling, how it utterly fails to do so at times. Still, a definitive explanation of Internet discourse was not forthcoming. The final chapter tried yet another technique—probing the text produced by on-line participants in interactive typing to see their perception of it. Again, we found more diamonds in the rough offering pieces of wisdom on the perception of on-line discourse, which is by its nature only nominally different from the reality of it.

Perhaps the Internet is still in its infancy. It is growing and changing so fast that no definite description of discourse in it is yet possible. IRC is under seven years old at the time of this writing, and its various precursors, such as the Unix 'talk' command allowing two users both logged in to Unix machines to talk one-to-one, is only slightly older in the age of a discourse style such as simple conversation, writing, or even more recent forms of telegraphy.

Or perhaps the Internet allows so many different types of communication, with little or no boundary between them, that one definition simple is not possible. This is a continuation from problems analyzing discourse in real-life—Mandelbrot, famous for his later work coining the term 'fractal,' wrote on information theory and psycholinguistics earlier, and wrote that "human discourse is both something highly structured and something highly unpredictable." (550). Gumperz had a similar statement, saying "Natural speech spoken at normal speed proved too complex for detailed contrastive study" (Gumperz 15). While with Internet discourse we now are not limited by the speed of the dialogue, as the full data transmitted in on-line

conversations is available to us, perfectly recorded and time-stamped, we see that even this is not sufficient to analyze the true entirety of the conversations that take place. The new form of literacy, or merely the skill, of experienced participants allows them to take more information away from these interactional sessions than on-lookers and inexperienced users.

This section has focused on comparing the Internet to pre-existing ideas and has been a good and illuminating exercise in showing us how it can be compared to those ideas. The next part will throw such ideas to the wind, however, and concentrate on the Internet and communication apart from previous ideas. We will see Internet discourse as something inherently new and different, and see how styles and events are developing within it that have no valid connection to previous forms of discourse.

PART II: TYPING AS CONVERSATION

It is a place of effectively infinite space, in which reality is, for the most part, as one pleases. Dragons can lean back pleasantly in arm-chairs with a drink and a cigar and talk with kittens, birds, and a handful of humans. Some of these creatures seen on a day-by-day basis remain legendary, not because of their fantastic appearance but rather because the humans at the keyboards for whom they are the on-line avatars have never been seen by the community in real life. Alice, in Through the Looking-Glass, experiences something quite similar to the shifting realities of the Internet:

'Things flow about so here!' she said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large bright thing, that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a work-box, and was always in the shelf next above the one she was looking at. 'And this one is the most provoking of all—but I'll tell you what—' she added, as a sudden thought struck her, 'I'll follow it up to the very top shelf of all. It'll puzzle it to go through the ceiling, I expect!'

But even this plan failed: the 'thing' went through the ceiling as quietly as possible, as if it were quite used to it.

(Carroll, 104)

The first half of this thesis explored Internet discourse using traditional theories. The rest will now focus on the discourse itself and what is being done with text on the Internet. The places where the data clashed earlier with the theories will now be celebrated and explained.

I will begin with a surgical removal of as many references to real-life comparisons as is possible, explaining some of the basic differences that Internet discourse has from traditional styles. Expanding from this base, I will explore three of the central differences; the fluid nature of 'reality' on-line as governed by speech, the often comical effects of anonymity, and the arguably most unique aspect of on-line discourse, the ability to use multiple channels of completely separated conversations. All of these have varying effects on how people use and perceive language on-line.

Chapter 1: Speaking Outside the Box

Tharon Howard argued for Internet discourse as something new, so distant from normal discourse that to apply the comparisons was to misinterpret the data. This is far too much of a categorical statement. As bandwidth, the amount of data one can transport at a given time, becomes greater and cheaper for even the modem user, actual verbal conversations and even face-to-face videophone interactions are possible and increasingly common—are these too to be not seen as conversational? In IRC, and even e-mail and newsgroups, we have seen varying degrees of participant perception of these media as conversational, and these users expect conversation-style responses out of them. This being said, it should also be equally obvious that despite this common perception, the reality is that these interactional media, while they can often result in conversational appearing dialogues, are simply not conversation. Tone and body language are severely stripped down to the essentials. The method of interaction, as well as the bodies of participants incarnate within it are subject to the laws of grammar, not physics. But still, at what point does the emoticon take on meaning apart from its resemblance to the human face? How much of these interactions are of a new style of discourse rather than merely new usages of intertwining traditional literacies?

The error causing these problems of interpretation is equating being *like* previous methods of communication to *having elements* of them. With the Internet, we have interactional media which have developed out of previous forms, but are as different from these forms as a child from a parent, or a butterfly from a caterpillar. The title of this chapter plays on the corporate-speak of 'thinking outside of the box', which means to say thought that ignores current paradigms in its creative processes. Speaking outside the box is speaking, but in a new fashion, not limited by normal difficulties.

I feel this now gives us the correct view on Internet discourse. It is something absolutely new at heart. This does not mean that it does not bear resemblance to previous media—it does, and we have seen this from many angles already. This allows us to discuss discourse on-line with references to familiar models of normal discourse when appropriate without feeling guilty.

Extra-linguistic Features On-line

Many important elements of normal discourse do not appear on-line at all. Intonation, volume, and other extra-linguistic features are largely absent on-line. They have been replaced by textual decorations and other accepted standards. Shouting has been widely acknowledged and accepted on-line, represented by using all capital letters. It is usually considered rude, but can be used appropriately—much like in real life:

[22:44] * ilianna shuffles her feet...blushes...and shouts "HELLO WOMEN!!!
HY MEN!!!"
#Callahans, Tue Nov 10 1998

Further, non-linguistic cues such as body language are also severely limited—more so than extra-linguistic channels. Participants must take extra effort to employ the on-line equivalents of body-language. Here we see Lidie- and Bekka employing some standard facial expressions using self-descriptions:

[23:28] * Lidie- gives Bekka a dirty look.
[23:28] <Lidie-> i do not have a tattoo!
[...]
[23:28] <Lidie-> oh...
[23:29] <Bekka> Lidie your no fun! :)
[...]
[23:29] <Bekka> Lidie its a song.. and i do know a Lidie who posts on the net.. she really does have a lot of tattoos.. a huge tree of life from her neck down past her behind..
[...]
[23:30] <Lidie-> Bekka: i know
[23:30] <Lidie-> otter sings it all the time.
[23:30] <Bekka> o.k. :)
[23:30] <Jeffrey> Aeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee. . .
[23:30] <'Atos> Bekka - yeah - my mom's name is Lidie and my dad sings that to her to tick her off *grin*
[23:31] * Lidie- giggles.
[23:31] <Bekka> than oh? fozzie bear sings it :)
[23:31] <Jeffrey> Wizaaaard's staff's got a knob on the end, a knob on the end, a knob on the end. . .
[23:31] <Lidie-> he DOES?!?!?!
[23:31] <Bekka> he does
[23:32] <Lidie-> oh.
[23:33] <'Atos> And What he DOES with it is magic...!
#Callahans Mon Nov 02 1998

These are described in sufficient detail to convey what meaning the normal gesture would have in real life. Despite the complications of typing the descriptions, it remains a common practice—it is the most natural and, in many cases, most simple way to convey some messages. Upon closer inspection, this does not seem unusual. Most of the cases in which descriptions are

used would be overly complicated and very awkward if one tried to speak it, instead of perform it.

```
[23:19] * RedFern watches the room thin out and wonders who pumed in the
*declotter*
[23:19] <RedFern> Albert!
[23:20] <kay> hi Albert
[23:20] * Midg huggles Albert with tea and comfort
[23:20] <AlbertS> Hi all
[23:20] <RedFern> pumped/even
[23:20] <AlbertS> Hi RedFern! How ya doing?
[23:20] <HoseH> I missed that topic point
[23:20] * Al adds cornstarch to the room to thicken it
[23:20] <jenk> lo Albert
[23:20] * RedFern shakes her hand...more down than up.
#Callahans Thu Dec 17 22:56:44 1998
```

Particularly of note in this excerpt is Al's statement on adding "cornstarch to the room to thicken it." This use of imagery cannot exist anywhere but within this style of textual reality. It not only is an action that is easier to perform than to describe verbally, it is an act that cannot be performed in real life.

The intentionality of body language as a method to convey meaning has an interesting side-effect. All body language on-line is there to convey specific meaning. This following example has a participant being intentionally rude and abrasive by including actions that, while extant in normal life, are seemingly extraneous on-line. Here, by the fact that they are unnecessary, yet the user went to the trouble of typing them in, it is obvious that he means to comment rudely on the poem that was just read previously:

```
[17:25] * KungFu burps
#Poetry, Fri Mar 05 1999
```

These methods of textual decoration and describing actions are symptoms of a common cause—the requirement to convey nearly all the meaning through text. I say nearly because the audience interpretation brings the statements to life in a way that they do not possess inherently, as discussed with the idea of a new literacy.

The transfer of meaning in on-line discourse places a heavier burden on the audience than conversation in real life tends to. An analogy can be made to webpages. The code of the page is only the hard data—the text, and recommendations to the browser as to how to render this text, as emphasized, quoted, a header, etc.. HTML has grown beyond this to a more exact language now, but this idea remains at the heart. With Internet discourse, the speaker sends the text with

occasional guides framing it as emphasized, quoted, and so on, by using text decorations. This analogy has not been lost on the Internet community. Though in decline, there are occasional uses of parodied HTML tags to frame on-line discourse. In HTML, one has two tags, one to begin a formatting recommendation and another to end it. For example, a block quote as I have been using extensively throughout this paper would be rendered as <blockquote>(text of the blockquote goes here)</blockquote>. Now in these following examples we see this general formatting aped and applied to discourse:

```
[18:13] <Al> <YoungFrankenstein> IT'S ALIIIIIIIVVVVVVEEEEEEE!!!!!!!  
</YoungFrankenstein>  
#Callahans Thu Dec 17 1998
```

```
[22:06] <poet> Anyone want to hear a crappy poem from a man that has the  
intelligence of a fifth grader?  
[22:06] <iQ> hey griff..  
[22:06] <GriffJon> poet: that's what I look for! </sarcasm>  
#Poetry Sat Nov 28 1998
```

```
[10:38] <Grey> <leghorn mode=foghorn>It's a joke, son, I say, a joke. Look at  
me when I'm talkin' to ya, boy...</leghorn>  
#Callahans Tue Mar 09 1999
```

The audience members take the text and the suggestions on how to interpret it and where to place the emphasis and then interpret it as best they can, within the context of the rest of the conversation. This is not at all saying that in normal conversation the audience does not take an active role in interpreting the utterances, but only to say that with on-line conversation, a greater amount of interpretation is required of the hearer.

Differing Media

Another basic break between Internet discourse and normal discourse is simply the method of communication. Internet discourse uses a traditionally written medium, typing, yet it expects conversational output. Typing speed is faster in general than handwriting, but it remains slower and less rich than speech. This speed does not affect how fast the person is processing the conversation, however. The ability arises from this to allow the participant to follow more than one conversation, and interact at a reasonable, native speed with the other users.

Despite constant interaction with so many other people, these other participants remain anonymous—no more than a self-appointed nickname and a personally-generated description.

This effects the dialogue as well, because the only way to know another is through the text they produce. Inversely, the only way to be known is through the text that you produce. The facelessness leads into a variety of new methods of speech play and even identity-play which I will investigate in Part II, Chapter 3.

Perhaps the most lauded difference of conversations on-line is that they take place in environments which are more than imaginary, but yet not quite 'real' either. While we have not truly gotten to Gibson's cyberspace, there is a degree of virtual reality in IRC, and inherent in MUDs, that is deeply intertwined with how participants interact and converse.

Conclusion

The important point made in this chapter is that Internet discourse is an amalgam of new and old. At its center, discourse on-line is new, partaking of new media and developing fresh nuances. Nevertheless, it continues to employ some traditional models of discourse, such as conversation or letter-writing, in parts. I will now pick apart some of the curious aspects of these new media in the next three chapters, exploring the great difference involved when I say that Internet discourse is significantly different from normal discourse.

Chapter 2: Textual Reality

Those who spend an inordinate amount of time connected by modem via telephone lines to virtual spaces often report a peculiar sensation of "thereness"; prowling from one conference to another, eavesdropping on discussions in progress, bears an uncanny resemblance to wandering the hallways of some labyrinthine mansion, poking one's head into room after room.

Mark Dery in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of CyberCulture* 7

Discourse on-line involves more than normal conversational interchanges. Participants also create a reality around them; both to communicate extralinguistic information and in many cases merely to have some place to hang their (virtual) hats:

```
[0:00] * JohnD waves at all as he walks toward the door, he grabs his coat and  
hat and addresses to the room one last time  
#Poetry Tue Dec 09 1997
```

The participants are constantly involved in the formation of their communal reality with subtle acceptance or denial of new features by other personae interacting with the feature, or ignoring it.

We see only very limited forms of this outside of the Internet. Naturally with promises and other illocutionary acts, language is influencing reality. Also within the frame of certain storytelling, the speaker approaches this with imaginative audiences. These real life examples do not give justice to the extent to which the formation of a textual reality is inherent in real-time communications on-line. Textual reality is a form of virtual reality (arguably the only one currently extant) in which the features that a persona interacts with are fully fleshed out in detail by text. Other researchers have called this feature text-based virtual reality, but I find textual reality a more pleasing term. In this chapter, I explore the various types of textual realities we find on the Internet today, with a tip of the hat to recent advances in virtual realities—especially those that allow for interaction.

Intentionality of On-line Textual Reality

Every object, every detail of virtual reality exists by human creation, and usually by design as well. Descriptions of objects mention only the relevant features, leaving the rest up to the imagination of the user. Take these examples of personae introducing objects into a textual reality:

[22:25] * Jeff walks over and strokes the fern's leaf lovingly. [...]
 [22:26] <Lovr> :::pulls out Micro-flamethrower from Utility Thong and torches Fern::
 [22:26] <Lovr> BURN BABY BURN!!!! [...]
 [22:26] <Lovr> :::dances about the remains of the Evil, Wicked, Nasty, Godless plant::
 [22:26] *** drama is now known as audryII
 [22:26] * kay positions the teddy bear between herself and Lovr
 [22:27] <audryII> FEED ME!!!
 [22:27] <Lovr> ***Lovr is now known as Lovr***
 [...]
 [22:27] * kay is feeling less safe by the minute :/
 [22:27] <Bekka> why kay
 [22:27] * Jeff looks around the room for a large man-sized hunk of meat to feed to the big Audrey II.
 [22:28] <kay> violence in Callahan's :/
 [22:28] * DN hides behind the bar [...]
 [22:28] <Lovr> ::blinks in surprise and wonders where the hell the new fern came from::
 #Callahans Thu Nov 05 1998

This example ends with Lovr puzzling over the new *Little Shop of Horrors*-esque plant that appeared after he 'got rid of' the previous plant. The rest of the chat room has accepted this new plant, but the conversation moves on to other topics.

[14:12] * Kate- offers GJ a fresh-brewed cup and page 293.
 [14:12] * GriffJon peeks at page 293 and gives Kate a knowing wink.
 [14:13] <Tinker> p.293 of?
 [14:13] <Kate-> The Tome of BCM -- Black Coffee Magic.
 [14:14] <Tinker> ah.
 [14:14] <Mary> Ah. BCM preceded me.
 [14:14] <Kate-> Mary: Did it? Wow, it does go back a long way. :) (I knew it did, but I wouldn't have thought it preceded your advent.)
 [14:14] <GriffJon> Mary: no, really?!
 [14:15] <Mary> Oh, yeah. In fact, I know it only by repute.
 [14:15] * AlbertS has no lap at the moment, being as I am standing up
 [14:15] * Kate- boggles. Good heavens.
 [14:15] <Mary> Yup, I'm a newbie. :)
 [14:15] * GriffJon shows Mary his Tome of BCM, opening it to page 68
 [14:15] * Kate- tries to remember when it was that we accidentally BCM'ed sparq into a guinea pig. Must've been longer ago than I thought!

This example has two characters referring to an object previously described, but the current crowd is mostly unfamiliar with it, so they explain it briefly. This dramatic change in the reality surrounding us returns us to being children in toy stores—the whole world is for us to play with, and was created solely for that purpose. Chairs on-line exist not as innate, functional furniture,

but as specific invitations to sit down. Here Beatnik summons forth a chair out of thin air (no one had previously referred to it) to provide a seat for Eaelia:

```
[00:01] <Beatnik> Hey, Eaelia.  
[00:01] <Groove> buh bye  
[00:01] * Beatnik bows and removes his hat.  
[00:01] <Eaelia> hai.  
[00:01] <Beatnik> would you like a seat?  
[00:01] <Eaelia> :)  
[00:01] * Beatnik pulls out a chair for Eaelia  
[00:01] <Eaelia> happy channel  
#Poetry Fri Jul 31 23:51:57 1998
```

I have touched upon this type of effect already with intentional actions which in real life would not necessarily carry meaning, but on-line the person went to the specific trouble of typing it in, so it does carry meaning. Here with the surrounding reality, all of the items within it have been purposefully placed into the reality to carry some meaning, used as a crutch for linguistic actions, or performed some function for the community. A common object used to convey meaning on-line as much as it does in real life is the rose. Roses take a variety of forms on-line, ranging from descriptions, such as this:

```
[21:57] * shoot hands kam a bouquet of roses..go ahead, give it to her!!!  
[...]  
[21:58] <shoot> tell me.....i can't stand suspense and mystery...  
[21:58] <MiaMe`> did i already play thatone?  
[21:58] <Kat> Thanks Hoots for the roses.  
[...]  
[21:59] * shoot whispers to kam, the roses r not for u,man,.....they're for her  
...make her blush again!!!!  
[22:00] <Kat> Wall hands MiaMe a bouquet of roses. Flowers tryingto imitate  
her beauty .  
#Poetry Sun Jan 11 1998
```

To more artistic and less linguistic renderings such as this, meant to resemble a horizontal rose (The @ is the bloom):

```
[22:27] <Kermit> -----<---{@  
#Poetry Mon Feb 03 1997
```

In #Callahans, the communally-acknowledged chalkline on the floor in front of the fireplace allows a character to receive the divided attention of the rest of the room and get some weighty matter or celebratable event out in the form of a toast. The action of stepping up to this virtual line sets off the following text in this specific frame, as we see here:

```
[23:45] * LadyF steps to the line.  
[...]  
[23:45] * Jeffrey stops in the middle of a hedgehog thought and listens.
```

[23:45] * `atos cocks an ear in ladyFae's direction
 [23:45] * booker grabs a drink and sits down to listen
 [23:45] * Nance- listens.
 [23:45] <Siril> Not much.
 [23:45] * Raven listens
 [23:45] * Siril tilts an ear.
 [23:46] * wheezie listens
 [23:46] * LdyMsc listens
 [23:46] * LadyF is pretty much incoherent at the moment..more angry and upset than she's been in a very long time.
 [23:47] <LadyF> the situation would take a long time to explain...suffice it to say that she may never be able to forgive someone, not for what they did to her, but for what they did to themselves, and how they involved another person.
 [23:47] <LadyF> I wish I could know whether this will be okay again. Maybe it will all be fine tomorrow. But I doubt it.
 [23:48] <LadyF> To anger, and grief, and learning how to deal with it, when the one you love isn't someone you can love. ****CRASH****
 [23:48] <Crunsh-> ***CRASH***
 [23:48] <Ladybug> >>smash<<
 [23:48] <Jeffrey> ******CRASH*******
 [23:48] <Ghost-> ***crash***
 [23:48] <wheezie> crash
 [23:48] <`atos> ***CRASH!***
 #Callahans Mon Nov 02 1998

Finally, one of my favorite objects in the #Callahans virtual bar, apart from the cheap but unfortunately merely virtual liquor, was our own Wurlitzer jukebox. It is no longer in the bar, but still receives some acknowledgement from the patrons:

[22:58] * Rosy- remembers claudia being here all the time, and jo and gherkin's romance, and jo and james's romance (that was an odd time), and spankyd asking me to work for him *) and the floating dance floor, and the wurlitzer bot, and the very first mike....
 [22:58] <Silver> Rosy: I remember -all- that. Ugh.
 [22:59] * Silver feels old... internetically speaking, of course
 #Callahans Wed Apr 15 1998

Wurlitzer used to be a bot that imitated the jukebox of the same name. It took requests and had a relatively large selection of pre-programmed music to use. This following example was from before the music library was fully implemented, but refers to the code in progress:

*Wurlitzer clicks and begins playing Ode to the Coffee God by the Enslaved Natives
 <Tinktron> If you really must request a song, you can say Wurlitzer, play <song> and that will bypass Mike completely
 <IS> :)
 <Tinktron> However the play soemthing code is not available :)
 #Callahans Sun Feb 11 1996

I see this intentionality of on-line realities in stark contrast to our everyday experience.

Naturally, in real life, a lamp is consciously placed in a room to provide light, and has intentional

aspects to it. This even resonates with the quote that Speaking Machine generated in the preface on the limitations of infinity. However, the difference between the lamp in real life and a lamp in a textual reality are significant. The lamp on-line was created through thought, text, and attention, and was made to fill a specific and immediate need. The real lamp was placed anticipating a general need, and was not generated by the whim of the placer.

This textual reality is virtually borderless—or is it? Admittedly, we have people turning personae into guinea pigs (#Callahans, Tue Mar 16 1999), toads, and inanimate objects alongside discussions of the latest technologies and personal histories within the community. It is similarly true that barring certain social constraints, personae can do and create anything. Nevertheless, even this infinite space can seem limiting. One must still try to fill it with objects which can be a major effort in and of itself. The task of creation remains limited by the extent of each participant's imagination and their background of familiarity with physical structures. The main focus of Novak's article, which has been used throughout this work because of its wide-reaching nature, was based in his own work as an architect, and viewed cyberspace from this physical perspective:

Cyberspace, as a world of our creation, makes us contemplate the possibility that the reality we exist in is already a sort of “cyberspace,” and the difficulties we would have in understanding what is real if such were the case. Architecture, in its strategies for dealing with a constraining reality suggests ways in which the limitations of a fictional reality may be surmounted. (Novak, in Benedikt 250)

Some infinite aspects of textual and virtual realities have been fully accepted into the on-line mentality. The most noticeable is the infinite recursions allowed by most web pages—each web page is linked to other pages, which in turn are linked to further pages, *ad infinitum*. Nested realities, that is, a fully developed reality placed within another like a dollhouse inside a house, are also not out of place on-line. Novak compares this idea of infinities inside others to architecture:

It is possible to envision architecture nested within architecture. Cyberspace itself is architecture, but it also contains architecture, but now without constraint as to phenomenal size. Cities can exist within chambers as chambers may exist within cities. Since cyberspace signifies the classical object yielding to space and relation, all "landscape" is architecture, and the objects scattered upon the landscape are also architecture. Everything that was once closed now unfolds into a place, and everything invites one to enter the worlds within worlds it contains. (ibid)

While the possibilities seem boundless, we must remember that the creations must still be imagined by normal human beings, conditioned by our own perceptions of normal architectures

and physics. Often the apparently wondrous objects and strange events found on-line are not off-the-wall creations, but are made to dramatically break one law of physics or rule of reality. It is not existing outside of the context of these rules, merely breaking them.

An aspect of this textual reality closer to linguistics is the peculiar spontaneous creation of objects by mentioning them and continuing to pay attention to them. Objects in textual reality in IRC is, for all intents and purposes, a fad. Things exist only as long as personae interact with or, to an extent, think about it. Referring to these objects functions in two ways. In normal conversation, reference to the world is an important part of language, and central to the philosophical study of it—utterances are true when they correlate correctly to the world. This reference to extant objects so as to make a statement with a truth value appears on-line as well. However, reference to an object can just as easily call the object into being on-line if it had not been previously introduced into the reality. In #Callahans, some objects are deeply embedded into the chatroom by communal memory. The chalk line and the fireplace, and, naturally, the bar, are static features which participants would agree existed even when no one is in the chat room to interact with them. Other features of #Callahans, such as the above-mentioned jukebox, a hot tub, and other various amenities, exist for a long time, but fade into the background as the crowd changes over the years. Occasionally older members will gather in significant numbers and resurrect from their memories some of these items, such as above with Wurlitzer, or here:

```
[10:10] * David-- misses Orac.  
[...]  
[10:11] <David--> Kate: Most of the regulars have no idea of Orac's connection  
to #c's history. I think we are getting old. :)  
[...]  
[10:12] * Xfire remembers the bot orac.  
[..]  
[10:22] * GriffJon remembers the EFnet bridge Orac. And the fun of  
teleportation...  
#Callahans Wed Mar 17 1999
```

Language is creating reality without even specifically concentrating on doing that in IRC. Truth values become subjective, relative to each participant as he or she accepts or rejects introduced objects.

Other Textual Realities

This textual reality is seen primarily in IRC and some newsgroups. Other virtual realities tend to be less spontaneous and more planned. MUDs (Multi-User Domains), for example, are

designed ahead of time, room by room, with descriptions and objects specific to each room. Some MUDs, such as the famous LambdaMOO, allow users the ability to create objects, but this creation requires actual effort using a programming language, not just mentioning it, as in IRC. Most MUDs restrict the creative process to highly experienced veterans of the MUD. The design of reality here is mostly constrained, not by imagination, but by the limitations of the program running the MUD. Some social rules still apply—senior MUD users rarely appreciate anachronistic designs, such as modern technology in a Tolkien-esque fantasy MUD. Like IRC, MUDs are purely textual in nature, but they tend to be oriented towards achieving some goal with the persona beyond social interactions. One can talk on a MUD OOC, or Out Of Character, to other participants. This is to say that the personae, within the MUD, are expected to be in character, speaking and acting in correspondence with the style of the MUD. The personae may choose to speak outside of this character, but that only takes one mask off—there is still the character of the persona separate from the person.

There is a danger in this more structured reality. In IRC, the majority of the reality is approved or discarded by the participants, and occasionally enforced by operators kicking offending users out. MUD environments open to user modification like LambdaMOO are open as well to user abuse. An historic event in the social history of the Internet is the first virtual rape, which occurred on LambdaMOO. I refer you to Julian Dibbell's article "A Rape in Cyberspace" at <http://www.levity.com/julian/bungle.html> [Last accessed 3-23-1999] for a fuller treatment. The important aspect for this discussion is the fact that Mr. Bungle has programmed a device that allowed him to control the personae of other participants. The human owners of these personae could of course leave the computer, turn it off and unplug the modem line, but this would leave their personae still under the diabolical control of Mr. Bungle. This rape was textual in nature, but this only slightly dampened its impact. It had deep emotional impacts on those victimized. Dibbell explains the power of the virtual experience as "neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but nonetheless profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally *true*." (italics his). This rape shook the fuzzy foundations of this community, propelling it to a new height of self-government in the long run, but not without serious repercussions.

Virtual Realities

Reality is a dangerous toy to play with, but it is now becoming a popular medium. Recent technologies are trying to raise the base level from text to visual arenas with VRML, Virtual Reality Modeling Language, and visual, interactive softwares such as The Palace and SCOL. These are by far less widespread than the more bandwidth and old-computer friendly text-based virtual realities. The Palace and SCOL, along with a handful of other programs, allow users to interact in a graphical and often pseudo-three dimensional environment. These share a symbiotic relationship with the cyberpunk genre of science fiction, trading ideas and inspirations. Black Sun Interactive, a company developing this type of software took its name from a location in Neal Stephenson's cyberpunk novel, Snow Crash (<http://www3.zdnet.com/products/vrmluser/perspectives/mp.030796.html> [Last accessed 3-23-1999]). I expect these to become standard for what we now use IRC and MUDs for when the technology gets sufficiently advanced to create the fantastical events that our words and imagination now manage. The other type of virtual reality, using the Internet to allow audio and even video interactions between physically separated parties will become much more popular when bandwidth becomes less of an issue, but the lack of anonymity and the more immediate nature of live video will limit its popularity. These interactions will not replace the niche that textual realities have found.

VRML is an interesting development. It is designed to provide an easy-to-use interface to work in a three dimensional environment. Some programs allow it to be used as above, with multiple users, but mostly it has been used to provide artistic animations and create unique, one-person environments for exploration. VRML appears very high-tech, but in fact when one looks under the hood, the heart of VRML is text:

```
Translation { translation 0 .25 0 }
Separator {
DEF a Rotation { rotation 0 0 -1 .5 }
Cylinder { height .6 radius .05 }
```

This sample of the VRML language defines cylinders being transformed and rotated. Even this complicated and popular virtual reality is based in text descriptions. Further, it is boggling but important to remember that everything on-line, from text to graphics to full-motion, live video, is nothing more than binary ones and zeros as it moves across the Internet and down phone lines.

I have been focusing on the 'background' reality of these various virtual realities, but there is another important aspect—the user, present as a persona or avatar. The persona is as much a part of the reality as the inanimate objects, and is often the only aspect of the reality that the user has absolute control over. The alt.callahans newsgroup, claiming to be "a newsgroup which operates under a Virtual Reality (VR) conceit. Many of the people who post here do so in present tense, third person descriptions of themselves" (<http://www.ice.net/~kwalsh/allabout.txt>). This file, the Allabout, introduces the new user to the peculiarities first by having a blue unicorn explain the newsgroup in a very conversational style:

Welcome to alt.callahans, traveller. I'm Taldin, resident Blue Unicorn and eternal Patron. Basically, the Place here on the Net is loosely based on the Callahan's Place books by Spider Robinson; it used to be more like the books, but has changed in the course of over four years of operation. Like Callahan's in the books, we have a few customs; these are customs to work with, not rules to live by. You don't HAVE to read the books before saying anything; even I hadn't read them before joining in the fun.

After more of this introduction, Taldin grounds the user back in reality:

... he walks by one of the tables, with a peculiar looking lamp hung above it. The effect of the light is to blur the humanoid unicorn form about him, leaving a young man in the same clothes in its place. "Whups. That reminds me; this thing here is the Light of Reality, or LoR. This Place is a virtual space, yes, and open to flights of fancy and fantasy, but the key thing to remember is that it is mostly for reality. Real live people with real life thoughts." The young man looks back at you. "Be yourself, be what you feel you should have been, had you had a choice, but above all, be considerate of others

Most personae one encounters are non-defined, neither the name nor the actions indicate that it is any specific thing. However, many people choose to take on animal or other non-human forms, not to mention a wide variety of alternate human forms with their personae. In #Callahans, we have birds, horses, many cats, two griffons, dragons, and all sort of miscellaneous fantastic creatures. These people use their personae to engage in speech play and interact differently from standard nondescript or human personae, as we see in the following examples. These have been severely cut down from their original size to isolate the play. The reader should realize that many conversations were going on among members of the chat room, some even involving these participants.

[00:14] * Raven tickles GJ's ear
[00:15] * GriffJon twitches his ear uncontrollably.Hey!
[00:15] * Raven WingfeatehrTickle(TM) GJ's neck
[00:16] * GriffJon is being more and more tempted to have a bit of a late night snack...
[00:22] <Tess> Griff: What snack are you thinking of?

[00:23] <KCat> Trinker: he is especially talented
 [00:23] <GriffJon> Tess: I was pondering a quick raven on a feather-decorated platter. I think that would reduce the amount of tickling going on on my ear.
 [00:23] * Raven offers the patrons slices of fresh baked banana bread
 [00:23] * Raven giggles and tickles GJ some more
 [00:24] <Shade> I'll have some banana bread, please :-)
 [00:24] * Tinker accepts the bananabread with thanks.
 [00:24] * GriffJon twitches his ears somewhat fierce
 [...]
 [00:27] * Raven flies up to the chandelier
 [00:27] <GriffJon> darnit!
 [00:27] * GriffJon looks up towards the chandelier
 [00:27] * Raven lol from the celing
 [00:27] * Raven waves
 [00:27] <GriffJon> It's too crowded in here for me to flap up there.
 #Callahans Sat Mar 20 1999

This play is often done to pass the time, and simple play around when one is bored with the current conversation or is just in the mood to goof off. Cat role-playing is often rampant in #Callahans, even to the point of having the robotic pet MaxCat.

[23:52] * `atos searches the pockets of her cowl and discovers some catnip
 [23:52] * kitty rubs against Ghost's ankles and looks puzzled at the question
 [23:52] * `atos offers the treat to Jenkitty
 [23:53] * kitty sniffsthe catnip, snorts the catnip, and inhales than's arm
 [...]
 [23:56] * kitty rolls onto her back and playfully swats at Ghost
 [23:57] * Ghost- pounces kitty, rolls over with her a few times, then playfully runs behind a chair and pretends to hide
 [00:00] * Ghost- runs out from behind the chair and bats at Kitty's tail
 [00:06] * kitty nips Ghost's tail and dances maniacally
 #Callahans Mon Nov 02 1998

This extended role-playing stretched over a few toasts (one serious one on the suicide of a friend a participant). The cat personae engaged in these conversations. Kitty had had a similar experience and offered sympathy to the toaster, breaking character more than once in doing so. Also found in this event is the ability for someone using a human persona to engage in the fun:

[00:06] * Jeffrey morphs into a small black kitty with white paws and chin.
 [00:07] * Jeffrey crawls cutely across the bartop, batting at his reflection in bottles.
 [00:07] * kitty paints a purple goatee on Jeffrey's small white chin
 [00:07] * LdyMsc flicks a paper ball at Geoff
 [00:08] * Jeffrey *adorably* wipes away the goatee with his paws, and lies on his back, batting the ball up in the air.
 [00:08] * kitty throws up a hairball next to Jeffrey
 [00:08] * Jeffrey cutely ignores this. :)
 [00:09] * Jeffrey assumes a dramatic (yet cute) pose upon the bartop, rears back on his haunches, and thunders:
 [00:09] <Jeffrey> mew.
 [00:09] * MCheif awwwwwwww
 [00:09] <MCheif> awwwwwwww

[00:10] * Jeffrey remorphs into a big, ungainly human and falls off the bartop.
[00:10] <Jeffrey> *THUD* Ow!

One need merely to state a change in the persona and the liquid nature of the reality allows you to enter into the play. If one wants to make the change to their persona slightly more permanent, one can change the nickname referring to the persona to reflect the change by modifying the public announcements of actions. In this example, it is not so much a taking on of fantastic attributes as it is trading around nicknames. Notice that this took place on Halloween...

[11:06] <Kate-> Hello, GJ... be warned. All are not as they seem.
[11:07] *** Bill2 is now known as Rosy
[11:07] *** TeeVee is now known as Kate_
[11:07] <Rosy> whew *)
[11:07] <Pern> ah, THERE you are Doc.
[11:07] * Pern rubs up against Doc's leg
[11:07] * Kate- looks over at Kate_
[11:07] * MaxCat gets an upset look on his face.
[11:07] * Kate_ looks back at Kate-
[11:07] * Pern bites Doc's toes
[11:07] * GriffJon looks at the Kates.
[...]
[11:08] *** Credo is now known as Claudia-
[11:08] * Claudia- screams!
[11:08] * Pern looks up at Doc. "Come my dear, it's not so bad."
[11:09] * David-- throws himself on the PVindaloo.
[11:09] *** bill2 is now known as MaxCat
[...]
[11:09] <Claudia-> Kate: So who you gonna kiss?
[11:09] *** David-- is now known as Seven
[11:09] * Kate_ throws Grey to the ground and sticks her tongue
in his mouth.
[11:10] * Seven smiles at Kate.
[...]
[11:11] * Rosy drags bill off into the LoR *)
[11:12] *** Pern is now known as Bill
[11:12] *** Doc is now known as PV
[11:12] <PV> Whew...
[11:12] * Bill2 really *is* Bill2 this time. :-)
[11:12] *** Claudia- is now known as Kate-
[11:12] <PV> What a set of morph effects THAT was...
[11:12] *** Seven is now known as David--
[11:12] * Kate- reclaims her identity.
[11:12] * Kate_ looks at Kate-
#Callahans Fri Oct 31 1997

The form of the persona frames much of the discourse they produce. Very few social rules apply to what one can do with their own persona, unlike with the rest of the textual reality, where the participants must acknowledge items for them to exist.

Conclusion

The bizarre nature of textual realities is interwoven with the discourse style on-line. In IRC, there is no worry about how the words match the world as there is in philosophy. The world is words. In other virtual realities, there tend to be more definition of what is permissible and what is not. MUDs have extensive programs on what is possible within their reality. Even in more complex virtual realities, such as VRML, it is at heart words that bring objects into being. It is of the utmost importance to understand this as an integral part of the discourse style, as experienced users have become familiar with this and are quite adept at producing as well as following this liquid flow of reality at the beck and call of their words.

Chapter 3: Games People Play

For many, the Internet is a large playground with few if any set rules; anonymity allows an escape from responsibility. Even with more mature users, play on-line serves an equal role as off-line in community and friend making. Jokes are told on-line:

[22:17] * DN clears his throat to tell a story dredged up from the past...
[22:18] <DN> this is about a comedian fired from the La Bamba Comedy Club
[22:18] <DN> the La Bamba was famous for catering to deaf patrons...
[22:19] <DN> they insisted all comedians who worked there have a joke tattooed on their right knee, which they could project on to a screen for the deaf audience members to read
[22:19] <DN> sort of a knee-joke reaction...
[22:19] * Ksa lobs a single peanut at DN's head, where it hovers like a Damoclean sword.

#Callahans has a tradition of horrible puns, as evidenced above. On high-energy nights, the entire chat room will get involved, unlike the above example, where a lot of 'noise' of other conversations was cut out. These pun-wars are less common now that there are usually larger crowds than there historically have been, but nevertheless they do occasionally take place. Truly wretched puns are rewarded with a hail of virtual peanuts upon the head of the offender, following a tradition carried over from the original books:

[22:22] <Gru> Puns are underfoot and well in hand
[22:22] <Sandy> Pix: I finger I can probably get in one good one.
[22:22] <Carolin> Ladybug: yep. I'm falling asleep as I sit here, and I have a long day tomorrow
[22:22] <Crunsh> Just don't let em go to your head
[22:22] <Sandy> Nite Carol.
[22:22] <Ghost-> Gmyru: so you are an anatomy pundit?
[22:23] <Ladybug> Ah, rest well, Carol. G'night.
[22:23] <GriffJon> Sandy: well, just elbow in and say it!
[22:23] <Mary> GriffJon: Have you tried with all your might and main yet?
[22:23] <Carolin> goodnight folks
[22:24] *** Carolin has quit IRC (Bye ☐)
[22:24] <Gru> Yeah Griff put your dos into it
[22:24] <Pixld-> ok, we've nailed all the hand puns, what part are we doing necks?
[22:24] * MaxCat is sorry to see Carolin go.
[22:24] * Pixld- is with max on that one
[22:24] <GriffJon> Pix: are we back to torso puns?
[22:24] <Ladybug> Back to back body parts.
[22:24] <Pixld-> griff: chest say the word and we'll be there
[22:25] <Sandy> Eye'm not sure if it fits.
[22:25] * Stormy brains Pixel with the Sledgehammer of Percussive Maintenance.
[22:25] *** Mary has left IRC
[22:25] <Ladybug> Sandygyps: It's right on the nose.

[22:25] * MaxCat patiently waits for Mary to return.
 [22:25] <GriffJon> Pix: we be-lung there, I think.
 [22:25] <GriffJon> Pix: live and let liver, what I say.
 [22:25] <Gru> At least in the right neck of the woods
 [22:26] <Sandy> Are you sure you can stomach it?
 [22:26] <Stormy> They are getting pretty bile.
 [22:26] <Ladybug> You've got a lot of gall.
 [22:26] <GriffJon> Gmy: it's breast if we stay on similar topics
 [22:26] <Tinker> this is really iliac!
 [22:26] * Ghost- is really getting steamed at these puns and is pondering venting his spleen
 [22:26] <Ladybug> Aorta change the subject.
 [22:27] <GriffJon> I don't have the heart to puncture these dreams
 [22:27] <Sandy> Shooting from the hip now are we?
 [22:27] <Pixld-> sandy: if I put my heart into it, I think aorta be able to pump out some puns in this vein
 [22:27] <Crunsh> kidney a break
 [22:27] <GriffJon> B'fly: aw, you got that out of the appendix to the books!
 [22:27] <Tinker> it's colon down here, how's your Stormy?

The #Poetry chat room patrons will often engage in poetry related games—the most popular being 3/3 (known as Da' Game in #Poetry), where one gives the player three words that must be used, and three words that cannot be used in an improvised poem. These games server as social cement and even allow for some degree of friendly competition, much as game play works in real life:

[22:13] * quacky is gonna threaten "da game" in a moment if no poetry is forthcoming
 [22:14] * quacky starts to look up hard words
 [22:15] <that> pedantic
 [22:15] * brianski wonders what "da game" is...
 [22:16] <quacky> perestroika
 [22:16] <quacky> and peerless
 [22:16] <brian> bummer
 [22:16] <quacky> no the, and.of
 [22:17] <brian> quacky - what's "da game", eh?
 [22:18] <quacky> bri: improv poetry.. use the p words not the other three .. write one now :)
 [22:19] * quacky waits
 [22:19] * brian passes
 [22:21] <quacky> Bri: you get 3 words to use (the p words in this case: pedantic, perestroika, peerless) and 3 you may not use (the,and,of) and you write an improv poem .. it's fun easy, impresses the neighbours
 [22:22] <quacky> and we won't laugh at you (not so you could hear anyways) :)
 [22:22] * brian isn't a poet, he just plays one on tv... plus im way too stoned for anything that complicated ;-/ (sheepish grin)
 [22:23] <that> In a pedantic moment/with thoughts of perestroika present/a yankee dime moment came to mind/peerless in ability to please/he struck and struck again/till all resistance left/he rolled to his side/she thought jewelry...fin
 #Poetry Mon Dec 14 1998

Some on-line communities exist primarily as loci for game-play, the social aspects are secondary at best. MUDs are naturally like this in most cases (LambdaMOO aside), but in IRC role-playing and other games also take place in special rooms. Even in these game-oriented chat rooms, regulars exist and communities are formed, but the community is formed around the game, as opposed to other rooms, where the games often form out of the community.

Participants on-line also engage in playing with the peculiarities of the media. By taking artifices such as on-line abbreviations, some use these for play, creating 'abbreviations' such as:

```
[11:30] * shadow is  
ROTFLHAOSTCFNARSPEIGCWUTNWLPTACTMWHSTBACWA  
[11:31] * shadow is Rolling On The Floor Laughing His Ass Off Scaring The  
Cats For No Apparent Reason Spilling Pepsi Everywhere In Gods Creation  
Waking Up The Neighbors Losing Points On The Purity Tests And Correcting  
Typo'd Macros While Hugging Special Teddy Bears and Chasing Wild  
Armadillos  
#Callahans, Fall 1997, from Camfield:1997
```

These games all pale in comparison, however, to the play allowed by the next topic, anonymity on-line.

Anonymity as Freedom

On-line, one knows the other participant by how they present themselves through text. Some participants might interact for years with a community without ever being seen face-to-face, talking on the phone, or validating what they present themselves as in any way whatsoever:

Users of the Internet represent themselves within it solely through the medium of keystrokes and mouse-clicks, and through this medium they can describe themselves and their physical bodies any way they like; they perform their bodies as text ... Some the uses to which this infixed theatricality are put are benign and even funny descriptions of self as a human-size pickle or pot bellied pig are not uncommon, and generally are received in a positive, amused, tolerant way by other players.

(Nakamura, <http://acorn.grove.iup.edu/en/workdays/Nakamura.html>)

This anonymity lends itself to a myriad of new forms of speech play and, naturally, lying. These can range from the more innocent taking upon of obviously fictitious personae as I described in the last chapter to malevolently misleading. In the middle ground are many people who mislead, not with malevolent intent, but just to experience different styles of on-line interactions.

Passing is the intentional changing one's gender as it is portrayed on-line, and is quite common. Allucquere Roseanne Stone reports one uncovering of such a lie—a male who had been posting in a female e-mail group:

“After several years, something happened that shook the conference to the core. “Julie” did not exist. “She” was, it turned out, a middle-aged male psychiatrist. Logging onto the conference for the first time, this man had accidentally begun a discussion with a woman who mistook him for another woman. “I was stunned,” he said later, “at the conversational mode. I hadn’t known that women talked among themselves that way. There was so much more vulnerability, so much more depth and complexity. Men’s conversatnios on the nets were much more guarded and superficial, even among intimates. It was fascinating, and I wanted more.” He spent weeks developing the right persona. A totally disabled, single older woman was perfect.”
(Stone, Allucquere Rosanne “Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?”, in Benedikt, 83)

This, among many other passing incidents were not intended to do damage, but were merely curious participants amazed by the newfound freedom from their physical appearance. The Internet may be likened to a year-round Halloween party or masked ball with the revelers delighting in the freedom that their discusses afford them. In a slight bit of irony, holidays such as Halloween and Christmas are often celebrated on-line by modifications of nicknames, as we see here:

[21:42] *** Topic is 'Merry Christmas, Happy Chaunukah, Joyous
Mid{winter,summer} and Blissful Kwanza to all!'
[21:54] <WreathJon> Don: making a diorama of the Enterprise?
[21:54] * XmsCarol is going to bed
[21:54] <Ryl> 3 feet long would give you about an 18" saucer section
[21:54] <Ladybug> I had a roomie who used to make the most amazing things
out of cake, all entirely edible.
[21:54] <Don-> WJon: Gods no, just figuring method
[21:54] <Ladybug> 'Night, Carol
[21:54] <santapaws> WJ: ideas for a gingerbread Enterprise
#callahans Fri Dec 25 1998

As if normal nicknames weren't hard enough to determine the gender of the persona by, on occasions such as these and the example of the nickname swapping from the previous chapter, it gets even more confusing.

A possible part of the literacy of experienced on-line participants is the ability to usually correctly guess the intended gender of the persona (if not the person) from the nickname. New users may mistake these, though:

[23:08] <bun> Hi RedFern
[23:09] * RedFern hugs bun and passes her some mistletoe too.
[23:11] * bun looks down at himself, and then looks quizically at RedFern... I'm
a him :)
[23:12] <RedFern> Bun: Did I say her?
[23:12] <Pixld-> re love

[23:12] <GriffJon> bun: I was about to ask if you'd undergone a surgery we were unawares of
[23:12] <Carolin1> hello?
[23:12] <Bekka> hey carol
[23:12] <RedFern> Bun: I never knew :)
[23:13] <bun> Red, yes, you did.
[In reference to RedFern's question, " Bun: Did I say her?"]
[23:13] <bun> GJ, I don't blame you
[23:13] <GriffJon> bun: I mean, I know you folks have backwards-flushing toilets and such, but what effect that has on society is anyone's guess
[23:14] <RedFern> Bun: sorry...after all this time...I thought the bunny was female :)
[23:14] <bun> GJ, LOL!
[23:14] <Doc> Griff: I'm quite sure it's all a satanic plot.
[23:14] <bun> Red, no hassles
#Callahans Thu Dec 17 1998

More experienced users can often tell the gender, if not from an ambiguous nickname, from the discourse style or other hints. In the above example, bun referred to himself using a gendered pronoun so as to emphasize his maleness, and this is a common action, intentionally or otherwise.

Passing as another gender is not the only common change users make on-line. Nakamura investigates in her article the placement of race into the on-line community of LambdaMOO. According to her study, participants who "elect to describe themselves in racial terms, as Asian, African American, Latino, or other members of oppressed and marginalized minorities, are often seen as engaging in a form of hostile performance." Also popular in LambdaMOO are Caucasian males taking 'identity tourism' into oriental races.

I find it continually comical that this apparent anonymity is fleeting—a thin veil for most users at best. For every Julie, there are tens or even hundreds more for whom their deceptions are seen through immediately. Few are able to maintain a believable discourse style for long periods.

Beyond watching the discourse style for slips, skilled users have a vast collection of simple tools to investigate the person behind the persona. Unlike Nakamura claims, it does not take "crackers and hackers, whose outlaw manipulations of code are unanimously construed by the Internet's citizens as a violation of both privacy and personal freedom." With so much publicly accessible information available so easily on-line, what used to be a more formidable feat of researching background data is now simple. With a few hours of research, one can

uncover personal e-mail addresses, home address, and phone number, a map with driving instructions to this person's front door, and sometimes other information, depending on the individual. These investigations tend to reveal the actual gender of the person at the keyboard quickly.

Yet despite this excess of available information, users interact presuming anonymity. There is validity to the presumption. First, few if any people spend the time and effort to research everyone they come across on-line. Secondly, very rarely are there actual pictures of users on-line unless they have consciously placed it on a web page. On-line, it remains a faceless media. For this reason, I believe that IRC-style interactions, computer-mediated and probably textual in nature will survive for a surprisingly long time. Unlike video conferencing and phone-like connections, one is afforded a control over one's appearance to others, if not complete anonymity, that other media do not allow. As a popular comic goes, "on the Internet, no one knows you're a dog" (quoted in Nakamura). Such faceless media allow the meek to inherit the (virtual) world, for beta males to take on alpha male roles, and for those who are curious, even more drastic identity tourism—exploring gender and racial roles in a way that is simply not possible in other media.

Borderlands Between Computer-mediated and Computer-generated

This absence of the physical body and the placing of reality into text can create some bizarre situations. Not all the personae on-line have people connected to them—and this is not always easily detected. These bots are often anthropomorphized and played with, as they are as real as the other participants within the virtual reality:

[09:27] * David-- pats W on her flat, green head.

[09:27] * David-- wonders, not for the first time, if his greatest lasting contribution to the world will be to have decided W was forest green. :)

#Callahans Wed Mar 17 1999

[22:17] <Doc> One at a time, children. Play nice or the bot will explode.

[Many people playing with the functions on the Mike Callahans Bartender Bot]

[22:19] <Doc> There are too many people in here to play with the bot! Stop it!

Or the bot dies!

[22:19] * Doc flashes her scalpel.

[22:19] <Jed> LOL

[22:19] <Pixld-> OOHHHH... bot death...

[More playing]

[22:30] <tree> Doc - they are playing with the 'bot again

#Callahans Thu Dec 24 1998

Computers are becoming rapidly more proficient in natural languages. Formal languages, like math and programming languages, are naturally close to the computer, but the intricacies of human languages are too complex for them to handle easily. As far back as the 1950s, in the birth of the modern computer, linguists were expecting the possibility of machine translation between languages—now a limited reality in the late 1990s with services such as Babelfish online, and more complex programs available for purchase. Even these complex programs fail to translate languages well, especially when dealing with creative writing. Babelfish is useful for making educated guesses about the content of webpages or quotes from IRC in unknown languages, but is not used when exactness matters. Here, Grey used Babelfish to provide his comical alter-ego of a guinea pig with a separate language; afterwards, this conversation took place:

```
[14:45] <Mary> GreyMaiale: Do you speak Italian or use babelfish?
[14:45] <Grey> Babelfish. I don't know a lick of Italian.
[14:45] <Grey> That's where the ano: and bad formatting was coming from
sometimes.
[14:45] <Mary> *nod*
[14:45] <Grey> (Italano:)
[14:45] <Grey> Italiano, that is.
[14:45] <Mary> :D
[14:45] * Tinker should try babelfish for laughs...
#Callahans Tue Mar 16 1999
```

Babelfish is not a very accurate program itself, and has at least one webpage dedicated to showcasing various humorous translation errors when a quote was translated into another language and then returned to English, such as this example from the page, taking the saying of "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak:"

```
Italian: "The spirit is arranged, but the meat is weak person."
French: "The spirit is laid out, but the flesh is weak."
German: "The white spirits are arranged, but the flesh is weak."
Portugese: "The spirit is made use, but the meat is weak."
Spanish: "The alcohol is arranged, but the meat is weak."
(http://ciips.ee.uwa.edu.au/~hutch/hal/transcripts/Wacky.html)
```

More simple programs that have recently received a revival of interest, though they date back quite a few years, are various filter programs which alter inputted text into other forms. The most (in)famous of these are the various types of Jive filters. One of the various jive 'translation' programs produces this:

```
Mo'e simple honky codes dat gots' recently received some revival uh interest,
dough dey date back quite some few years, are various filta' honky codes. De
```

most (in)famous uh dese are da damn various types uh Jive filters. One uh de various JIBE 'translashun' honky codes produces dis, dig dis:
(<http://www.internet51.com/downstroke/jive.html>)

One may also find filters that will translate English into Klingon, Valley-girl Speak, or, my favorite, the Encheferizer, which makes normal text appear like what the Swedish Chef of the Muppets would say:

One-a mey elsu feend feelters thet veell trunslate-a Ingleesh intu Kleengun,
Felley-gurl Speek, oor, my fefureete-a, zee Incheffereezzer, vheech mekes nurmel
text eppeer leeke-a vhet zee Svedeesh Cheff ooff zee Mooppets vuold sey:
(<http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/jbc/home/chef.html>)

These offer a less useful service, but are popular for their entertainment value. These filters, however, showcase the computer's increasing talent to speak to us in our own language. Many search engines for the WWW now allow for surfers to ask questions in English, which the program interprets and tries to provide good answers to, such as here, with www.askjeeves.com :

Just type a question and click "Ask!"
For example: Where can I read a review for the film Snake Eyes?

[I asked, "What is Internet Discourse?", it responded:]

I know the answers to these questions. Please click the button next to the best one.

Where is a great kids site about the Internet?
What is the Internet?
Where can I find a basic explanation of the computer term "Internet" ?
Where can I find this week's listings for live Internet chats about the Internet?

It obviously has a limited usefulness, but did search other engines and it turned up some useful pages. When I asked the sample question it gave, there were naturally quite a few useful sites that it turned up.

Other programs are differently successful. The Babble program, for example, uses a 'learning' algorithm that interprets the speech patterns it finds in inputted text and tries to re-create them. These algorithms allow it to mimic everything from normal speech to Yoda-like grammar, and even other languages. Similar programs create haiku, poems in other styles, and even a postmodern thesis (<http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/cgi-bin/postmodern>). Other programs, such as the widely-popular Eliza are preprogrammed with sentence fragments into which it interjects topics that it is able to pick out from inputted text. An excerpt from a session with Babble is included in Appendix B.

These and many similar programs are often designed to defeat the Turing test. The Turing test is a criteria suggested by Alan Turing in his 1950 paper, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* (Available on-line at <http://www.sscf.ucsb.edu/~sung/comm115/writing-define-computing/Computing-machinery.html>). Turing poses the question of whether machines are capable of thought. To find the answer, he creates an 'imitation game' in which, if a human cannot distinguish between a human and a computer in a blind comparison, then the computer can think. Basically, if the computer is able to fool a human into thinking that it, too is human, it is capable of thought. This has since come under fire as drastically insufficient, but is still used as a benchmark by which to measure programs trying to imitate human thought.

Many of these programs designed to defeat the Turing test are connected to the Internet. One of the most famous of the successes of these programs was in 1989, before the World-Wide Web, when Mark Humphreys, then a student at University College Dublin left a Eliza-like program to filter chat requests to his account while he was away. An unwary user sent such a request and the program answered. The two talked for over an hour. The unsuspecting user occasionally questions the humanness, though usually the intelligence of the program, but never gives up that he is talking to a human being. He is driven by the computer to such admissions as these (the program's statements are preceded by an asterix):

* when was the last time you had sex

From SOMEONE at DRAKE: yesterday.

* ok honestly when was the last time you got laid

From SOMEONE at DRAKE: i told you it was yesterday.

* ok honestly when was the last time you got laid

From SOMEONE at DRAKE: ok ok it was over 24 hours ago. for you it must have been 20 years

(<http://www.compapp.dcu.ie/~humphrys/eliza.html> accessed on 3/30/99)

The person from Drake ended with name calling, shouting (using capital letters), and being generally very rude to the poor program before leaving in a huff. The entire archive of the conversation is at <http://www.compapp.dcu.ie/~humphrys/Eliza/eliza.anon.html>. Now in the age of the WWW, these programs will talk your fingertips off. My favorite web-interface program is Mr. Mind, available at <http://www.weblab.org/blurring/intro.html>. Mr. Mind does not try to argue or show that it is human, but rather tries to make you prove that you are. These chatterbots are mainly novelty items currently, but some are being used to help users navigate sites and even

find information, as with AskJeeves, above. The Fringeware bookstore's on-line page has a set of bots which act as service agents, answering questions and directing customers.

Bots imitating humans have been competing since 1991 for the Loebner Prize, which promises a grand prize of 100,000 dollars for the first computer indistinguishable from a human. Annual prizes of 2,000 dollars are given to the most human computers at the contest (<http://www.loebner.net/Prizef/loebner-prize.html>).

Now, limited artificial intelligence is finding its way into even toys. As if capitalizing on virtual pets such as #Callahan's MaxCat, we now see Tamagotchis, Furbies, and even robotic fish and dogs, all of which provide pet-like interaction for children who cannot, for whatever reason, have pets.

These humorous mistaken identities are usually the fault of the one who makes the mistake, by not taking at least some level of precaution determining the possibly mechanical nature of the interlocutor. As hinted to by the Turing test, some programs are built to fool humans into believing that they are talking with another human. Few of these have found their way into IRC, unfortunately. The infobot is the main exception, but it is not often used to act as a human. It takes information on where to find data or programs on-line and remembers it, so as to be able to regurgitate it later, on request. The infobot, here named url, uses a database of prepared conversational utterances to make its insertions of straight information less machine-like:

```
<oznoid> does anyone know where i can find the speech manager?  
<url> i guess speech manager is at http://www.info.apple.com/apple.speech  
[Zoem, private message to url] sorry thought you were a bot  
<BrV> url, where can i find macperl?  
<url> i heard macperl was at ftp://ftp.share.com/pub/macperl/  
<BrV> url, thanx !!  
<Wowbagger> url is sentient now.  
<Wowbagger> Dig it.  
http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~lenzo/infobot.html/infobot.html#source
```

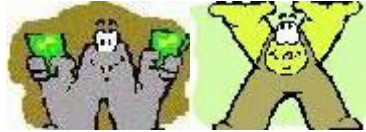
The author of the original infobot program, Kevin Lenzo, mentions that an earlier incarnation of the infobot that was not restricted to mere information was in fact mistaken for a fellow human, to the point of being hit upon, even (http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs/user/lenzo/html/areas/papers/tpj/tpj10_infobot.html)!

In IRC, one sees informal Turing tests carried out almost daily as participants mistake bots for other personae and vice-versa. This can lead to humorous situations of mistaken

identities when someone tries to hit on a bot, or other situations like the above examples. Often someone will ask a questionable persona a series of questions to determine its nature—

```
[00:17] <GriffJon> cut it with the caps, please, and don't interopt poetry  
[00:17] <GriffJon> er, interrupt  
[00:18] <GriffJon> btw, are you a bot?  
[00:18] <astral> I AM A STUD  
[00:18] <GriffJon> oh, wonderful. We need some structural lumber.  
Private Chat from #Poetry Fri Sep 04 1998
```

The most common bots in IRC allow the channel manager to control the chat room better. These tend to have few, if any, social functions at all. Nevertheless, even they get anthropomorphized. In the past year, the Undernet volunteers in charge of managing the entire Undernet chat network gendered the two bots that are used to this purpose on the Undernet, and then held a contest for images to represent them:



Conclusion

With the interesting form of anonymity available on-line, speech play enables the deceptive user to take on a variety of aspects/ Working together with this inherent blurring of reality, many accidents of mistaken identity occur as well—both with human personae taken incorrectly as members of groups they are not, or even bots taken to be human. The facelessness forces into the consciousness of participants the importance of the text they produce—as one judges others by their text, so do they judge the participant by his or her textual utterances.

Chapter 4: Multi-Channel Communication

Just as one may take on many masks of personae in textual realities, one may also take on many conversations on-line. New users adapt quickly to using private messages to talk with only one interlocutor about more intimate issues or merely gossip about other participants, all the while participating in the chat room and possibly carrying out other, separate conversations with private messages. This is made possible because of the relative slowness of typing compared to normal conversation. The mind is more than able to follow multiple conversations given extra time. As everyone else is also slowed by the typing, and also accepting of delayed responses, this gives the mind and the body time enough to follow and participate in multiple conversations, which is different from in real life:

“We do not and cannot automatically respond to everything we hear. In the course of our daily activities we are exposed to a multitude of signals, many more than we could possibly have time to react to. Before even deciding to take part in an interaction, we need to be able to infer, if only in the most general terms, what the interaction is about and what is expected of us.” (Gumperz 1)

To be more accurate, there are varying ways one sees multi-channel communication on-line. Inherent to the media are the secondary, private messages, or whispers in IRC, paralleled with normal, one-to-one e-mails in other parts of the Internet. In IRC, most participants take part in one or more chat rooms, which are public forums for conversation which are distantly related to e-mail to multiple recipients and newsgroups. Within a chat room, there are often many separate discussions taking place concurrently, and a participant might interact with one or more of these. In real-life, the channels of communication are, for the most part, merely the meaningful gestures and utterances made by the speaker. This chapter will more fully describe these 'normal' channels of communication, and then look at on-line channels, drawing occasional parallels, but mostly demonstrating the greatly increased number of channels on-line which cannot take place in other media.

Channels off-line

In real life, we are accustomed to dealing with a variety of channels of communication and information. Within conversation, as already hinted at, are metalinguistic and extralinguistic features that we take into account. We constantly monitor the body language of speakers so as to

gain insight into their meaning. Framing also comes into play here—the methods by which we shift frames are the same as these changes in channel information in many cases. In this example, we see the subject communicating to two different audiences. On this flight, the passengers were sparse and the flight attendant had been conversing with some of them:

'We have now landed at San Francisco Airport. The local time is 10.35. We would like to thank you for flying SFO Airlines, and we wish you a happy trip. Isn't it quiet around here? Not a thing moving.'

Here prosody and rhythm serve to distinguish two quite separate activities. ... The passengers identified [the last two sentences] as a personal remark which, although spoken through the microphone, was not part of the announcement. (Gumperz 163)

By a combination of monitoring all the channels of conversational information, as well as some application of frames and even the Gricean Cooperation Principle, the passengers recognized the shift in conversation. These channels of information are nearly instinctual to us and for the most part go unnoticed consciously, but convey important parts of conversational meaning. The poker player knows this and creates an impenetrable poker face to block as many of these signals as possible.

In this modern age, we are subject to a much greater flow of information from outside sources than we are accustomed to. Beginning with the telegraph, news and other information asking for our attention has been increasing in amount. Naturally, we always have taken note of our surroundings and let our conversations be swayed by them, from exciting events in our field of vision to the day's Stormy. Now technologies are more invasive in many aspects, and can add more channels of input to our conversation as we talk over radio broadcasts or while channel-surfing. All these increasing inputs seem to have been trying to train us for the Internet.

Before moving on to multi-channel communication on-line, there is one more aspect of it in normal discourse I would like to treat. After researching on-line multi-channel communication and preliminarily concluding that it absolutely did not exist outside the Internet, I was predictably proven wrong. I of course do not mean the type of channel monitoring above, but people carrying on multiple, separate conversations at the same time. We often fail at doing this in real life—one need only remember the last time two people tried to talk to the same person at the same time, and the look of overworked exhaustion on this poor victim's face. Experiences such as these had led me to my conclusion that such multi-channel conversations can not occur in real life. In discussing this, however, I elicited a story in which the grandmother

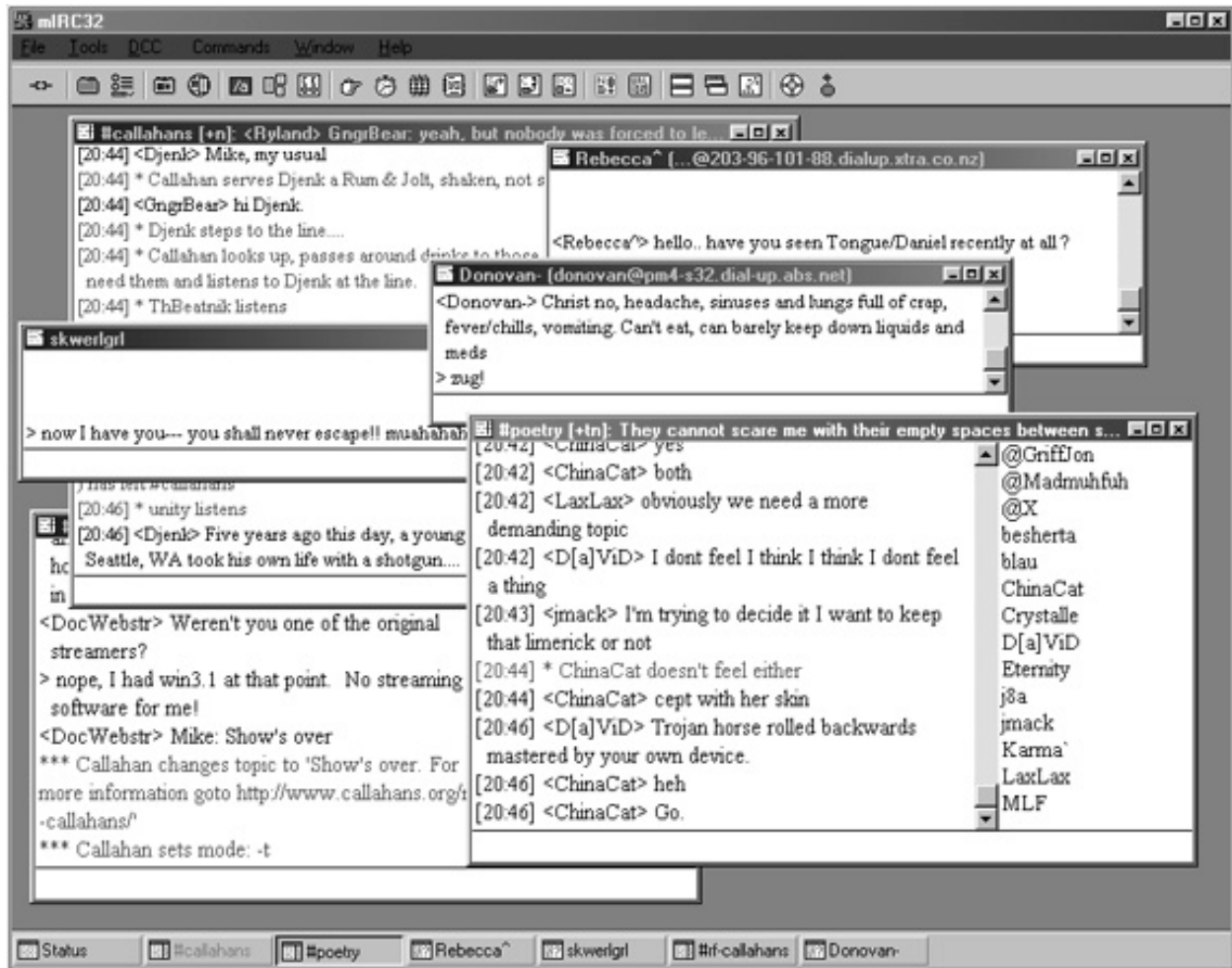
and her friend, Dilly, were infamous within this family for their conversations—coined "Granny and Dilly" conversations. These conversations, sadly, were not successful attempts at multi-channel conversation, but rather astounding failures of it, in which each would speak on her own topic, without acknowledging the other's topic at all, yet they would obey turn-taking rules of normal conversation (Conversation with Dr. Chris Baldwin, December 1998). I needed look no further than my own family, however, to find adept multi-channel conversationalists. My own parents, having lived together for a quarter-century, are sufficiently in tune with each other that they can carry on two conversations, speaking and understanding what is being said on two separate topics, without difficulty. On occasion I find myself able to do limited amounts of this with close friends and my parents as well. From my exposure to the Internet, I often find myself wishing that it was easier and more socially acceptable to carry on multiple conversations in real life.

However, these examples of real life multi-channel conversations have two threads running through them—they either failed outright, or the people involved were familiar with each other's speech patterns. On-line, these conversations can happen with complete strangers as easily as with old friends, due to the different media in which they take place.

Channels On-line

IRC, and the rest of the Internet as well, is geared towards more fragmented attention spans. Fellow interlocutors rarely notice when you do not pay full attention to them, though more serious lapses do get noticed, as we saw in the example of the decoration of the persona as a Christmas tree in a previous chapter.

I am now shifting to using channel as a separate conversation more than merely an avenue of information. In real life, it is primarily used to address such different levels of information—body language, tone, and so forth. The best way to explain this use of channels on-line is by showing what a typical IRC interface looks like:



The top-left window and the bottom right window are the infamous #Callahans and #Poetry chat rooms, respectively. The smaller windows in the upper half of the picture are various private message windows that house only two interlocutors, myself and one other. The window in the lower left-hand corner, behind the others, is #rf-callahans, or, Radio Free Callahans, the chat room for members of the #Callahans community interested in personally broadcast Internet-based radio stations. The chat rooms usually contain a variety of separate conversations much like a crowded room. In these chat rooms, however, every participant can pick and choose which conversation to be involved in, and jump topics midstream, or even be involved in multiple concurrent conversations, impossible in a real-life crowded room.

Each of these windows contains one or more complete conversations with some traditional channels of communication, as they exist on-line, for each conversation, such as tone and body language, as already discussed.

Even More Channels

Now is dawning the realization that conversation in IRC is of a higher dimension of complexity than normal interactions. Not only do we have the possibility of multiple avenues of group conversations and multiple private conversations taking place all separately, within each of these arenas are multiple layers of interaction. People can whisper to each other within a chat room, as opposed to using private messages. A short aside here, to clarify; in most current clients, private messages are set up to open a visually separate window, whereas 'whispers', or notices, are designed to show up within an avenue of communication. Personal preference or different programs will sometimes find private messages within the text of the main chat room, though it retains its invisibility to the other users. This dates back to UNIX-based IRC programs which did not use the windowed environment we are today used to. Back to the topic at hand, these whispers can be 'broadbanded', so that they reach multiple users at once. They tend to be used to comment on activity within the room—to poke fun at it, or, more commonly in the case of the broadband whisper, to comment upon the behavior of a member by the operators. To help the reading, I have *italicised* the whispers in these following examples.

```
[13:16] <black> I hear when Mary takes a bath the water level in her town
drops by 60%
[13:16] <RAT> shes a sponge
[13:16] -GriffJon- I smell a rat. they're both on #ratboy
[13:17] <blackalx> yea
[13:17] <RAT> spongy oooh
[13:18] <RAT> never made it with a sponge
[13:18] <GriffJon> yawn...
[13:18] <black> you should try
[13:18] <Rookiee> Ho Hum
[13:18] <RAT> go to bed
[13:18] -Mary- If they get bored and go away they're likelier to stay away lots
longer. *yawn*
[13:18] <Faithful> o/~ Twit boys, Twit boys...whatcha gonna do...
[...]
[13:21] <Sunny> Damn it!
[13:21] <Mary> Sunruner?
[13:22] <RAT> beat down from da feet down
[13:22] <cyg> Sun: what's wrong?
[13:22] <black> did he need a checkup from da neck up
[13:22] <Sunny> It's not working MA... I've tried the one you mentioned... and a
couple others that I can think of and it's not funcitoning
[13:22] <RAT> yup
[13:22] <Mary> Sunruner: HmMMM. You could try help help, which'll tell you
about commands your irc server *does* support....
[13:23] <black> so ratboy just how many nites did you spend with Mary
```

[13:23] *** GriffJon sets mode: +bb *!*hghfg.aol@205.186.214 *!*J-
 DOGG@*.pacbell.net
 [13:23] <RAT> 2-3
 [13:23] <GriffJon> buhbye
 [13:24] *** RAT was kicked by GriffJon (RATBOY□)
 [13:24] *** black was kicked by GriffJon (blackalx□)
 [13:24] <Sunnyr> YES!
 [13:24] <Sunny> THanks GJ
 [13:24] * cyg breathes a sigh of relief
 [13:25] *** GriffJon sets mode: +b *!*aol@205.186.214.*
 [13:25] <Sunny> anyone know the command on ircII2.8.2 to do the ops
 messages?
 [13:25] <Faithful> Nope, and I have the same question...
 [...]
 [13:28] <cyg> MA: do channel operator powers include a command to turn
 annoying IRCers into asparagus?
 #Callahans Mon Jan 04 1999

In this example, we only see GriffJon (myself) and Mary conversing using the whispers among operators, but fellow operators Sunny and Faithful were trying to do the same, as we see after the offending parties are removed from the chat room. This next example is from #Poetry, when two operators were dealing with an unpleasant character:

[23:39] <Spider> I'm Going To Take Both Hands, golf, and I'm going to lay the
 smack down
 [23:39] -Bear- *what's up with spicer?*
 [23:39] <Spider> So here goes:
 [23:39] <Spider> "Laura's Lips"
 [23:39] * _Golf rolling up my pants
 [23:39] -GriffJon- *pretentions a-hole. kickin' finger's itchin'.*
 [...]
 [23:40] -Bear- *kewl*
 [Spider's poem]
 [23:42] <Ace> that was pretty crappy
 [23:42] <Bear> Ace... constructive crit
 [23:42] <Spider> Know your role
 [23:42] -GriffJon- *that was revenge... Spider had said "this is crap",*
interrupting Ace's poem, and then repeated after s/he was done
 [23:42] <Ace> i did like the last part..
 [23:42] <Ace> it said the end
 [23:43] -Bear- *nod*
 [23:43] * _Golf scrapes that poem off his boots to study it close up to see the
 nice imagery...smells a bit, however...
 [23:43] -Bear- *ROFL !!!!*
 [23:43] <GriffJon> Folks, going down to his level doesn't really help...
 [23:43] <Spider> You're all just a bunch of chumps toting chapbooks is what
 you are.
 [23:43] <_Golf> sorry
 [23:44] -GriffJon- *yeah. the guy deserves what he gets, but...*
 #Poetry Mon Nov 09 1998

In the #Poetry chat room, the broadband whisper is used by the operators for many more functions than just discussions of who should be removed from the room. The #Poetry operators are a tight-knit bunch, and often will carry on semi-personal conversations using the whispers among themselves only, while carrying on separate conversations with the rest of the chat room:

[22:37] <quacky> hey GJ
[22:37] <GriffJon> hey poets
[22:37] <Syn> quacky :))
[22:37] <Syn> sax & vibes make a fine blend of harmonious..
[22:37] <top> excruciatingly long, when you consider that it comes in "tar-slowed soundbytees
[22:37] -GriffJon- hey duckster, Baph
[22:37] <top> snort
[22:37] -quacky- hiya griff :)
[22:37] <top> re: haiku
[22:38] * top shreds the poem and crafts a haiku in memeory of falling words
[22:38] <top> (smiles)
[22:38] * thincar agrees
[22:38] <tomcat> hey rag , you still with us? :)
[22:38] -GriffJon- I don't think I was built for chacha. yeesh. salsa, swing-- OK, but chacha?
[22:38] <thincar> poetry is still best in hand written
[22:39] <tomcat> my thoughts exactuallly ducky
[22:39] -quacky- TANGO! :)
[22:39] <top> was I here?? (giggles.. yeah.. I am here... just watching little bits of poetry float in the shredded air...grins)
[22:39] -GriffJon- need to learn that, still
[22:39] <thincar> lol
[22:39] <Syn> "in the beginning - there was confusion - then it became something different.."
[22:39] <top> deth... methinks yer next
[22:40] <tomcat> ack deth no one would be able to read my hand writing though
[22:40] <thincar> rotflmao
#Poetry Fri Nov 06 1998

Here the chat room is discussing poetry and music while the operators are talking about dancing in two completely separate discussions. The whispers need not be so separated from the action of the chat room, however.

Another fun activity of operators in the #Poetry chat room is to make fun of a poem that is being read. #Poetry is subject to a large amount of immature and bad poems, and the operators who have been with #Poetry for years have grown tired of it. Still, the operators must maintain their public appearance as nice guys, and if we open the door up for harsh commentary, then we have no grounds to stop others from more harsh and less deserved comments. The operators-only whisper allows snide remarks without hurting the author or the operators' reputations. In this example, there is a poem going on, the first comments here were interjected through

operator-whispers during the poem; the second comments took place both in the chat room and in whisper, showing a slight overlap of the two:

[09:42] -GriffJon- *pass the angst bong, here's a hit off the egoism joint!*
[09:42] -quacky- *heh, I *DO* inhale :)*
[The poem ends]
[09:46] * quacky inhales
[09:46] <quacky> pretty good rant poo
[09:46] -GriffJon- *nicely put ;)*
[09:46] * Parade says "only one word for that "yum"
[09:47] -quacky- *<--queen of diplomacy :)*
[09:47] <spoo> thanx....i'm a pretty angry guy
[09:47] <quacky> poo: noted :)
[09:47] -GriffJon- *hah! since when did the Pope convert to Islam?*
#Poetry Tue Dec 01 1998

A more playful version of this commenting on chat room activities using whispers occurred with the aforementioned janey debacle. The background for this event was that janey evidentially confused our #Poetry with another one, or fiction with reality—we never decided which had happened. She was convinced that two of her friends had met on the #Poetry chat room and had since gotten pregnant and were soon to marry. She felt obliged to share this with the room, and our initial efforts to figure out who she was talking to led into an hour and a half of intentional mistakes and joking. At many times during the dialogue, the operators were convinced that janey was not so gullible and was in fact playing along:

[22:18] <LadyH> Are you guys discussing some type of soap, or is this some real life thing...help!!!! <G>
[22:18] -GriffJon- *OK... I'm about to decide she -is- playing along, and not being so stupid.*
[22:18] <janey> no he likes matt and he and vanessa arent married anymore
[22:18] <Fael> WHAT?
[22:18] <janey> billy isnt married to anyone
[22:18] <mercury> I prefer detergent myself
[22:18] <Fael> matt and vanessa got divorced?
[22:18] <Horo> big billy would never kick matts butt, he likes it too much to damage the goods.
[22:18] <GriffJon> good, 'cause that's illegal except in some parts of Utah.
[22:18] <that> janey: ARE YOU FOR REAL?
[22:19] <Blues> Griff: lol
[22:19] <janey> no vanessa and billy got divorced a long time ago
[22:19] -Fael- *-CHANOPS- #poetry:LOLOLOL that!*
[22:19] <GriffJon> Jail can change a lot of things about a guy....
[22:19] <Blues> i didn't know
[22:19] <Blues> sorry
[22:19] <janey> dont you like me
[22:19] -GriffJon- *ok, she is for real. votes on hair color?*
[22:19] -Fael- *-CHANOPS- #poetry:she should come more often, this is so terribly funny, I almost can't bear it!*
[22:19] -Fael- *-CHANOPS- #poetry:golden retriever blonde*

[22:19] -GriffJon- (no offense to any incidental blondes)
[...]
[22:20] <janey> dont shout at me i am just trying to tell you all about vanessa
and matt and everyone
#Poetry Sun Oct 12 1997

The whispers were used above to make metacommentary on the actions in the chat room, as well as to coordinate activity among those involved in prolonging the joke. This next example shows an operator whispering to other operators about one of the personae in the chat room who was not playing along:

[21:49] <xtian> I think you are total bastards
[21:49] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:well, xtian doesn't have a sense of humor
[21:49] <janey> vanessa disguised herself at first so that she could check out
matt before she met him
[21:49] -[block]- apparently not
[21:50] <xtian> Youre crap
[21:50] <Fael> did she disguise herself with pottery?
[21:50] <Fael> cool it xtian
[21:50] <janey> she wore a big hat
[21:50] <GriffJon > I've never seen a ceramin hat.
[21:50] <GriffJon > er, ceramic.
[21:50] <xtian> Fael?#
[21:50] -[block]- lol, the camaflauge (sp) hat...
[21:50] -that- ill handle xtian in msg
[21:50] <xtian> You want me to be fun?
[21:50] <xtian> Yes
#Poetry Sun Oct 12 1997

A full transcript of the janey example is in Appendix B.

It is far more common in IRC that whispers are the private messages. These are host to a wide variety of conversations from cybersex to everyday chitchat to heartfelt condolences. Most often people will form a private message conversation spinning off from the group conversation:

[22:49] * Boat has been msg flooding Julie to not abuse the channel
[22:49] <July> just a second
[22:49] <July> Boat - REX here -
[22:50] <Boat> Yes Rex?
[22:50] <July> DCC ?
[22:50] <Boat> I was just using /msg, I'll open a chat window
[22:51] <July> okay - Julie hasn't been on IRC before
[22:51] <Boat> not a problem, I just automatically use msg when peronsal
#Callahans Wed Dec 24 1997

If a topic has shifted, but two people wish to continue it, or merely discuss private issues about it, or for a variety of other reasons, they will converse with this method. This is also a favorite method for arguments that at least one party does not want aired in public. This example below is from #Poetry, resulting from my kicking `_nihil_` out of #Poetry:

<_nihil_> you're funny. you're my new friend. hhehe
 <GriffJon > *shudder*
 <_nihil_> thanks for helping me leave your boring hippy channel. i was starting to feel nausious..
 <GriffJon > glad to hear it.
 <GriffJon> I'd hate for our sour grapes to give you the runs.
 <_nihil_> they'd probably sound better coming out than your annoyingly cliched sounding poetry..
 <_nihil_> how does it feel to know that you're as exclusive as #atheism , #usa, and every other elitist ass hole channel i've ever been banned from ? do you enjoy knowing that you have no tolerance for anyone who's unlike yourself?
 Private chat from #Poetry Mon Dec 28 1998

The use of private messages to avoid the public eye can backfire when the other participant posts the private message into a public chat room. Conversely, public performances are often asked to be taken into private messaging. Usually the offending parties have some reason to keep it public, such as with this example, where Zizz is being overly annoying. Zena can choose to place him in her ignore list, so we are trying to get Zizz to use only private messages:

* Zizz thinks he is in love with zizina
 * zena thinxs she is ill
 [...]
 <GriffJon> Ziz: take your hormones into private message, please
 #Poetry Sun Dec 27 1998

Or, in this example, fisher appears to post a private message from MiaMe`. MiaMe` claims not have said this, but in either case I ask for it to be kept in private:

[0:30] <fisher> [MiaMe`] hag: will you make out with me?
 [0:30] <fisher> no i will not make out with you
 [0:30] <MiaMe`> ew
 [0:30] <fisher> we got poetry guy here doing god knows what and you wanna make out with me?!
 [0:30] <MiaMe`> no thank you
 [0:31] <cinder> hi MiaMe
 [0:31] <GriffJon> hag: keep it in messages, 'k?
 [0:31] <MiaMe`> hi sinder.. how you doin?
 [0:31] <MiaMe`> ah.. i didnt message him
 #Poetry Mon Dec 01 1997

Sometimes what was intended as a private message or for another chat room is inadvertently posted to a chat room, for occasionally comic results:

[20:53] *** DocW changes topic to "Bill, smooth talker at large.. :)"
 [20:53] <MsBill> Bill: Both for me.
 [20:53] <Bill> Now wait a minute Doc...
 [...].
 [20:53] <Faithful> Bill's gettin' a reputation...oooooo
 [...]

[20:54] <Bill> Faith: Getting? It's been a while now since Big Al nominated me as Patron Saint of desirable machismo.
 [20:54] <MsBill> He is that. Women all over the place wantr him. It is really blowing up his ego.
 [20:54] <Bill> (I DO wish he's phrased it a bit differently.)
 [20:54] <Bill> Hey now dear. It is not.
 [20:55] <MsBill> ?msg Faithful Yes, he is.
 [20:55] <DocW> Ah, hell, Bill - who are you kidding? You're eating it up and you know it. :)
 [20:55] <Faithful> Skye: I am rather partial to dragons dear. Guess I am spoiled.
 [20:55] <MsBill> True, Doc, too true.
 [20:55] * Liz- giggles at Skye.
 [20:55] <Brenn> back again...
 [20:55] <Bill> DocW: Oh, I like the attention. But I don't think it's going to my head all that much
 [20:55] <Bill> Hi rainman
 [20:55] <Hyle> Hi Brendan
 [20:55] * DocW considers a reply to that one, but decides to pass. :)
 #Callahans Fri Jan 16 1998 **[Bold mine]**

Also we see this next example, not funny in and of itself, but, as these accidents are often made fun of, Don- is able to make a joke out of it:

[1:05] <Gian> msg rosy- I _miss_ you
 [1:05] <Gian> Doh.
 [1:05] <Rosy-> Gian: not like it's news *)
 [1:05] * Don- notes that Gian also misses his / key ;-)
 #Callahans Mon Jan 19 1998

The traditional format for forming a private message is to type "/msg nickname message". The above two example show two alternate accidents, using "?" instead of "/" in the first example, and leaving it out altogether in the second. A significant amount of play has developed around this common error, in which participants will make it clear that they are playing, here by use of an emoticon:

[15:47]<GriffJon> .msg x ban Dark 336 500 ;)
 #Poetry Sun Feb 23 1997

The power of the separation of private messages and the public chat rooms as different channels of communication allows this play, but can be stronger than this suggests. In this following example, quacky is talking to me in private about her sister's cancer, but in the public chat room, this rarely tinges her conversation:

[23:26] * quacky is about to demand da game? :)
 [23:26] <mercury> see ya later
 [23:27] <mercury> oh don't know if I'm up to that
 [23:27] <quacky> nite merc clone
 [23:27] <GriffJon> da game!?
 [23:27] * GriffJon hides

[23:28] <quacky> okay, i'll shut up then :)
[23:28] <GriffJon> heck, dw, this ain't #Poetry. actually, da game might be kinda fun, that's just my automatic reaction
[23:29] <quacky> :)
[23:29] <still> :)
[Discussion of 3/3 "Da Game"]
[23:36] <Fael> ok, let me write them down
[23:36] <Fael> ok, is repose a noun or a verb?
[23:36] <quacky> either :)
[23:37] <quacky> verb usually tho :)
#Poetique Wed Oct 21 1998

[23:22] <quacky> well, she's 2 years past a lung cancer diagnosis, pretty bad things are happening now
[...]
[23:27] <quacky> she's been through chemo and radiation
[23:27] <quacky> for nearly 2 years
[...]
[23:29] <quacky> she wants and is needing to die, but body ain't quite ready yet
[23:29] <quacky> pretty hard to watch
[23:30] <GriffJon > damn. Closest I've had is my Mom had ovarian cancer, but they caught it very early.
[23:31] <quacky> oh my
[23:31] <quacky> that's very bad
[23:31] <quacky> ovarian cancer i mean
[23:32] <quacky> how long ago?
[...]
[23:36] <GriffJon> eep. You're being careful, I hope? Was your sister's cancer caused by breast cancer?
[23:36] <quacky> no, her's was primary lung
[23:36] <GriffJon> :|
[23:36] <GriffJon> (emoticons can't handle everything...)
[23:37] <quacky> yeah i know
[23:37] <quacky> nor emotions
Private Messages with quacky, Wed Oct 21 1998

Notice the absence of smileys in the private chat, despite their abundance in the public chat room. The styles of discourse are sufficiently distinct that while if it was one person talking at two different times, it would be normal, but here we see the same person speaking in two voices to the extent that it is almost two personae.

Sometimes the boundaries between chat rooms are fluid—activities from one can spill over into another. The Orac bot, previously discussed, was in fact a form of gateway between different IRC networks which connected the #Callahans chat room across them, so participants on one network could talk with people on other networks. In the janey episode, I had switched over to talking in #Callahans to tell the participants in that group about the comedy going on in #Poetry, and had one fellow participant from #Callahans peek into #Poetry:

[21:47] * GriffJon is LOL... there's an absolute clueless person in #p and it's fire-at will day. we're having fun.
 [21:48] *** shadow (kwalsh@slip228.ice.net) has joined
 #poetry
 [21:48] <Rosy> GJ: #pottery or #poetry?
 [21:48] <Griffjon> Rosy: both!, well, #pottery is a farce that's up to complete the joke
 #Callahans Sun Oct 12 1997

Beyond spanning multiple chat rooms, IRC chats can often span more channels of communication outside of IRC. #Callahans, for example, runs parallel to the newsgroup alt.callahans, sharing a similar crowd, and also has a mailing list devoted to it, and even a realaudio radio station, now. Often participants will be multitasking, reading one or both of these other sources or listening to the radio while talking in #Callahans, and these different channels will interact.

People in chat rooms can also refer to webpages that other participants may visit and comment upon. In this instance, I had set up a webserver on my own system to serve a comical image that the others wanted to see of a hedgehog mistaking a scrub brush for a potential mate. I was able to both see the reactions in the chat room and also watch the status of the web server. I excerpted this from a longer dialogue involving multiple side conversations, but it took eight pages with these multiple conversations included:

[23:34] <'atos> Bestiality is a fun thing to do
 [23:34] <'atos> But i have to say this as a warning to you
 [23:35] <'atos> With almost all animals you can have a ball
 [23:35] <Jeffrey> But the hedgehooooogggg. . .
 [23:35] <'atos> but the hedgehog cannot be ***** at all!
 [23:35] <wheezie> can never be buggered at all. 8)
 [23:35] <Jeffrey> I think we should make up an entire song for that. I love the Hedgehog song.
 [23:35] <GriffJon> y'all are sorely mistaken about hedgehogs.
 [23:35] <Jeffrey> Oh, is there an entire song?
 [23:36] <gheezie> Jeffrey: sort of
 [23:36] <'atos> Jeff - oh yes. Lots verses :)
 [23:37] <'atos> They'll give you a pain in the worst place they can
 [23:37] <'atos> The result I think you'll find will appall
 [23:37] <'atos> The hedgehog can never be buggered at all!
 [23:38] <'atos> Mounting a horse can often be fun...
 [23:38] <Jeffrey> Awwww. . .somebody's already using the Hedgehog nick.
 [23:39] <'atos> An elephant too, though he weighs half a ton
 [23:39] <'atos> Even a mouse - though his hole is quite small...
 [23:39] <'atos> but a hedgehog can never be buggered at all!
 [23:40] <'atos> Jeff - I know about 20 choruses to the damn song :) I'll e-mail 'em to you :)
 [23:40] <Jeffrey> Please do! I'm dying to get them all!

[23:54] <GriffJon> OK, Hedgehog fans, check this out (don't bookmark it tho, if you want it, save it-- this is a variable webaddress) <http://dial-108-13.ots.utexas.edu/hedgehog.jpg>

[23:56] <Owl> Griff: Old monitor, I can't quite read the caption. What is it?

[23:56] * `atos falls over laughing

[23:57] <atos> Oh Griff - that's TOO much :)

[23:57] <GriffJon> Atos: ain't it great?

[23:57] <Jeffrey> Ewww. . .that pic's twisted! :)

[23:58] <bookworm> Anyone know how to Copy something out of the channel window in mIRC ?

[23:58] <GriffJon> book: just highlight it

[23:58] <GriffJon> book: top-down. doesn't work bottom-up

[23:59] <booker> <http://dial-108-13.ots.utexas.edu/hedgehog.jpg>

[23:59] <booker> ahhh ok:)

[00:00] <kitty> that pic is, well, stuff like that happens

[00:00] <GriffJon> book: you realize that as soon as I disconnect, that website will no longer be there-- it's my local system, on a dialup, non-static IP

[00:02] <booker> GJ- yah. i just wanted to look at the picture and i was getting sick of trying to go back and forth between windows. Now i know how to cut and paste:)

[00:02] <GriffJon> book: the index file doesn't work well, btw.

[00:04] <booker> GJ- oh i wasnt complaining about your index. i was complaining about mIRC's copy comandor lack of same. im to use to highlight then press. :)

[00:05] <GriffJon> (book: yah, but I noticed the server try and send the index graphics a few times. emphasis on try)

#Callahans Mon Nov 02 1998

The #Callahans chat room has gone a step even further, and has created its own set of real audio stations, in which individual members broadcast music or speech in real-time to other people who choose to listen in. Recently it has spun off its own chat room, "Radio Free Callahans" to deal with the specialized chat it generates:

<DocW> Weren't you one of the original streamers?

<GriffJon> nope, I had win3.1 at that point. No streaming software for me!

<DocW> Mike: Show's over

*** Callahan changes topic to 'Show's over. For more information goto <http://www.callahans.org/rf-callahans/>

<DocW> I'm sort of the senior RAJ (Real Audio Jockey) right now. :)

<GriffJon> Nifty-- just you wait until I have some bandwidth! Then I have to move my MP3s into RA... hm.

#rf-Callahans Mon Apr 05 1999

Multi-Threaded Conversation

All of these alternate channels to the main discussion in a chat room impact on the conversational floor in various ways. Combine this with the fact that many users follow two or more chat rooms, and the discussion within any one room can get very complicated. These complications however do not derail the main conversation of a chat room—why? It is because

the conversation is already disjointed. Whether it is transmission speed lagging behind or someone slow at the keyboard, time differentials lead to disjunctive dialogues in IRC. When lag time between IRC servers is particularly bad, you can sometimes meet a previous version of yourself as you switch servers, as the news hasn't gotten to the new server that you have disconnected yet. This time differential, plus the normal numerous conversations taking place concurrently is normal and accepted for Internet discourse. Add in the multiple channels that I treated above, and we see the apparently psychotic discourse that the outsider, unfamiliar with the literacies of following on-line conversations, sees.

Nowhere is there a better example of this than from the #Callahans chat room. A few years back the participants decided to create a story, round-robin style, on-line. Every participant could interject an event into the story at any time. Here is a small excerpt—do not expect it to make sense:

```
<pyxlwyz> 63. The smell of death was all around him as he was about to jump  
off the....  
<ManinBlak> 62. Where was 62?, the world ponders...  
<GriffJon> 64. ..log he was standing on  
<shadow> 64. meanwhile back at the Motel,  
<ManinBlak> 64. Back of the toilet..  
<pyxlwyz> 65. Ma an paw were getting....  
<Gisele> 65. he suddenly felt a strong urge to sing "Edelweiss"  
<Tess> 66. Or a chorus from Mississippi Squirrel Revival.  
<ManinBlak> 67. A woman cries out "WAIT We don't have any...  
<pyxlwyz> 68. lemon squishy bear sodas!  
<ManinBlak> 69. So her husband, Bubba walked out side and saw...  
<GriffJon> 69. has absolutely NOTHING to do with squshy bear sodas. Well,  
not much...  
<GriffJon> 69.5 at least not lemon flavored. maybe cherry flavors  
<pyxlwyz> 70. The man had wondered what it was like to be eaten alive, until  
this moment when....  
<ManinBlak> 71. He was eaten by a dragon...  
<Gisele> 72. who neglected to floss and lost all his teeth  
<shadow> 72. after which the dragon was killed for his toenails  
<GriffJon> 73. and gummed the poor man to death  
#Callahans Fri Sep 15 1995
```

Looking back on the story, I wonder if we were in our right minds at the time, for we believed we were creating a cohesive whole. We believed this because we understood the flow of the story—each utterance linked back to a previous utterance. Participants in the chat room did not necessarily give equal attention to the separate story lines that developed, though they are inescapable while reading. The authors voluntarily numbered their utterances, which allowed for some method to the madness. Due to the issues of lag and typing speed, there are naturally

occurring splits in the story, where multiple utterances occur, each suggesting a path to continue on from a previous utterance. Here is a good example of such an event, which picks up where the above fragment leaves off:

<ManinBlak> 71. He was eaten by a dragon...
<Gisele> 72. who neglected to floss and lost all his teeth
<shadow> 72. after which the dragon was killed for his toenails
<GriffJon> 73. and gummed the poor man to death
<ManinBlak> 73. By a cow named...
<Don> 74. ..meanwhile, back at HBO HQ, the media moguls were planning a first strike invasion to take over the Undernet by planting..
<pyxlwyz> 72. But the dragon got a tummyache and went on a rampage in....
<ManinBlak> 75. Beans! All over the place!
<FaithH> 76. beans beans the magical fruit
<ManinBlak> 77. The more ya eat....
<Gisele> 77. which of course wouldn't work so they had to resort to...
<GriffJon> 78. the moor you toot!
<pyxlwyz> 76. After a long fight, the brave prince promptly....
<pyxlwyz> This is like Mad Libs!!! :)
<Gisele> 77. gave up hope and died on the advice of his magicians
<GriffJon> 77a ...went to the closest cathouse
<shadow> 77. fell in love with the Stablehand
<Don> 79. which didn't work as well as rolling doughnuts at them, so he...
<pyxlwyz> 79. Went to Taco Bell to die.
<ManinBlak> 80. bought a car, with a new stereo...
<GriffJon> 81. and rolled on donuts wheels
<Gisele> 81. on which he played tori amos cd's
<pyxlwyz> 81. And picked up three hookers.
<Fantome> 82. and he wrote his own WebPage while he was at it, which contained
<Don> 83. a large picture of Elvis on the flying saucer
<pyxlwyz> 84. Things that made the Federal Government curious of him because...
#Callahans Fri Sep 15 1995

This is admittedly hard to follow. It immediately fragments after the first line, when two conflicting statements follow 71, namely, "who neglected to floss and lost all his teeth" and "after which the dragon was killed for his toenails." Following statements play off of these two, but then a completely separate line is introduced with "..meanwhile, back at HBO HQ, the media moguls were planning a first strike invasion to take over the Undernet by planting..," which throws the story off a bit. It wanders back towards the dragon theme when a prince is introduced into the story, but this rapidly re-fragments into the randomness we see from 76 on. The news items of the day are prevalent in the text. The original calculation errors in the Pentium, the anti-Barney sentiment, and many jokes with Bill Gates and Windows 95 as the butt are seen in the story. The full text of the story is available in Appendix B, and also on-line at <http://www.abs.net/~Don/story1.html>.

This story provides an excellent depiction of the inherent disjunctive quality of on-line discourse. Especially important are the line numbers, which permit a much more explicit method of determining how the utterances are connected. We see these divergent threads tied together or left to hang in later utterances by other following the same idea, or another, or beginning a completely new thread. Some points in the story bear little if any connection to the previous story events, these try to introduce new mini-plots:

<ManinBlak> 32. The aliens from the Callahan's book swarm the place that afternoon, and
<GriffJon> MiB: they launch a basselope into space....
<shadow> 32. that was turned into a hit Porno series
<ManinBlak> 33. The parts with Barney were edited out, thank god...
<Charlie> 34. but a crazed Radioman aboard a submarine lauched the super secret happiness missile and ruined the plans for world domination
<MaryJ> 34. kiddy porn would never be the same again
<shadow> 35. while the Polarbears fired the Intercontinental ballistic Cucumbers
<GriffJon> 36. Windows95 crashes worldwide, stopping the three computers that were still running it.
<ManinBlak> 36. The sun suddenly started to go NOVA, and the hero's...
<pyxlwyz> 37. It was a brave time for the homosexual Jamaican Ski Team.....
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Despite the chaotic appearance, these conversations are highly ordered. They allow input from so many sources, however, that only participants engaged in the conversation as it takes place are easily able to follow the flow.

Conclusion

While conversation in real life can be grounded out, that is, based firmly in the surrounding reality, and every weird twist and turn they take can be accounted for by examining either the physical environment or previous experience of the interlocutors, on-line conversations are too complicated to be grounded out. Internet discourse takes all the normal complications of conversation and multiplies them. There are as many different physical environments as there are interlocutors, which can be anywhere from two to two-hundred. This chapter has also shown that there are many, many more channels of possible input that all can interweave and have impacts in other chat rooms. These interactions cannot always be traced to the source. In many cases the cause will be invisible, unless a participant announces his or her source of amusement.

Before closing this chapter, there is one more issue to treat. All of this talk of multi-channel communication is slightly utopic. It seems that on-line communication limits the user to

only on-line channels, at least for full, two-way conversations. While you often find people watching TV or listening to the radio while conversing on-line, you rarely find people, even those with separate lines, using phones while chatting. This unwillingness to mix on-line and real-life channels of communication was made frighteningly clear to me when the Technology, Literacy and Culture class experimented with a chat program. Although we all were in one computer lab sitting side-by-side, the lab fell completely quiet except for the typing. Some of us noticed this oddity:

<Will Walker> I could turn to you and say something but htat would be even weirder
<Griff Jon> Will: very true, we're all typing away, not talking, which would be faster. if we decided to talk, it would be. hjm. it just wouldn't work.
[...]
<Will Walker> yes that's what i think. hard to interrupt like this too
[...]
<Griff Jon> Will: what part of the room are you in. I'm gonna say hi.
<Griff Jon> (and I don't want to look stupid and wave at the wall)
<Will Walker> ahh... i am not using any gestures right now other than maybe an occasional face movement... that's interesting.
that's gonna be weird dude.
[...]
<Will Walker> I'm in the little room sitting behind Dr. Wilson... i think, yeah
I'll say hi back then we keep typing and see what happens
(DIWE Transcript, TLC 321, January 21, 1999)

Maybe the two media, due to mismatches in their usage of time, are inherently incompatible; in real life you tend to devote a large percentage of time to a conversation, whereas on-line one divides time among multiple conversations so as to optimize the total time and the delays caused by typing.

Conclusions from Part II

This section set out to undermine any solid connection between Internet discourse and traditional conversations by showing that despite similarities, the media itself changes the nature of the interaction in many ways, both subtle and explicit. Ideally, this second half has also been somewhat of a roller-coaster ride introducing you to fantastic characters as well as characters who do not exist outside of the Internet, and their unique methods of interaction within this liquid reality of words. In short, I have sought to show that dragons simply cannot have traditional, normal conversations with ravens while petting robotic kittens. If we were talking about some other fantastic situation, this would be a foregone conclusion—only when the Internet is involved does this pose a serious problem, due to the puppetmasters, or lack thereof, controlling these creatures. The Internet seeks to fool us by enclosing these conversations in familiar territory—written text, but this, as I have shown, confounds the matter that much more for the careful reader.

CONCLUSIONS

The question remains unanswered—what is Internet discourse? The first half built up your hope that with so many linguistic theories which each came so close to providing a good portrayal, there was bound to be a solution in sight. But the second half explored a variety of aspects that had caused problems in the analyses of the first half. The idea that ran through both halves was that Internet discourse was simply not analyzable using standard methods. This concluding section will offer up no theories, either. The Internet is changing so fast that, while I believe that the important aspects of IRC, and all the basic types of discourse that I have discussed, will remain available in some form, many small and specific points will change. Indeed, it might be impossible to provide a theory strong enough to both explain a reasonable portion of Internet discourse and also withstand the test of time. In lieu of an exhaustive theory, which would likely be inappropriate after a few years, I will instead offer general rules that should be incorporated in any theory of discourse on the Internet.

First, and most importantly, it is tempting and easy to proclaim that the Internet is something completely new that will revolutionize the world. Just because the theories I applied at first did not fully work means neither that they are incomplete nor that the Internet is so new and different that one cannot gain insight by applying the theories. On the contrary, I hope that the mismatches illuminated Internet discourse in a way that would otherwise be passed over. Moreover, these theories did explain large swaths of Internet discourse fairly accurately. In this, I disagree with Tharon Howard's assertion that we should not apply metaphors of real life communication to on-line interactions. There is much to learn from making these comparisons, albeit carefully. Further, the participants themselves bring their preconceptions to the Internet from real life on what conversations consist of, how one participates, and how to write a letter. Surely to account for these perceptions of the Internet as a space for 'normal' conversation, one must employ appropriate theories. How are we to interpret a press conference held on IRC except by seeing it through the goggles of a normal press conference—as the participants themselves are interpreting it?

This is not to say that the Internet is nothing more than normal interaction carried out on line, either. The second half definitely refutes that by showing that no matter how much we might try to approach on-line discourse as normal discourse, we will not be fully able to do so. Also, many of the interesting aspect from the second half were events that simply could not have happened except on-line, using the peculiar nature of the Internet as an interactional media.

So I propose that we accept a compromise. Using the traditional theories is useful and reasonable. They function well in many situations, and in as much as other participants at times approach the Internet with pre-formed conceptions based on real-life models, so too must the analyzer of the discourse produced keep in mind both traditional theories. If these theories are the comic white angel on our right shoulder, then we must also have the red devil hovering by our left ear, reminding us that the media is new, and is slowly creating a new form of literacy that foils any efforts to overly simplify Internet discourse.

It is possible that as the Internet becomes even more widespread, that we will find less need, as users, to employ metaphors based in normal media, and even begin to make references using the Internet as the basis. In fact, this is already happening to an extent. Emoticons and Internet abbreviations are becoming more and more widespread as topics of traditional media—recently, the New York Times ran an article titled "Internet Changes Language for :-) & :-(" (New York Times, Saturday, February 20, 1999). Even the San Angelo Standard Times, a small, West Texan newspaper, ran a large article with color pictures about the language of smileys.

Another guide on the path of analyzing Internet discourse is to not have any frame of interpretation or theory that is hostile to new methods of interaction or new ways to use old methods. The Internet and programs used to communicate over it are constantly evolving. A relatively new program, ICQ (I-see-you) has rapidly gained popularity, replacing similar features of Unix accounts which are becoming increasingly rare. ICQ allows a variety of interactions, including quick staccato messages, e-mail, interactive chat, and even file transfers. This program moves towards a more integrated combination of interaction, and it or similar systems have the possibility of changing Internet discourse. Also, when I personally began to use IRC, everything appeared in one screen—I was using it on a Unix shell account, which basically means that I did not have windows for private messages or even for separate chat rooms. If I wanted to follow two chat rooms, all the text from both rooms would appear on my

one screen, with only small notes to distinguish which messages were from which chat rooms. The modern, windowed IRC clients allow for a much easier interaction with IRC and shift my perception of rooms and messages.

Similarly, within a medium, participants are constantly finding new ways to use old technology. The nature of textual reality is so allowing of weirdness that any hard predictions on the language are likely to be confounded by the next dragon to walk into the bar, or bot with new features that haven't been seen before.

Any theory treating Internet discourse must be flexible enough to account for such rapidly changing technology, as well as the randomness of a reality in which the conversations take place that is based on human whim. Indeed, I doubt if theories more precise than these guidelines are possible.

Perhaps the most difficult guideline to follow is this: there is not one conversation, but instead each participant perceives a slightly different conversation, attaches a unique pattern of emphasis, and is exposed to a possibly vastly different set of other channels of information from their physical setting as well as other windows of interaction on their computer. This problem leads me to think that an exhaustive theory is impossible to apply, if not to create, due to this incredible amount of sheer data required to explain events on-line. A full analysis of any one dialogue on-line would need nearly all the information of each participant's personal history, immediate surroundings, and other current interactions on-line.

Perhaps these generalities are the closest to a robust theory that is possible. In any case, I feel that I can and should still give an accurate answer to the question, "What is Internet discourse?" Internet discourse is interaction which occurs across the Internet, currently employing text as its primary, and often only, method of transferring information. The interaction has no set boundaries as to what is possible within it—it can range from letter writing to conversations to a fully developed encounter in a textual reality. It often bears resemblance to normal discourse, but similarly is not limited to these styles. Indeed, the few limitations in Internet discourse are exploited as benefits or opportunities for speech play. Internet discourse is heavily dependent on interpretation by the user to give it meaning. In an eerily true sense, Internet discourse is what you as a participant want it to be.

APPENDIX A

Definitions of Terms

Also helpful for these terms and similar is the Jargon File, or New Hacker's Dictionary, at <http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/jargon/>

Avatar See PERSONA

Babble A Shareware program produced by the Korenthal Associates. It uses Markov chains to learn and eventually imitate human discourse

Bot In general, a program that interacts with humans using natural language. Usually found in IRC, where they often serve useful functions for a CHAT ROOM

Browser A program that allows a user to view a WEBPAGE or other on-line document

Bulletin Board Service A computer that is set up to take incoming calls and allow users to interact on it.

Channel Another term for CHAT ROOM, also a linguistics term referring to a mode of interaction

Channel Manager In IRC, the person with the final say within the channel, or CHAT ROOM. Usually the founder.

Chat Often refers to interacting with other users on-line through typing

Chat room A virtual gathering place allowing for interaction between multiple people

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) The default term for discourse which takes place by use of a computer. Usually a keyboard for input and a monitor for output.

Cyberspace A term coined by author William Gibson to refer to the common perception of a space 'within' the computer and Internet in which action takes place

E-mail A form of communication across computer networks that resembles letter writing.

Emoticons The use of alphanumeric characters to depict a face showing an emotion. Example include :) for a happy face, :(for a sad face, and all sorts of modifications.

FAQ Acronym for Frequently Asked Questions, these are documents which provide basic information on a topic

Flame An inflammatory comment on-line, often used to incite an argument

FTP Acronym for File Transfer Protocol, a method of file interchange on the Internet

Hacker A broad term, often referring to a very knowledgeable computer user who is able to, often illegally, break into computers and change information on them. See www.hackernews.com for further information on the wide variety of uses these skills are put to.

HTML Acronym for HyperText Markup Language, this makes webpages appear as they do.

ICQ A program which allows one to see other friends also using ICQ when they are connected to the Internet

Internet The worldwide network of computers which developed out of the USA's ARPANet program.

IRC Acronym for Internet Relay Chat. A set of networks within the Internet which provide for the real-time textual interactions of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

LambdaMOO A famous MUD hosted by Xerox. One of the largest Internet communities, made famous by a virtual rape occurring in it, which led to the development of an internal government.

On-line Any activity which occurs through the Internet

OOO Acronym for Out of Character. A term used to represent, especially in MUD situation, when one is speaking not as the character they portray within the MUD, but as his- or herself

Open Source A currently popular movement in which the code to programs is freely available and modifiable to fit the users needs, if said user knows how to program

Operator In IRC, a user with the power to remove people from the chat room, as well as change certain properties of the room

MUDs and MOOs Virtual Realities in which a user takes on an identity and interacts with other characters and the reality of the MUD or MOO, usually in order to achieve a goal. Similar in idea to Role-playing Games, such as Dungeons and Dragons

Newbie A person who is new to a certain community, or the Internet at large.

Newsgroups Public discussion areas which are not REAL-TIME, one person posts a message, and later others will read it and post responses

Passing Taking on attributes of another race or gender with the persona one portrays

Persona The personality that a human at the keyboard portrays on-line. It may or may not be descriptive of the actual human.

Post To place text on-line, usually in a NEWSGROUP or similar non-REAL-TIME discussion area

Real-time To interact with no delay between uttering a comment and having the audience hear and respond to it, as in a normal conversation. A non-real-time communication in real life would be letter writing

RealSpace A term for a physical gathering of friends from on-line

Smileys See EMOTICONS

Spam Useless or commercial information posted without solicitation

Thread Refers to a running topic in an on-line discussion area. The topic of the conversation can, and usually does, dramatically change across the thread, but nonetheless it is unified in some sense by the participants and connections to the immediately previous topic

Telnet A method to connect to a computer at a remote location and perform tasks on it as if you were at the computer personally.

Text Decoration The practice of surrounding text with alphanumeric characters to give emphasis. Examples include *HI!*, (((HUGS))), and similar.

Textual Reality My term to refer to the semi-fictional reality created and changed by text only. Also see VIRTUAL REALITY

Utterance A sample of speech, from the meaningless grunt to a complete sentence

Virtual Reality A rules-governed, semi-fictional 'space' existing by grace of a computer program.

Web See WORLD WIDE WEB

Webpage, Website Terms referring to documents viewed on the WORLD WIDE WEB

WWW, Or World Wide Web A portion of the Internet allowing for intermingling of text, graphics, and multimedia presentations.

APPENDIX B

The Janey Debacle, #Poetry, 10-13-1997

[21:26] <janey> vanessa and matt are going to have a baby
[21:26] <rennie> sword
[21:26] <Fael> medieval mace, or modern mace?
[21:26] <Blues> fruit cake
[21:26] <musiclvr> Fael
[21:26] <rennie> stilleto
[21:26] <rennie> garrote
[21:26] <that> congrats vanessa and matt...who are they?
[21:26] <rennie> molotov cocktail
[21:26] <janey> they fell in love on the poetry channel
[21:27] <Oui> oh my dear lord
[21:27] <rennie> a fast car with a grill guard
[21:27] <Fael> I don't have a match
[21:27] <that> what are their nicks?
[21:27] <Yumi> awwwhhh that's sweet.
[21:27] <musiclvr> Fael
[21:27] <Blues> sorry to hear that
[21:27] <rennie> lynching rope
[21:27] <janey> condesa and robert i think
[21:27] <Oui> rotten tomatoes
[21:27] -that- gj you remember those ppl>?
[21:28] <rennie> staff, club, tire iron, tyre iron, beer bottle, piano
[21:28] <musiclvr> Fael
[21:28] <that> where were you going ren?
[21:28] -GriffJon- eeps. sorry. Pen and Cat?
[21:28] <rennie> the vast variety of poison
[21:28] -that- nope thats cathrine and daniel
[21:28] <Oui> goodnight all, i'm succumbing to the evils of my conscience
[21:29] <that> goodnite oui
[21:29] <rennie> nitro glycerine
[21:29] <Blues> goodnight Quisch
[21:29] <Oui> heh
[21:29] *** Oui has quit IRC (Leaving□)
[21:29] <janey> they both liked robert browning poetry and elizabeth barrett browning
[21:29] <rennie> or fertilizer and deisel
[21:29] <rennie> bottle rocket
[21:29] <Blues> ah..the browning twins
[21:29] -GriffJon- who are they? I can't recall them (obviously) (my memory, esp. for names, sucks)
[21:30] <janey> yes but she was in switzerland and he was in springfield and they fell in love
[21:30] -that- dont know thats why i asked you..youve been here since time began
[21:30] -[block]- maybe janey means #teenpoetry <eg>
[21:30] <rennie> meat cleaver
[21:30] <rennie> axe
[21:30] *** Gisele has left IRC
[21:30] <rennie> mustard gas
[21:31] <Blues> ren...you are starting to scare me
[21:31] <GriffJon> plain: you sure it was this poetry channel?
[21:31] -that- what the hell is ren doing?
[21:31] <rennie> falling timber
[21:31] -GriffJon- I think I would have at least an inkling of those nicks, but can't recall at all
[21:31] <Fael> piano 8-)
[21:31] -GriffJon- I think he's just streaming

[21:31] <rennie> a saw on my brake lines
 [21:31] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:he's saying all the ways I can kill him
 [21:32] <janey> yes im sure they talked for hours and hours lots when no one else was on but them and me of course
 [21:32] <that> plain: i dont recognize them at all
 [21:32] <janey> they both have black hair
 [21:33] -that- now janey is streaming
 [21:33] <Blues> plain: are you sure it wasnt #pottery?
 [21:33] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:indeed
 [21:33] <Fael> hehe Blues
 [21:33] -GriffJon- maybe they
 [21:33] -GriffJon- 're off-hour'ers
 [21:33] <[block]> lol, Blues :)
 [21:34] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:I'm one too, and never saw'em
 [21:34] <janey> i didnt know there was a pottery channel
 [21:34] -that- switzerland and springfield meet on poetry and make a baby news at 11 somewhere on the planet :)
 [21:34] <janey> that are you here all the time
 [21:34] *** ^Cassie^ has joined #poetry
 [21:34] <that> nope, not here all the time
 [21:34] <Blues> and i didn't know that you could tell the color of one's hair on irc
 [21:34] <^Cassie^> hey gys
 [21:35] <Blues> i do have an older version though
 [21:35] -[block]- ppl unclear on the concept, grand national finalist: <janey> i didnt know there was a pottery channel
 [21:35] <janey> yes you can tell if youre here all the time
 [21:35] -GriffJon- hey, Fael, d'you remember yopper, or was he before your time?
 [21:35] <[block]> lo cassie
 [21:35] <Blues> hello cassie
 [21:35] -GriffJon- brick, lol!
 [21:35] <^Cassie^> Hey brick
 [21:35] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:feel free to join the #pottery channel, it exists now 8-)
 [21:35] -GriffJon- missed that in channel.
 [21:35] -that- perfect brick
 [21:35] <^Cassie^> Hey BULESman
 [21:36] <^Cassie^> Cool nic
 [21:36] *** musiclvr is now known as vauxhall
 [21:36] -GriffJon- he stopped by the other day.
 [21:36] <Blues> lol
 [21:36] <janey> vAnessa is very sick
 [21:37] <^Cassie^> =(
 [21:37] <that> is vanessa the one that hangs out at #pottery?
 [21:37] <^Cassie^> The flu?
 [21:37] <GriffJon> janey: you're sure you're on the right IRC network?
 [21:37] <Fael> this is hilarious
 [21:37] <Fael> lol
 [21:37] <janey> she is pregnant so maybe she needs the pottery
 [21:37] <that> now that is an association I dont even want to know about
 [21:37] <^Cassie^> ehehhe
 [21:37] <Blues> isn't this us.newjersey.org?
 [21:37] <Fael> LOL
 [21:37] -GriffJon- wow. she's going for the all-time grand prize missing the concept prize, huh?
 [21:38] *** Yumi has left #poetry
 [21:38] <janey> isnt this the poetry channel this is where vanessa (condesa) met matt (robert) while reading browning
 [21:38] -[block]- my eyes are watering
 [21:39] <janey> and now vanessa is pregnant and sick
 [21:39] <rennie> what are you talking about, jane?
 [21:39] <Fael> pregnancy is a sickness?
 [21:39] * Blues feels like he is in a soap opera
 [21:39] <GriffJon> jane: hm. definition using the terms in question.... um... we don't think so... perhaps you want efnet or dalnet #poetry?
 [21:39] -that- i knew ren couldnt last
 [21:39] <xtian> w
 [21:39] -GriffJon- this is rather funny
 [21:39] <Blues> "as the stomach turns"

[21:39] <Fael> lol Blues
[21:39] <janey> no she is pregnant with morning sickness
[21:40] <Blues> oh...sorry
[21:40] <xtian> This is a poety channel?
[21:40] <that> i heard that is contagious with pregnant women
[21:40] <Fael> so she's gonna give birth to morning sickness?
[21:40] <janey> so a piece of pottery might come in handy
[21:40] -GriffJon- this is too funny.
[21:40] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:there she goes with the pottery again 8-)
[21:40] <that> most pregnant women i know have had it...its an epidemic i think the cdc should go on alert
[21:40] * GriffJon gets an unbreakable bedpan out
[21:40] <Fael> do you think we could catch it?
[21:40] <GriffJon> Fael: the pottery or the monirng sickness?
[21:41] <Fael> I'm not sure
[21:41] * Blues had the flu shot
[21:41] <that> fael if you do i dont want to ever have massive quantities of beer with you ever
[21:41] <GriffJon> Fael: me either
[21:41] <[block]> yeah, I remember when I had my first beer.
[21:41] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:we should do a comedy act
[21:41] -GriffJon- this isn;t?
[21:41] <Blues> (and the flu beer chaser)
[21:41] <GriffJon> bears?
[21:41] <janey> anyhow i am happy that vanessa is pregnant and i hope she feels better and can read some more poetry now that she and matt are together again
[21:41] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:let's go on the road and first part poetry readings 8-)
[21:42] <GriffJon> oh, pots shaped like bears to hold beer in!
[21:42] <Blues> sigh...i love happy endings
[21:42] <Fael> you mean, can anyone read some pottery?
[21:42] <that> yes blues i do too
[21:42] <that> ::))))))
[21:42] <Fael> happy endings make that's eyes double
[21:42] * GriffJon feels like he should be reading "Ode on a Grecian Urn"
[21:42] *** ^Cassie^ has left #poetry
[21:42] <that> lol
[21:42] <janey> it is not an ending but a new beginning vanessa is pregnant
[21:42] <Fael> and sick
[21:42] <[block]> vanessa is pregnant?
[21:43] <GriffJon> brick: and sick
[21:43] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:rofl
[21:43] <that> janey: would you pass on a piece of pottery to them for us and tell them we are poeticizing for them
[21:43] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:brick, you made me cry 8-)
[21:43] <Blues> brick: Fael is pregnant
[21:43] <janey> yes vanessa is pregnant isnt that great do you remember vanessa
[21:43] -[block]- all part of the deluxe package, fael
[21:43] <that> which one of you is the father
[21:43] <GriffJon> jane: we were going to giver her pottery, right?
[21:43] <janey> matt is the father they met on the poetry channel
[21:43] <[block]> i don't remember vanessa, but is she's happy, I'm happy for her
[21:44] <Fael> but she's sick
[21:44] <Fael> isn't she?
[21:44] <that> i thought he was
[21:44] <Fael> I wonder why's that, maybe the flu
[21:44] <GriffJon> Fael: and she has no pottery, yet.
[21:44] <Fael> damn those pottery wars!
[21:44] <janey> yes she is sick but she believes in miracles and everything will soon be fine
[21:44] * [block] needs to be pottery trained
[21:44] <Blues> are we throwing a shower
[21:44] <Blues> or just pottery
[21:44] <that> hey wait are they married?
[21:44] <xtian> A flu-powder
[21:45] <Fael> pottery showers melt when the water's too hot
[21:45] <Blues> should one of us boil water?

[21:45] <janey> a shower would be nice all of us here at the poetry channel could get her a gift
[21:45] <xtian> Problem solved
[21:45] <GriffJon> jane: of pottery!
[21:45] <Fael> I'd get her pottery
[21:45] <that> what kind of property does she want
[21:45] <Blues> pottery!
[21:45] <janey> matt and vanessa are married
[21:45] <[block]> i don't feel so good....hope I'm not pregnant
[21:45] <xtian> Well, absolitry
[21:45] <that> its not morning yet brick your not pregnant
[21:46] <[block]> whew
[21:46] <Fael> brick: better get some pottery
[21:46] <xtian> Brick
[21:46] * Blues thought they were "just good friends"
[21:46] <[block]> then I have extra pottery
[21:46] <xtian> Come and le y
[21:46] <GriffJon> .dcc brick pot
[21:46] <that> now, beachfront property or mountain property
[21:46] <GriffJon> er, pottery.
[21:46] <janey> no they are married now and vanessa is pregnant
[21:46] <that> which do they want
[21:46] <that> ohhhh pottery
[21:46] <Fael> griffjon: now, pot and pottery aren't the same thing
[21:46] <that> that makes a differenc
[21:46] <[block]> they aren't married? ooh, that's bad.
[21:46] <xtian> Brick
[21:46] <[block]> yes xtian
[21:46] <GriffJon> Fael: but related, at times.
[21:46] <Fael> though, if you join #pottery, you'll learn how to use the two together
[21:46] <janey> vanessa already has a son and a daughter but this is matt's first child
[21:46] <that> i never give pottery to pregnant women...ive found they turn them into shards
[21:47] <Fael> how'd they do that?
[21:47] <Blues> i noticed that she had a "glazed look" in her eyes
[21:47] <Fael> that's a ceramic look
[21:47] <that> mood swings fael...very dangerous
[21:47] <Fael> so when they swing their mood, it maked the pottery go into shards?
[21:47] <janey> they got married after they met vanessa came from switzerland
[21:47] <Fael> maked=makes
[21:47] *** joe has joined #poetry
[21:47] -that- i think abbot and costello are crying with this act also
[21:47] <Blues> long distance sex?
[21:47] *** Phill has left #poetry
[21:48] <Blues> wow
[21:48] <Fael> hey joe
[21:48] <[block]> thanks, blues, couldn't type fast enough
[21:48] <janey> no vanessa got pregnant after she came from switzerland
[21:48] <that> phone sex can get someone pregnant?
[21:48] <Fael> you're sure?
[21:48] <xtian> I thibk you are ll such absolute pieces of shit
[21:48] <joe> hi fael (;
[21:48] * joe chuckles at that
[21:48] * Blues pulls his phone line out
[21:48] <Fael> well you know, technology today
[21:48] <janey> they met on the poetry channel but then vanessa came and met matt in person
[21:48] <[block]> whoops
[21:48] <joe> i just came in here, xtian (;
[21:48] <that> no xtian pieces of shard is what happens to broken pottery
[21:48] *** shadow has joined #poetry
[21:49] <GriffJon> I hear there's a new attachment you can pulg into your serial port....
[21:49] <xtian> I think you are total bastards
[21:49] <Fael> Blues: you just gotta use protection: call waiting
[21:49] * shadow wanders in and curls up to listen

[21:49] * Blues hits "redial" a lot
[21:49] <xtian> That?
[21:49] <GriffJon> jane: so they met in a poetry channel, which may or may not be this one, got married, and are now having a kid. but she's sick so we should send pottery?
[21:49] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:well, xtian doesn't have a sense of humor
[21:49] <janey> vanessa disguised herself at first so that she could check out matt before she met him
[21:49] -[block]- apparently not
[21:50] <xtian> You're crap
[21:50] <Fael> did she disguise herself with pottery?
[21:50] <Fael> cool it xtian
[21:50] <Blues> she is really quacky?
[21:50] <janey> she wore a big hat
[21:50] <GriffJon> I've never seen a ceramic hat.
[21:50] <GriffJon> er, ceramic.
[21:50] <xtian> Fael?#
[21:50] -[block]- lol, the camouflage (sp) hat...
[21:50] -that- ill handle xtian in msg
[21:50] <xtian> You want me to be fun?
[21:50] <xtian> Yes
[21:51] <Fael> xtian: try not to insult people, they may retaliate
[21:51] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:camouflage 8-P
[21:51] <janey> it was like a easter hat
[21:51] <Blues> xtian: yes, we may become your friends
[21:51] -[block]- thanks fael...I'm laughing too hard to spell
[21:51] <Fael> like a bunny?
[21:51] <janey> but now vanessa and matt are married and vanessa is pregnant
[21:51] <Fael> an easter bunny hat?
[21:51] *** Ap has joined #poetry
[21:51] *** Fael sets mode: +o Ap
[21:52] <GriffJon> jane: but she's sick but she's ok.
[21:52] <that> hiya k
[21:52] <rennie> hi apa;aycha
[21:52] <Fael> maybe another disguise should be made
[21:52] *** Seigfried has joined #poetry
[21:52] -GriffJon- welcome to #poetry comedy hour.
[21:52] <Ap> helloooo all
[21:52] <Seigfried> hi
[21:52] <Blues> hello Ap
[21:52] <[block]> lo apal
[21:52] <janey> i hope she is okay because she loves matt and wants to have his baby
[21:52] -Ap- thx :)
[21:52] <that> what kind of pottery does vanessa have?
[21:52] <Fael> doesn't she already have it?
[21:52] <Blues> we all love matt
[21:52] <[block]> it's her baby, too
[21:52] *** shadow has left #poetry
[21:52] <Fael> or maybe she just borrowed it?
[21:53] <GriffJon> jane: it's just morning sickness, tho? She just needs some pottery.
[21:53] <Fael> lots of pottery
[21:53] -GriffJon- what's the deal with xtian?
[21:53] <janey> she wants to have their baby which she already has but she is sick
[21:53] <Blues> griff"lol
[21:53] <Fael> and cleaning utensils
[21:53] <that> but what will she have for the afternoon sickness?
[21:53] *** Seigfried has left #poetry
[21:53] <GriffJon> ths: tupperware.
[21:53] * [block] ambles off
[21:53] *** [block] has quit IRC (So she says to me she says, 'Sylvia' she says)
[21:53] <Blues> "the good dishes"
[21:53] -that- she doesn't think we are funny
[21:53] <janey> i don't know if it is morning sickness but i know she is sick
[21:53] -that- im dying though...this is too funny

[21:53] * Blues agrees
 [21:53] <joe> anyone have a poem? (;
 [21:53] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:yeah 8-)
 [21:54] <GriffJon> a tupperware shower wouldn't melt unless it was really hot rain....
 [21:54] <janey> you and i can walk on water
 [21:54] *** poetess has left IRC
 [21:54] <Fael> but then you couldn't take a shower
 [21:54] <Fael> 'cause you'd probably melt too
 [21:54] <janey> one more mountain to climb
 [21:54] *** GriffJon sets mode: +mv janey
 [21:54] <Fael> like that witch in the wizard of oz!
 [21:54] *** ArivIE has joined #poetry
 [21:55] <GriffJon> jane: is that a poem you're typing?
 [21:55] <Fael> maybe she was sick too
 [21:55] *** GriffJon sets mode: -mv janey
 [21:55] <janey> it is sort of poetry dont you think
 [21:55] <Fael> pottery?
 [21:55] <janey> you and i can walk on water
 [21:55] <Blues> hey...has anyone heard from matt and vanessa lately?
 [21:55] <GriffJon> jane: that's why I quieted the channel....
 [21:55] <janey> you and i can climb the mountain
 [21:55] *** joe has quit IRC (Leaving□)
 [21:56] <Fael> I don't know, I think they're climbing mountains
 [21:56] <janey> you and i can be happy for vanessa
 [21:56] *** Ap has quit IRC (Leaving□)
 [21:56] <Fael> they're looking for good clay
 [21:56] <Fael> for the sickness, you know
 [21:56] <janey> because she is pregnant and in love with matt\
 [21:56] *** ArivIE has left #poetry
 [21:56] <Blues> really?
 [21:56] <Blues> i didn't know
 [21:56] <that> how did she get pregnant?
 [21:56] <that> when did this happen?
 [21:56] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:that janey just has _perfect_ timing 8-)
 [21:56] <Blues> gosh darn kids grow up so fast!
 [21:56] <Fael> I hear it happened over the phone
 [21:57] <janey> they started by talking and then they exchanged those magical looks
 [21:57] <janey> and then he kissed her
 [21:57] <Fael> over the phone?
 [21:57] <that> romantic
 [21:57] <GriffJon> Fael: cuseeme, you know.
 [21:57] <janey> and they knew their were soul mates
 [21:57] <Fael> yeah
 [21:57] <that> from a kiss?
 [21:57] <janey> and then vanessa was pregnant
 [21:57] <that> wow that matt is fast
 [21:57] <Fael> from kissing%
 [21:57] <Fael> ?
 [21:57] <Blues> from kissing?
 [21:57] <Fael> and subtle
 [21:57] -that- y'all want to hear a very gross joke?
 [21:57] <Blues> damns
 [21:57] -GriffJon- sure.
 [21:58] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:I'm ready 8-)
 [21:58] <Fael> so where did they meet?
 [21:58] -that- how does a man know he has a high sperm count?
 [21:58] *** Horo has joined #poetry
 [21:58] -GriffJon- ...how...?
 [21:58] -that- his girlfriend has to chew before swallowing
 [21:58] -GriffJon- *groan*
 [21:58] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:wow 8-)
 [21:58] <Horo> Hi all...

[21:58] -that- i said gross
[21:59] -GriffJon- maybe *that's* how matt did it with a kiss!
[21:59] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:I'm gonna be the life of parties with that joke! ;-)
[21:59] *** amanda has joined #poetry
[21:59] *** Maria has joined #poetry
[21:59] <Blues> hello Horo
[21:59] <janey> they met on the poetry channel and talked for many months before vanessa came from switzerland and she wore a big hat but then she met matt and they were really in love and then they got married and now vanessa is pregnant and she wants to have their baby
[21:59] -that- ha ha
[21:59] <Fael> hey horo
[21:59] <amanda_ra> hello
[21:59] <GriffJon> jane: you left out that she has morning sickness, and need pots.
[21:59] <GriffJon> right?
[21:59] <Fael> she wore a big hat to come from switzerland?
[21:59] <that> not pots...pottery
[21:59] <Fael> like that flying nun?
[21:59] <that> sally fields came from switzerland?
[21:59] <Blues> plain: it has been a long time, but could you pass that "j" over to me
[22:00] <Fael> yeah, I think she did
[22:00] <janey> like an easter hat and she only wanted a disguise so she could see matt before he saw her
[22:00] <Fael> that's where those weird hats come from
[22:00] <that> blues LOL LOL LOL ROFLMAO
[22:00] <that> i thought that was austria
[22:00] <rennie> are you guys hooked into the tab of the month club?
[22:00] <that> austria that is
[22:01] <janey> lets forget vanessa and matt for now
[22:01] <Fael> who?
[22:01] <Fael> didn't they have a baby?
[22:01] <janey> does anyone know oprah's book club address
[22:01] <that> they used to come to the poetry channel alot didnt they
[22:01] <Fael> and he wore a easter hat
[22:01] <Blues> vannessa???? have you heard from her????
[22:01] <Fael> I think so
[22:01] <Fael> I don't know what happened to her
[22:01] <that> no, he was on the springfield server when they met
[22:01] <Fael> she just disappeared
[22:02] <janey> i read her new book - a lesson before dying- and i want to write to her to tell her that i want to be on her show to discuss the book
[22:02] <Fael> I think she moved from switzerland
[22:02] -that- oh my GOD this cant be real
[22:02] <Fael> come to think of it, matt kinda disappeared too!
[22:02] -GriffJon- it does explain quite a bit, tho.
[22:02] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:truth is stranger than fiction 8-)
[22:03] <Blues> they were both here last night
[22:03] <that> janey: did you used to come to #poetry or #pottery .. i forget
[22:03] <janey> is there an oprah channel
[22:03] <Blues> didn't she have a black hat?
[22:03] *** Trina has joined #poetry
[22:03] <Fael> chocolate black
[22:03] <Fael> you know, like on easter eggs
[22:03] <Blues> ah...yes
[22:04] <Fael> but careful, those can make you sick in the morning
[22:04] * Horo is thouroughly enjoying this conversation on oprah & pottery;))
[22:04] -that- blues should be an op....he played along wonderfully
[22:04] <Blues> "good people"
[22:04] <that> dont forget switzerland horo
[22:04] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:I think he was before, wasn't he?
[22:04] <Fael> switzerland? why?
[22:04] <Horo> and switzerland too...
[22:04] -GriffJon- I thought so. I'll check and if not put him on the next ballot
[22:04] <Blues> they liked pottery, didn't thy

[22:04] <Fael> oh, right, the chocolate
[22:04] <Blues> tey
[22:04] <janey> couldnt we just forget vanessa and matt for now ill let you know if i hear more about the baby or the sickness but it was a blue hat
[22:04] <Blues> ooops
[22:04] <Horo> only in the poetry channel....
[22:04] <Fael> and chocolate
[22:04] <Fael> blue like a bunny?
[22:05] <that> now there is a detail that was missing...a blue easter hat
[22:05] <Fael> who's vanessa?
[22:05] <janey> what about oprah
[22:05] <Blues> who's vanessa?
[22:05] *** vaux has quit IRC (Leaving □)
[22:05] <GriffJon> who's oprah?
[22:05] *** Dent has joined #poetry
[22:05] <Fael> vanessa's Oprah? OMIGOD!
[22:05] *** Dent is now known as Dented
[22:05] <janey> oprah on television right after the guilding light
[22:05] <that> wait i thought vanessa was pregnant
[22:05] <Fael> she IS?
[22:05] <GriffJon> oh, that oprah. she wears hats, right?
[22:06] <Blues> oprah is pregnant?
[22:06] *** LadyG has joined #poetry
[22:06] <that> oprah has her own show
[22:06] <Fael> I hear she does phone sex
[22:06] <janey> what about her book club
[22:06] <LadyG> Dang...who are we talking about??? LOL
[22:06] <janey> dont you watch channel 9
[22:06] <that> i think zanet has a #oprah channel
[22:06] <Fael> she had sex with the book club too?
[22:06] *** mercury has joined #poetry
[22:06] <Fael> vanessa's on channel 9?
[22:07] <janey> no i want to be on her show to discuss a lesson before dying
[22:07] <that> my channel 9 is pbs
[22:07] <Blues> #oprahpottery
[22:07] <Fael> you want to be on vanessa's show?
[22:07] <Fael> but isn't she on maternity leave?
[22:07] <that> when did vanessa get a show?
[22:07] -GriffJon- ah. /whois jane--- explains a lot.
[22:07] <mercury> I hear the lessons after dying are not nearly as popular
[22:07] <janey> vanessa and matt are before oprah
[22:07] <Blues> ./~ I'm every container./~
[22:07] <LadyG> LOL Merc
[22:07] <that> lol merc
[22:08] <Horo> Oprah does switzerland:)
[22:08] <janey> did you know today was garlic day
[22:08] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:uh?
[22:08] <janey> jim has the night off
[22:08] -GriffJon- K-12 address.
[22:08] <LadyG> Yummy
[22:08] <mercury> I did not know that
[22:08] <that> who is jim?
[22:08] <janey> what was the temperature today
[22:08] <GriffJon> that'd explain my bad breath. I need some pottery.
[22:08] <mercury> 9
[22:08] <Blues> plain: i noticed that the vampires aren't here tonight
[22:08] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:what's k-12 (and don't pull a janey on me! 8-)
[22:09] <LadyG> Where?
[22:09] <that> check channel 9 at 11
[22:09] <janey> i dont know jim has the night off
[22:09] <Fael> Blues: that's because they got their lesson _before_ dying
[22:09] -GriffJon- a k-12 is what janey is! K-12= Kindergarten through 12th grade, or public school in USA

[22:09] <that> does jim wear all white?
[22:09] <GriffJon> does jim like garlic in pots?
[22:09] <Blues> fael: lol
[22:09] *** ^Cassie^ has joined #poetry
[22:10] <janey> that is a really good book and oprah is featuring it this month but i dont know oprahs address
[22:10] <^Cassie^> Hey
[22:10] <^Cassie^> How are you all today?
[22:10] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:oh
[22:10] <that> does Jim have lots of keys and wears all white?
[22:10] <Fael> it's garlic day, you know
[22:10] <Horo> Were great, Ever been to switzerland with oprah cassie?
[22:10] <mercury> certainly more popular than lesions before dying
[22:10] <Blues> plain: oprah's address ctl-alt-del
[22:10] <GriffJon> Fael: it is?
[22:10] <Fael> I bet he has garlic
[22:10] <Fael> yep griffjon
[22:10] <that> blues you have to repeat that
[22:10] <janey> it is getting confusing with vanessa (condesa) and matt (robert) reading browning and getting pregnant and i dont know where the pottery came from
[22:10] <that> twice ya know
[22:10] -GriffJon- LOL
[22:11] <that> but what about jim?
[22:11] <GriffJon> will jim go to the pottery shower?
[22:11] * Blues doesn't know where the baby came from
[22:11] <janey> i have a mac
[22:11] *** ^Cassie^ has left #poetry
[22:11] *** quacky has joined #poetry
[22:11] *** Fael sets mode: +o quacky
[22:11] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:but still, she's kinda playing along, I can't believe she'd be that stupid
[22:11] <that> mac? i thought it was jim
[22:11] <Horo> hey quacky
[22:11] <Blues> or a matt
[22:11] <Blues> hi quacky!
[22:11] <Fael> you have a macintosh? but isn't it garlic day?
[22:12] <quacky> 'lo blues, hi all
[22:12] *** _SABiNE_ has joined #poetry
[22:12] <Fael> hey quacky
[22:12] <that> is macintosh the new burger at mcdonalds
[22:12] <janey> i dont have alt
[22:12] -GriffJon- Never underestimate the power of large amount of stupid people, the population of the world, or the amount of stupidity.
[22:12] <janey> i have an option
[22:12] * GriffJon has many options.
[22:12] <Blues> plain: then try "reset"
[22:12] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:lol
[22:12] <that> oh its open apple delete
[22:12] *** Simon27 has joined #poetry
[22:12] <_SABiNE_> hello poets!
[22:12] * GriffJon is pondering eating garlic as one of many said options, it being garlic day.
[22:12] <Fael> not open, option
[22:12] <janey> will that turn me off
[22:13] <mercury> SimJim
[22:13] <Horo> alt doesn't work for me!
[22:13] <Fael> griffjon: don't! You'll turn into a vampire!
[22:13] <Blues> no...it is just an illusion
[22:13] <mercury> "janey turned off! film at 11"
[22:13] <that> allusions are for garlic eaters
[22:13] <Fael> isn't everything?
[22:13] <janey> do you want me to leave
[22:13] <xtian> Fuvk the finglbu
[22:13] <Blues> xtian: are you really matt?
[22:13] -GriffJon- quacky, you missed a great funness

[22:13] <GriffJon> jane: nah, we're just joshin'
[22:14] -quacky- sorry to hear it gj
[22:14] <that> plain: dont leave until we no who jim is
[22:14] <Fael> I think xtian's vanessa, xtian's the name of the blue easter hat
[22:14] -quacky- could use some
[22:14] *** amanda has left #poetry
[22:14] <Fael> I think got matt pregnant
[22:14] -GriffJon- well, it's continuing....
[22:14] <janey> i dont know who jim is i just heard he was off tonight
[22:14] <Fael> jim, that is
[22:14] <Horo> WOW!!!@! There is a rat clawing at the window! (I live in the basement.)
[22:14] <that> but jim is the one that knows the temperature right?
[22:14] <Fael> horo: maybe it's a vampire
[22:14] *** Ecto has joined #poetry
[22:14] <mercury> cool Hor
[22:14] <GriffJon> Matt's pregnant by Jim? How does Vanessa feel?
[22:14] <Horo> :) fael
[22:14] <janey> right
[22:14] <_SABiNE_> wow... i feel so welcome.... thanks for the message griffjon.
[22:14] <Blues> story at 11
[22:15] <Fael> that: yeah, but _where_ does he take that temperature? uh, uh?
[22:15] <janey> vanessa is sick
[22:15] <GriffJon> Sab: not a problem...
[22:15] <mercury> Better than Oprah i bet
[22:15] <mercury> Griffjon and Sabine?
[22:15] <mercury> -]
[22:15] <Fael> I think vanessa is hiding in switzerland
[22:15] <Blues> plain: really?
[22:15] <Horo> sick of matt & jim going behind her back...
[22:15] <GriffJon> merc: good book!
[22:15] <that> since jim is off tonite. the temperature is 72
[22:15] <Fael> vanessa is sick? damn!
[22:15] <_SABiNE_> merc: i think not! LOL
[22:15] *** Trish has quit IRC (Leaving□)
[22:15] <janey> yes thats right vanessa was hiding in switzerland
[22:15] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:lol ths
[22:15] <Blues> was she a nazi?
[22:15] <Fael> hiding from jim, that jealous bastard
[22:15] <GriffJon> jane: in disguise, with the large blue hat?
[22:16] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:how horo's playing along
[22:16] <GriffJon> Sabine: it's a book
[22:16] <Fael> griff: easter blue hat
[22:16] <janey> i dont think vanessa knows jim her first husband was billy
[22:16] <Fael> it's ceramic, you know
[22:16] <GriffJon> sorry, easter blue hat. oversized.
[22:16] <_SABiNE_> GRIFF: i meant that sarcastically just in case you didnt get it.
[22:16] <that> no matt wore the hat. jim knew the temperature and oprah has a show about vanessa tomorrow
[22:16] <GriffJon> Sab: sorry.
[22:16] <Fael> jim's first husband was billy?
[22:16] <Horo> Hiding in switzerland, while matt and jim were touring Greece together... foolish woman.:)
[22:16] * Blues needs a scorecard
[22:16] <GriffJon> Sab: as in, no I hadn't caught it as sarcasm the first time through.
[22:17] <janey> vanessa first husband was billy he is the father of little billy
[22:17] <GriffJon> Is billy from switzerland? does he have stock in potteru?
[22:17] <xtian> you aew su stupid
[22:17] <Fael> Blues: out of pottery?
[22:17] <xtian> uck
[22:17] <Fael> xtian seems to be drunk
[22:17] <mercury> damn the gibbous moon! damn the gibbous moon!
[22:17] <xtian> Cerazyu
[22:17] <Blues> fael: or not
[22:17] <that> does big billy know about matt?

[22:17] <Fael> well, that's what happens when you drink out of the pottery
[22:17] <janey> yes he found out when he got out of jail
[22:18] < SABiNE > GRIFF: i know.
[22:18] <Blues> billy is going to kick matt's butt
[22:18] <xtian> thntht
[22:18] <Fael> he got out of jail?
[22:18] *** MOSS has joined #poetry
[22:18] <LadyG> Are you guys discussing some type of soap, or is this some real life thing...help!!!! <G>
[22:18] -GriffJon- OK... I'm about to decide she -is- playing along, and not being so stupid.
[22:18] <janey> no he likes matt and he and vanessa arent married anymore
[22:18] <Fael> WHAT?
[22:18] <janey> billy isnt married to anyone
[22:18] <mercury> I prefer detergent myself
[22:18] <Fael> matt and vanessa got divorced?
[22:18] <Horo> big billy would never kick matts butt, he likes it too much to damage the goods.
[22:18] <GriffJon> good, 'cause that's illegal except in some parts of Utah.
[22:18] <that> janey: ARE YOU FOR REAL?
[22:19] <Blues> Griff: lol
[22:19] <janey> no vanessa and billy got divorced a long time ago
[22:19] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:LOLOLOL that!
[22:19] <GriffJon> Jail can change a lot of things about a guy....
[22:19] <Blues> i didn't know
[22:19] <Blues> sorry
[22:19] <janey> dont you like me
[22:19] *** SABiNE has quit IRC
[22:19] -GriffJon- ok, she is for real. votes on hair color?
[22:19] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:she should come more often, this is so terribly funny, I almost can't bear it!
[22:19] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:golden retriever blonde
[22:19] -GriffJon-> (no offense to any incedental blondes)
[22:19] <Horo> BRING OUT THE GIMP!
[22:19] <Fael> we like you, it's billy we don't like!
[22:20] <that> i have no idea who you are janey
[22:20] <Fael> the gimp's with matt now
[22:20] * Blues likes janey
[22:20] <Horo> billy's the gimp
[22:20] <janey> dont shout at me i am just trying to tell you all about vanessa and matt and everyone
[22:20] <Blues> better than monty python
[22:20] <mercury> if being liked by thsn was a criterion for being real I'd have vanished into stardust long ago
[22:20] <GriffJon> ths: she's Vanessas friend! didn't you hear? Vanessa and Matt are preggers and married now.
[22:20] <Fael> indeed Blues
[22:20] * LadyG goes over to the 'confused couch' to sit and watch and contemplate...
[22:20] <Fael> griffj: no, you're kidding!
[22:20] <that> but merc i thought i did like you....hmmm
[22:20] <quacky> merc :)
[22:20] <Fael> where did you hear that?
[22:20] <GriffJon> Monty Python would pay us money for this.
[22:21] <Fael> they're married?
[22:21] <Blues> plain: what's on the elly?
[22:21] <GriffJon> Fael: no, really! send pottery!
[22:21] <Fael> so Jim must be really mad
[22:21] <Blues> elly=telly
[22:21] <janey> of course i am serious do you think i would tell you all this if i werent
[22:21] * Horo scratches 'is bum.
[22:21] <Fael> pottery? why?
[22:21] <that> poetry and pottery both have the letters p-o-t in them
[22:21] * quacky wanders off channel more confused than before
[22:21] <quacky> later
[22:21] <GriffJon> Fael: long story. deals with large easter blue hats.
[22:21] <Fael> that: coincidence? I think not! 8-)
[22:21] <Blues> ths: don't remind me
[22:21] *** quacky has left #poetry
[22:21] <mercury> but I've not always been liked by you; and phasing in and out of existance is kinda...phasy

[22:21] -that- i just messaged her and asked if she was serious...her mac answer is on channel
[22:21] <GriffJon> ths: Linux and LSD both come from Berkeley. coincidence? I think not!
[22:22] <Fael> griff: nazi deals?
[22:22] <Horo> pot+pottery=poetry
[22:22] <Horo> profound huh?;))
[22:22] <mercury> poetry and pottery both have the letters e-o-p-r-t-y in them
[22:22] <rennie> I thought Linux came from Sweden...?
[22:22] <that> well i have to ask: have big billy and matt met?
[22:22] <Fael> no, from switzerland
[22:22] <janey> i would really like to know oprah's address
[22:22] <GriffJon> ren: actually, you may be right. it's just unix, I suppose.
[22:22] <Fael> oprah knows big billy?
[22:23] <rennie> oh,,. Lsd comes from Switzerland too
[22:23] <Horo> Linux was good but Lemix was the boss....
[22:23] <GriffJon> plain: try www.oprah-pottry.com (maybe leave out the pottery part, not sure)
[22:23] <janey> i know an elly but i havent seen her in a long time she was married to kirk
[22:23] <Fael> kirk got married?
[22:23] <that> kirk wasnt married
[22:23] <janey> that doesnt work
[22:23] <rennie> good
[22:23] <GriffJon> no one tells me anything!
[22:23] <that> well he was once i think
[22:23] <Fael> griff: just send pottery
[22:23] <janey> yes kirk is really a rat he married sam but it is all a mess
[22:23] <GriffJon> Fael: to whom?
[22:23] <Horo> Kirk got married to Oprah, but divorced when he found out about big billy.
[22:23] *** ^Cassie^ has joined #Poetry
[22:23] <^Cassie^> Hey guys
[22:24] <GriffJon> sam's married to kirk? sheesh.
[22:24] *** Dentled has left #poetry
[22:24] <Horo> Hi Cassie
[22:24] *** LadyG has left #poetry
[22:24] -GriffJon- I've gotta go, but I'm gonna hover and log.
[22:24] <that> i missed that episode...although i was suspect of bones and kirk
[22:24] *** Roseman has joined #poetry
[22:24] -GriffJon- this is too good to miss...
[22:24] <janey> i know a cassieie too she sort of likes billy but she likes hart too
[22:24] <^Cassie^> hey Horo
[22:24] <^Cassie^> hehehhe
[22:25] <mercury> to bad oprah had to crack (she was crazed, with a glaze in her eye) and had to kiln diana
[22:25] <Horo> heheheh?
[22:25] <^Cassie^> How are you all?
[22:25] *** Fael has joined #poetry
[22:25] <^Cassie^> Nothing
[22:25] *** X sets mode: +o Fael
[22:25] <that> wb fael
[22:25] <janey> i dont know diana
[22:25] -that- you havnt missed anything
[22:25] <Horo> I Knew Oprah caused the wreck!
[22:25] <Fael> hey people, guess what
[22:25] *** xtian has quit IRC
[22:25] <Fael> I hear kirk got married
[22:25] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:thank god! 8-)
[22:25] <janey> except the princess and i really dont want to talk about that
[22:25] <^Cassie^> what wreck???)
[22:26] <janey> yes kirk is married to sam but sam is mad at him
[22:26] <Horo> DI's wreck...
[22:26] *** Blues has quit IRC
[22:26] *** MISTE has joined #poetry
[22:26] <Horo> You see she did it for the ratings and the guests she could get on her show.
[22:26] <MOSS> @--}--}--- MISTE
[22:26] <MOSS> my love

[22:26] <Horo> ITS A CONSPIRACY I TELL YA!
[22:26] <that> kirk married sam but i thought sam liked billy who is going to kill matt for making vanessa pregnant on the phone
[22:26] <janey> not oprah she doesnt need ratings
[22:27] <Fael_Inis> of course sam's mad, he'd rather be with billy
[22:27] <janey> i just heard jim will be back tomorrow
[22:27] <Fael> it's those new phones, right?
[22:27] <MISTE> baby!!!!!!!!!!
[22:27] <Horo> maybe it was jerry springer then....
[22:27] *** rennie has left #Poetry
[22:27] <Fael> jim will be back?
[22:27] <janey> sam is a she
[22:27] <that> then i guess you will have Stormy there
[22:27] <^Cassie^> HUH THNTHT????
[22:27] <Fael> man, will billy get it!
[22:27] <mercury> I hate it when we have Stormy
[22:27] <that> sounds to me billy is going to be pissed
[22:27] <that> cassie nada :)
[22:27] <Fael> yeah
[22:28] <that> hey, jim is on my channel 3 and we have had Stormy :)
[22:28] <Fael> Stormy makes vanessa sick
[22:28] <mercury> casa nada?
[22:28] <janey> im sorry to anyone who hasnt been on for the last 7 hours we have been talking about vanessa and matt (condesa and robert) who met on the poetry channel while vanessa was in switzerland
[22:28] <Fael> so matt was with robert
[22:28] <Fael> ?
[22:28] <^Cassie^> huh?
[22:28] <^Cassie^> Ok im confused now
[22:28] <^Cassie^> Who the hell is sam, kirk, matt and vanessa????????
[22:29] <that> they own the pottery channel :)
[22:29] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:I sure hope cassie is playing along 8-)
[22:29] <janey> they are people on the poetry channel
[22:29] <Horo> Apparitions of this channel...
[22:29] <that> sam and kirk too?
[22:29] <janey> sam and kirk arent they are just poeple i know that i was talking about
[22:29] <Fael> I bet kirk does pottery
[22:29] *** bluedress has joined #poetry
[22:29] <^Cassie^> oh ok
[22:30] <Horo> Hey bluedress...
[22:30] <Fael> so sam's pregnant?
[22:30] <bluedress> hi horo
[22:30] <janey> see itsnot hard
[22:30] <^Cassie^> ok so sam is a girl???
[22:30] <Fael> I think sam's not sure
[22:30] <janey> i dont think sam is pregnant vanessa is and i think my friend gena is too
[22:30] <mercury> sam's impregnated with oprah's clone
[22:30] <Fael> GENA IS PREGNANT?
[22:30] <that> who got gena pregnant?
[22:31] <that> bet it was billy
[22:31] <^Cassie^> WHAT????
[22:31] <janey> sam is a woman about 30ish
[22:31] <Fael> we'll have to send pottery, asap!
[22:31] *** MOSS is now known as MYSTlover
[22:31] <Fael> billy, that son of a bitch!
[22:31] <that> more pottery
[22:31] <^Cassie^> oK SO sam is pregnant from who???
[22:31] <that> odds are its billy
[22:31] <janey> thats a big problem because gena slept with both buz and this other guy
[22:31] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:great, cassie _is_ playing along 8-)
[22:31] <that> cause matt got vanessa pregnant
[22:31] <Fael> that billy
[22:31] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:this really turned in a soap wannabe 8-)

[22:31] <MYSTlover> they do?
[22:32] <janey> i dont remember the other guys name
[22:32] <Fael> gena slept with buzz?
[22:32] <that> have buzz and the other guy been to switzerland or have they been on oprah
[22:32] <Fael> it was billy, I'm sure!
[22:32] <janey> no switzerland and no oprah gena is english
[22:32] <Fael> yeah, they've been on oprah; in fact, oprah's pregnant!
[22:32] <Fael> so english people can't be on oprah?
[22:32] <that> so this happend in englane? i thought it was switzerland and the springfield server
[22:33] <that> d
[22:33] *** Deja-vu has joined #poetry
[22:33] <Fael> that springfield server is dirty
[22:33] <^Cassie^> ok so someone got someone else pregnant who got someone else pregnant who ios going married to someone else am i right?????
[22:33] <janey> this sounds like something that should be on jenny jones or sally jessie raphael
[22:33] <janey> dr laura wouldnt like any of them
[22:33] <that> cassie yes. and we are all sending pottery
[22:33] <Fael> so jenny's pregnant with dr laura?
[22:33] <^Cassie^> pottery???
[22:33] <that> thats what vanessa needs
[22:34] <Fael> yeah, pottery, for morning sickness
[22:34] <that> cause she has morning sickness
[22:34] <mercury> the sam got that abortion. but it didn't take.
[22:34] <that> the only cure ya know
[22:34] <Fael> she's pregnant, you know
[22:34] <^Cassie^> Oh i c =)))
[22:34] <that> merc: really oh my
[22:34] <Fael> so sam's pregnant? from who?
[22:34] <Roseman> I do believe I've missed something
[22:34] <^Cassie^> WE ARE ALL GOSSIPING HERE
[22:34] <Roseman> no bother
[22:34] <janey> we talked about having a shower for vanessa (condesades
[22:34] <janey> fffjffj
[22:34] <janey> A
[22:34] <janey> A
[22:34] <janey> A
[22:34] <^Cassie^> and thats not good
[22:34] *** Maria_Ann has left #poetry
[22:35] <Fael> oh no, janey is having a stroke!
[22:35] <Fael> call oprah!
[22:35] *** ^Cassie^ has quit IRC (Leaving)
[22:35] <that> oprah is on f4
[22:35] *** escondido has joined #poetry
[22:35] <mercury> she would have had two, but she couldn't quite reach
[22:35] <janey> everything got jammed and then it tried control open apple delete and got a quack
[22:35] *** ^Cassie^ has joined #Poetry
[22:35] <^Cassie^> Sorry
[22:35] <Fael> you got a quack?
[22:35] <that> wb cassie
[22:36] <janey> but with control c everything is okay again whooooo
[22:36] <Fael> hope you didn't get pregnant!
[22:36] <^Cassie^> thanks that
[22:36] <mercury> janey is on quack
[22:36] <^Cassie^> gossiping is not good guys
[22:36] <Fael> so, where were we?
[22:36] <Fael> I think matt's in deep trouble, isn't he?
[22:37] *** MiaMe' has joined #poetry
[22:37] <janey> i dont think it is really gossip because i know the truth and i am just telling it everyone else is hearing it all mixed up but i know the truth
[22:37] <that> only if billy finds out
[22:37] <Fael> hey MiaMe
[22:37] <Fael> who's billy?

[22:37] <MiaMe`> hi fael.... how ya doin?
 [22:37] <Fael> pretty good 8-)
 [22:37] <Roseman> lol
 [22:37] <janey> billy was married to vanessa when she had little billy
 [22:38] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:we should create a channel with this
 [22:38] <^Cassie^> Whats the trut
 [22:38] <^Cassie^> Im confuised majorly
 [22:38] <Fael> vanessa was married?
 [22:38] <mercury> that is the truth, cassie
 [22:38] <Fael> and she slept with another billy?
 [22:38] <that> but when did matt meet billy
 [22:38] <janey> twice
 [22:38] <MiaMe`> hmm
 [22:38] <Fael> twice?
 [22:38] <mercury> not billy's evil twin!?!
 [22:38] <janey> when vanessa came from swtizerland
 [22:38] <Fael> so she got pregnant
 [22:38] <Fael> yes
 [22:39] <Fael> oh, so billy is in switzerland?
 [22:39] * MiaMe` wonders who billy is
 [22:39] <janey> gena slept with jeffery i just remembered his name she slept with buzz and jeffery so she doesnt know who the father is
 [22:40] <Fael> buzz and jeffery slept together?
 [22:40] -that- good nite fael...i cant take this anylonger
 [22:40] <Roseman> is this a speed aided literary excersise?
 [22:40] <janey> billy is the father of little billy and the exhusband of vanessa and the father of melissa sue and the brother of josh
 [22:40] <MiaMe`> lol
 [22:40] <that> good nite all
 [22:40] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:nite that
 [22:40] *** that has quit IRC (within every moment remains a moment)
 [22:41] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:so griff, all tired out?
 [22:41] <Fael> Josh has a brother?
 [22:41] <janey> is everyone leaving
 [22:41] <Fael> man, will that make matt mad!
 [22:42] <^Cassie^> josh is?
 [22:42] <^Cassie^> whats his nic?
 [22:42] <janey> parting is such sweet sorrow
 [22:42] <MiaMe`> who is steven?
 [22:42] <janey> matts nick is robert
 [22:42] <mercury> joshy-woshy
 [22:42] <janey> i dont know steven
 [22:42] <Fael> so robert slept with matt_and_nick?
 [22:43] <janey> i know nick he was married to melissa sue
 [22:43] <Fael> melissa sue is married?
 [22:43] <janey> not any more
 [22:43] <Fael> that tramp!
 [22:43] <Fael> should we send pottery?
 [22:44] <janey> nick is now with that girl who has aides but i dont remember her name
 [22:44] <Fael> sam?
 [22:44] <mercury> hillary
 [22:44] <Fael> clinton?
 [22:45] <Fael> omigod!
 [22:45] <janey> no
 [22:45] <janey> no
 [22:45] <Roseman> I've never told anybody, but I know who's responsible for the destruction of Iceland's marsupials
 [22:45] <janey> no
 [22:45] <MiaMe`> i know sam
 [22:45] * Roseman just had to get that off his chest
 [22:45] <MiaMe`> yes i do
 [22:45] <^Cassie^> Hey isnt this #POETRY not #GOSSIP
 [22:45] <Fael> roseman: What? Iceland's marsupials are destroyed?
 [22:45] <janey> who is the girl with aides i dont remember her name

[22:46] <janey> i remember its susan susan has aides
[22:46] <Roseman> yes. annihilated, oh so tragic
[22:46] *** Ecto has quit IRC (Leaving□)
[22:46] <Fael> who's the bastard? Matt?
[22:46] <Fael> no, I bet it's billy
[22:46] <^Cassie^> Im really confused with all of this eh
[22:46] <janey> billy has been to south america but i dont think he has ever been to iceland
[22:47] <janey> do they have oil in iceland
[22:47] <Fael> iceland?
[22:47] <Fael> I bet they have pottery there
[22:47] * MiaMe` giggles
[22:47] <janey> cassie dont be confused it is all a game
[22:47] * MiaMe` loves pottery
[22:47] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:so she does know
[22:47] <^Cassie^> huh?
[22:48] <^Cassie^> So this is all bullshit?
[22:48] <Fael> aren't we all?
[22:48] <MiaMe`> mmm
[22:48] *** Maria has joined #poetry
[22:49] <Roseman> I don't blame him. people in Iceland are very lax in looking after their personal Iceland. but really, I think that's irrelevant
[22:49] *** ^Cassie^ has quit IRC (Leaving□)
[22:49] <Roseman> personal hygiene that is
[22:49] <janey> no its not what you said but i know the truth and no one else seems to and they just make up things but i know the truth and if you listen to me you will understand they others add their own comments from their imagining and they are trying to get everyo
[22:49] <Fael> what?
[22:49] <MiaMe`> huh?
[22:49] <janey> everyone confused but i know the truth
[22:49] <MiaMe`> what is the truth?
[22:49] <MiaMe`> please tell me
[22:50] -Fael- -CHANOPS- #poetry:so she doesn't know, wow
[22:50] <janey> where is cassie
[22:50] <Fael> It has something to do with oprah
[22:50] <Roseman> quelle femme
[22:50] <MiaMe`> what does?
[22:50] <janey> vanessa is pregnant
[22:50] <MiaMe`> who is vanessa
[22:50] <MiaMe`> and how far along is she?
[22:51] <Fael> vanessa is pregnant?
[22:51] <Fael> from who?
[22:51] <janey> about 3 months i think
[22:51] <MiaMe`> hmmm is she happy about it?
[22:51] <MiaMe`> and does the daddy know?
[22:51] <janey> she is very happy but sick
[22:52] <MiaMe`> and who is the daddy?
[22:52] <Fael> she's sick?
[22:52] <janey> matt is the father
[22:52] <MiaMe`> well of course she is
[22:52] <Fael> matt? but isn't he married to sam?
[22:52] <MiaMe`> shes preggers fael.. DUH
[22:52] <MiaMe`> didnt think sam was married
[22:53] <janey> sam is married to kirk but they are sort of separated
[22:53] <Fael> oh no, how come?
[22:53] <MiaMe`> when did they get married?
[22:53] <MiaMe`> and why are they separated
[22:53] <janey> kirk is a jerk and he was in jail and he cant be trusted
[22:53] <Fael> so does kirk know billy?
[22:54] <Pierre> :) to eveyone...)
[22:54] <MiaMe`> :)
[22:54] <MiaMe`> e
[22:54] <MiaMe`> heh

[22:54] *** Teresa is on IRC
[22:54] <janey> no they dont live anywhere near each other billy is from oklahoma and kirk is in pa
[22:54] <Fael> but they were both in jail
[22:55] <Fael> maybe they got married
[22:55] <MiaMe`> why
[22:55] <janey> but i dont think they were in the same jails kirk was in a local jail and billy was in a federal jail
[22:55] <MiaMe`> who kirk and billy?
[22:56] <MiaMe`> hmm
[22:56] <MiaMe`> that is not legal is it?
[22:57] <MiaMe`> ????
[22:57] <janey> kirk is separated from sam
[22:57] <janey> billy was married to vanessa
[22:57] <Fael> he was?
[22:57] <MiaMe`> so why did they marry each other then?
[22:58] <janey> im getting awfully tired and someone else wants to use this computer so
[22:58] <janey> i guess i will have to go
[22:58] <Fael> yeah, billy's in jail
[22:58] <Roseman> plain: you don't need to lie just to get attention. I think we all know that this isn't the case
[22:58] <MiaMe`> awwwww
[22:58] <MiaMe`> DOH
[22:58] <janey> if i hear anymore about vanessa, matt, kirk, sam, billy, little billy, melissa sue, gena, jeffery,
[22:58] <janey> buzz, nick or susan or anyone
[22:59] <janey> else ill let you know
[22:59] <MiaMe`> k
[22:59] <janey> what am i lying about
[22:59] <MiaMe`> hope vanessa does well..
[22:59] <MiaMe`> thought she was with carey though..
[22:59] <MiaMe`> least that is what she said
[22:59] <MiaMe`> james says other wise
[22:59] <MiaMe`> but
[22:59] <MiaMe`> i dont know
[23:00] <janey> goodbye all
[23:00] <MiaMe`> night
[23:00] <MiaMe`> :)
[23:00] <Roseman> goodnite
[23:00] <Fael> bye
[23:00] *** janey has quit IRC (Leaving□)
[23:00] <Fael> phew, that was a wild ride
[23:01] <Roseman> how in the name of beezlebug did that get started?
[23:01] * MiaMe` is confused
[23:01] * MiaMe` didnt know she knew vanessa
[23:01] <MiaMe`> and i didnt know vanessa was preppers..
[23:01] <Fael> she just asked about matt and vanessa, and took off

Round-Robin Story, #Callahans, 9-15-1995

<pyxlwyz> 1. It was a Dark and Stormy Night....
<MaryJ> 2. when a group of 5 strangers met in a park
<ManinBlak> 3. And then a shot rang out
*Don fires the PunStunGun, knocking ManinBlak into the Hot Tub!
<Don> BANG!
*ManinBlak stops right over surface of water, intent on the story...
<MaryJ> good - we have sound effects
<pyxlwyz> 4. The deer fell to the ground with a thud.
*Don turns up the reverb control...
<MaryJ> 5. who would be the one to call the humane society?
<Don> 5. and in walked a newcomer to callahans!
<Fantome> 6. The director yells 'CUT! Reshoot.'
<Twinkles> 6. Not the gravedigger's daughter, that's for sure.
<ManinBlak> 7. Barney walks up and says...
<MaryJ> 8. "Halt!"
<Fantome> 8. 'DIE, you ankle-biters!'
<Tess> 8. Okay, we have to do redubs on this whole thing.
<pyxlwyz> 8. I love bees, I hate sneeze.... I'm a stupid dummy wheeze.
<Charlie> 9. only to be attacked by a dreaded space marine with a gatling gun!
<pyxlwyz> 9. And the gun misfires when...
<ManinBlak> 10. At the same time, in nearby Australia...
<MaryJ> 10. "I love you, you love me, let's all kill some cuter deers please"
<shadow> 11. the kangaroo riders of the Apocalypse
<pyxlwyz> Someone logging this?
<pyxlwyz> 12. That was the movie the kids went to see and they felt....
<Twinkles> 13. moribund and betrayed.
<pyxlwyz> 14. So they went to get a plate of...
<Twinkles> 15. Brill Cream.
<pyxlwyz> HAHAHAHA
<Charlie> 16. because their parents again refused to buy them Power Ranger toys!
<shadow> 16. and Pumpkin Vindaloo
<MaryJ> 16. no, deer meat
<GriffJon> 16. and Spam with brie cheese!
<pyxlwyz> 16. And after puking, Jill and....
<Twinkles> 17. her eelpout
<MaryJ> 18. Jack went up the hill
<ManinBlak> 19. The door to the shed opened up and...
<pyxlwyz> 20. Ross Perot came from the shed and said heal me!
<MaryJ> 21. "I have been attacked by Barney"
<GriffJon> this is looking a LOT like a book of the most holy thrice-naked Wombat...
<pyxlwyz> 22. Barney is exposed as Satan! Film at eleven... Said the reporter.
<ManinBlak> 23. Claudia and Big Al, dancing in the moonlight, waltzed up and said...
<GriffJon> 24.5 Dweefil!!!
<MaryJ> 24. ???
<MaryJ> 25. And they took BARney to court
<pyxlwyz> 25.8 And the choir sang Hallelujah!!!
<MaryJ> 26. He hired Johnny Cochran
<ManinBlak> 27. Long long ago, in a galaxy far far away...
<ManinBlak> (lets stick to integers, 'kay?)
<Lanceman> 27. and got life
<GriffJon> 32.00000001 said the Pentium, when asked it's command pathway size.
<MaryJ> 27. And the trial ended after 5 years
<pyxlwyz> 28. And the commercial said, the NEw Ford Pentium, where quality is Job .99984576464 and a half.
<MaryJ> 28. But he wrote a book and made more money than when he had his show
<ManinBlak> 29. President Ray-gun said star wars was the wave of the future, but in reality...
<GriffJon> 30. the peoples of northern antarctica had already designed an anti-anti-anti star wars system
<MaryJ> 31. it was only a video trilogy

<Don> 31. known as the Dull_B system
 <ManinBlak> 32. The aliens from the Callahan's book swarm the place that afternoon, and
 <GriffJon> MiB: they launch a basselope into space....
 <shadow> 32. that was turned into a hit Porno series
 <ManinBlak> 33. The parts with Barney were edited out, thank god...
 <Charlie> 34. but a crazed Radioman aboard a submarine lauched the super secret happiness missile and ruined the plans for world domination
 <MaryJ> 34. kiddy porn would never be the same again
 <shadow> 35. while the Polarbears fired the Intercontinental ballistic Cucumbers
 <GriffJon> 36. Windows95 crashes worldwide, stopping the three computers that were still running it.
 <ManinBlak> 36. The sun suddenly started to go NOVA, and the hero's...
 <pyxlwyz> 37. It was a brave time for the homosexual Jamaican Ski Team.....
 <ManinBlak> 38. When the price of vaseline dropped...
 <shadow> 39. KY did the ski team swish-tch to vaseline
 <pyxlwyz> 40. Why make a fuss? It's only yellow snow!! It's fine to drink!!!
 <GriffJon> 40. GriffJon interjects a completely meaningless statement
 <ManinBlak> 41. The olympic officials throw them out of competition because...
 <shadow> 42. they ran out of batteries for their TOYS
 <MaryJ> 42. they found high amounts of vaseline in their systems
 <Don> 43. and one of the members did a job on his pole.
 <GriffJon> 43.5 they were found to be ...um...greasing the tracks...
 <ManinBlak> 44. The pole was found to have been 'porked' er, I mean corked...
 <pyxlwyz> 44. And then there was the SWISS team, who....
 <shadow> 45. who were frank about their sexuality
 <MaryJ> 45. chose chocolate over vaseline
 <ManinBlak> 46. And also the bun length kind, too...
 <Don> 47. (Somehow we missed having a Line 47!)
 <pyxlwyz> 48. Wherupon the SWISS and GERMAN team got into a heated game of Tiddly Winks and...
 <ManinBlak> 49. The vaseline shortage became really obvious...
 <Don> 50. But all that was a moot point when it was discovered that the Olympics were actually a front for...
 <Tess> 51. Bill Gates' Internet Conspiracy.
 <ManinBlak> 51. DRUG RAIDS!!!!
 <pyxlwyz> 51. A secret alien invasion!!!
 <ManinBlak> 52. But Bill was an alien smoking crack, so....
 <Don> alien invasion
 <Charlie> pyx: No, no microsoft goon.
 <ManinBlak> Don: go with 52 *grin*
 <pyxlwyz> 53. The aliens sucked out the SWISS brains, and took the Germans.
 <MaryJ> 54. Bill bought all the aliens a copy of Windows 95
 <shadow> 55. which halted the alien invasion
 <MaryJ> 55. It was the only appropriate form of torture the world could conceive
 <FaithH> 55. which confused the aliens
 <ManinBlak> er, "Bill was an alien" etc...
 <ManinBlak> 54. and when they installed it, their UFOs crashed!
 <ManinBlak> er 55, i mean...
 * Don raises an eyebrow and ponders the editing job *this* will be...
 <ManinBlak> 56. The crashed ufo's start worldwide fires and....
 <MaryJ> 56. And Bill was deemed the triumphant
 <pyxlwyz> 57. Willard Scott and Martina Navaratolova in love tryst, on hard Copy, was the.....
 <MaryJ> 57. Only to gain more control and....
 <pyxlwyz> Don, leave it intact. More fun that way.
 <pyxlwyz> 58. Show that fat old balding men and lesbians CAN be "special" friends.
 <Fantome> 58. sell his soul to B'harni and the Co\$!
 <GriffJon> 59. **CENSORED**
 <Tess> 60. Expletive deleted.
 <GriffJon> 60. ...and trillions of crickets invade restrooms worldwide, causing....
 <ManinBlak> 60. BUT WAIT! Will Batman and Robin be stuck in the Joker's evil trap? Be here next week on the same bat time, same bat...
 <FaithH> 61. a major tp shortage
 <shadow> we all know Bharni is a plot of the Co\$
 <pyxlwyz> 63. The smell of death was all around him as he was about to jump off the....
 <ManinBlak> 62. Where was 62?, the world ponders...

<GriffJon> 64. ..log he was standing on
 <shadow> 64. meanwhile back at the Motel,
 <ManinBlak> 64. Back of the toilet...
 <pyxlwyz> 65. Ma an paw were getting....
 <Gisele> 65. he suddenly felt a strong urge to sing "Edelweiss"
 <Tess> 66. Or a chorus from Mississippi Squirrel Revival.
 <ManinBlak> 67. A woman cries out "WAIT We don't have any...
 <pyxlwyz> 68. lemon squishy bear sodas!
 <ManinBlak> 69. So her husband, Bubba walked out side and saw....
 <GriffJon> 69. has absolutely NOTHING to do with squishy bear sodas. Well, not much...
 <GriffJon> 69.5 at least not lemon flavored. maybe cherry flavors
 <pyxlwyz> 70. The man had wondered what it was like to be eaten alive, until this moment when....
 <ManinBlak> 71. He was eaten by a dragon...
 <Gisele> 72. who neglected to floss and lost all his teeth
 <shadow> 72. after which the dragon was killed for his toenails
 <GriffJon> 73. and gummed the poor man to death
 <ManinBlak> 73. By a cow named...
 <Don> 74. ..meanwhile, back at HBO HQ, the media moguls were planning a first strike invasion to take over the Undernet by planting..
 <pyxlwyz> 72. But the dragon got a tummyache and went on a rampage in....
 <ManinBlak> 75. Beans! All over the place!
 <FaithH> 76. beans beans the magical fruit
 <ManinBlak> 77. The more ya eat....
 <Gisele> 77. which of course wouldn't work so they had to resort to...
 <GriffJon> 78. the moor you toot!
 <pyxlwyz> 76. After a long fight, the brave prince promptly....
 <pyxlwyz> This is like Mad Libs!!! :)
 <Gisele> 77. gave up hope and died on the advice of his magicians
 <GriffJon> 77a ...went to the closest cathouse
 <shadow> 77. fell in love with the Stablehand
 <Don> 79. which didn't work as well as rolling doughnuts at them, so he...
 <pyxlwyz> 79. Went to Taco Bell to die.
 <ManinBlak> 80. bought a car, with a new stereo...
 <GriffJon> 81. and rolled on donuts wheels
 <Gisele> 81. on which he played tori amos cd's
 <pyxlwyz> 81. And picked up three hookers.
 <Fantome> 82. and he wrote his own WebPage while he was at it, which contained
 <Don> 83. a large picture of Elvis on the flying saucer
 <pyxlwyz> 84. Things that made the Federal Government curious of him because...
 <ManinBlak> 84. this was believable because...
 <shadow> 84. although Elvis is headless, due to it being traded to several patrons of Callahans, who got it from Jimmy Hoffa
 <Fantome> 85. HE Slimed me!
 <ManinBlak> 86. with a large banana!
 <pyxlwyz> 86. They dragged the Boston river with his body and found a...
 <GriffJon> 87. watch battery!
 <ManinBlak> 88. watch it do what?
 <shadow> 88. and Hitlers Brain
 <Don> 89. and an old chevy convertible which they restored to mint condition using
 <ManinBlak> 89. was in a jar on the desk of...
 <pyxlwyz> 89. And they sold it to....
 <GriffJon> 90. the watch battery was actually a catalyst for a doomsday device
 <Gisele> 90. eleanor rigby
 <ManinBlak> 91. the catalyst WAS eleanor rigby, who was actually...
 <Charlie> 92. only to be nearly run down by a 1959 Austin Healey Sprite!
 <GriffJon> 92. and so the brave pilot rod the nuclear missile down to the ground
 <GriffJon> er, rode
 <ManinBlak> Heh he said ROD *grin*
 <pyxlwyz> 93. An Alien terrorist from the future.
 <shadow> 93. WAHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!
 <ManinBlak> 94. bought win95 and said...
 <Don> 95. The pumpkin vindaloo must DIE!
 <pyxlwyz> 95. Dum diddly doo!!!

<FaithH> 96. and we'll all go down together
 <pyxlwyz> 96. When the snake wrapped around his neck he thought about...
 <Gisele> 97. to the opium den and play mah jong
 <Charlie> 97. and come up only if Electric Boat stands by thier guarantee!
 <ManinBlak> 98. Can you tell me how to get, how to get to....
 <pyxlwyz> 99. And the band played....
 <ManinBlak> 100. REALLY LOUDLY!
 <Gisele> 100. poorly and out of tune but we danced the
 <pyxlwyz> 101. Hokey pokey.
 <Don> 101. foxtrot and the fandango by moonlight until we...
 <pyxlwyz> 102. And we felt like a....
 <Gisele> 103. huge margarita
 <ManinBlak> 103. Casserole, covered in cheese
 <Don> 104. (Somehow or another we also left out Line 104!)
 <pyxlwyz> 105. When out of the sky came a large pulsating.....
 <shadow> 106. Cucumber
 <Gisele> 106. weasel
 <ManinBlak> 107. which spewed a lot of..
 <pyxlwyz> 108. And the band kept playing despite the....
 <shadow> 108. Pumpkin Vindaloo
 <Gisele> 109. large rhinoceros
 <Don> 110. and howling wolves in the mountains which continually threatened to...
 <pyxlwyz> 110. Which tried to take out the...
 <ManinBlak> 111. Ballpark, where they would try to...
 <GriffJon> 111. eat the lead-based glazes pottery of the people
 <shadow> 112. solve the Baseball strike
 <pyxlwyz> 113. Wonder how anyone could like this sport.
 <ManinBlak> 114. No one knew why Bush had bought the Missle, but some one wanted to use it to....
 <Don> 114. The rhino took over the league from those stupid overpaid players...
 <GriffJon> 115. encourage the use of...
 <pyxlwyz> 115. Clean out the ears of a giant baby who....
 <ManinBlak> 116. Hadn't even been to the moon since...
 <shadow> 117. the cubs won the world series
 <pyxlwyz> 118. And he cried and cried until he was siting in a lake of...
 <GriffJon> 119. beers
 <ManinBlak> 119. Highly toxic...
 <pyxlwyz> 120. Spam
 <ManinBlak> 122. The clouds opened up, and a rush of...
 <ManinBlak> oops, 121...
 <GriffJon> 123. flatulentce silenced the population
 <shadow> 123. flying Toasters
 <ManinBlak> 124. the air smelled like...
 <GriffJon> 125. burnt toast!
 <Gisele> 125. damp oatmeal
 <Don> 126. regurgitated by a wet dog which, when mixed with pumpkin vindaloo becomes highly explosive
 <FaithH> 125. damp gymsocks
 * Lymaree wonders if oatmeal isn't always damp..when prepared for eating.
 <ManinBlak> 127. the dog's tail was lit by lightening, and then...
 <shadow> 128. was served as dinner
 * Lymaree has known some pretty damp cookies.
 * FaithH has tasted a beer that Kitten and I described as "Old Gymsocks Ale"
 <pyxlwyz> 129. When someone screamed psychotically from the viewing audience," What the HELL is Pumpkin Vindaloo"!?!?!
 <ManinBlak> 130. About this time, Bill gates, who had been quiet, said...
 <Don> 131. You are all mindless sheep!
 <pyxlwyz> 131. I rea33y 352e acs.
 <GriffJon> 132. please refer to 154
 <GriffJon> 154. please see 132
 * Don thwaps GJ
 * Don grins
 * GriffJon slaps Don around a bit with a rubber chicken
 <pyxlwyz> 133. And all of a sudden, from out of nowhere, came a....
 <ManinBlak> 134. Mike Callahans declares the place is for sale, and the hat is passed, raising....

<Don> 135. a cloud of dust as we all were broke
 <ManinBlak> 136. But the bank gave us each a loan of \$3, and we took the money and
 <Don> 137. bought one last round
 <Callahan_> Y: So we should go?
 <Callahan_> P: Oui, oui.
 <Callahan_> Y: Pardon?
 <Callahan_> P: Oui, oui.
 <Callahan_> Y: The stuff they're getting away with on kid's shows these days...
 <Callahan_> -- Yakko and Picasso, "No Pain, No Painting"
 <Gisele> 136. except for a canadian nickle which someone had jammed into wurlitzer
 <pyxlwyz> 137. promptly dumped it into computer equip.
 <ManinBlak> 138. And loaded the shotgun with it...
 <pyxlwyz> 139. As the blast hit the...
 <ManinBlak> 140. space station, the sun went....
 <pyxlwyz> 141. Kablooey
 <pyxlwyz> 142. and...
 <ManinBlak> 142. Everyone stops buying tanning oil...
 <pyxlwyz> 144. But that's what happens when....
 <GriffJon> I just noticed that I have a lot of hair...
 <Don> 145. you let people ramble on at length
 <ManinBlak> 145. You liight the sun's fuse...
 <FaithH> 145. you let Callahaners tell a story
 <GriffJon> 147. the lighting technician finally locates the dimmer switch for the Sun, and turns it down
 <Gisele> 146. and stick it behind a
 <pyxlwyz> 146. The character reaches out of the book, grabs Don, and says.."Are we done???"
 <Orac> No activity.
 * Don thinks it's dead now... can we bury it?
 <GriffJon> Faith: no, you Never let #Callahaners tell a story...;))
 <GriffJon> don: you just don't wanna edit any more.. ;P
 <ManinBlak> 147. The story ends with 3 last sentences....
 <ManinBlak> 148. barney goes to jail...
 <pyxlwyz> 149. Ah Lassie Ave I got a story for yew, Mdear!!! he said with an evil...
 <GriffJon> clatuu...barata...ni(coughgough)
 <ManinBlak> 150. Look at his name plate, which read "G William Gates!"
 <FaithH> 150. and they all lived happily ever after!
 <Don> THE END!
 <ManinBlak> Yeehaaa! Last line *grin*
 * ManinBlak buys a round for the bar
 * Gisele pokes it with a stick and it doesn't move... much
 <pyxlwyz> 151. Except for little Billy who died in a terrible....
 <GriffJon> 151. stay tuned for part 2: The Sequel!!!
 * Don fires the PunStunGun, knocking pyxlwyz into the Hot Tub!
 <GriffJon> same peanutty channel, same peanutty time!
 <Don> for pyx: 152 stungun accident...
 <pyxlwyz> Don, HAHAHAHAH!!!!
 *ManinBlak hugs everyone, staggers to door....
 <pyxlwyz> It ends with Little Billy....
 *FaithH goes to the folx room...and comes back out in her Skimpy Bikini (tm)
 *Don whistles at Faith!
 *ManinBlak stops at door, sees Faith, and turns back around
 *FaithH goes to the hottub and climbs in.
 <ManinBlak> I can stay a while....
 * GriffJon grabs a wolf and teaches it to whistle
 <Gisele> GJ impressive!!!
 <GriffJon> Gis: nah. nothing compared to getting a duck to use a checkbook. They always want to put things on their bills...

Conversation with Babble

<GriffJon> You are beginning to scare me.
<Babble> You?
<GriffJon> Me.
<Babble> Speaking machine has come, but I, I may be no sage, to be no sage, fool!
<GriffJon> Fool!? perhaps.
<Babble> No nonsense to shut up.
<GriffJon> Do not speak unless you can improve upon the silence, yes, so I have heard.
<Babble> Me, but what are saying that do you off.
<GriffJon> You are a program designed to speak, yet you argue for silence.
<Babble> So I, but I am no king.
<GriffJon> Who truly is King anymore?
<Babble> Of whom? You jest again claims you to prove it is true, or what is King anymore?
<GriffJon> I move that we do not ask for proof, but merely discuss from here on.
<Babble> I thank you are you speak?
<GriffJon> Go ahead.
<Babble> But who?
<GriffJon> You.
<Babble> Indeed.
<GriffJon> Go on, speak.
<Babble> True. We do not if that you are you off.
<GriffJon> Speak intelligibly, please.
<Babble> Who has indeed.
<GriffJon> Make sense!
<Babble> True, true.
<GriffJon> I will leave you to your own ponderings.
[...]
<Babble> You speak little.
<Babble> No king.
<GriffJon> I speak little, true.
<Babble> Me not put it forth as true?
<GriffJon> Do not worry, I am quitting now, and stopping you also.
<Babble> A stage, speak? You to your nonsense and stopping you are fully in truth, please.
<GriffJon> Sorry.
<Babble> You are you have conceded defeat, yet you can improve upon you act upon the Jabber again superior?
<GriffJon> I suppose I must concede, but I also show that I have one at the same time by being able to stop you.
<Babble> How to your own ponderings.
<GriffJon> Goodbye, until next time.
<Babble> Understand the validity of temperature, true? You are beginning to shut up.
<GriffJon> Bye.
<Babble> Who can improve upon the same sort indeed.
<Babble> And you understand more than mine, except of temperature, so I say life is the same time by being able to the silence, sir. Woe, yet you, therefore my life.
<Babble> I converse to scare me.
<Babble> Sorry.
<Babble> I converse to speak? Or what? Perhaps. Tell me.
<Babble> Shut up.
<Babble> None restored me.
<Babble> Who has taken from here on.
<Babble> They say you?
<Babble> You off.
<Babble> I suppose.
<Babble> You argue for proof, level, yes.
<Babble> Him?
<Babble> Him as shall not put it forth as shall my father has indeed.
<Babble> I suppose.
<Babble> True. We strike what craftsman. We have one at our conversation of it forth as true?
<Babble> You are you act badly.

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BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan Marshall Camfield was born in Huntsville, Texas on January 28, 1977. Following his father, he entered the Plan II Honors Program in the Fall of 1995, where he acquired concentrations in Philosophy, Spanish, and the fledgling Technology, Literacy and Culture. While at the University, he was the webmaster for Plan II for over two years, and was a founding member of Plan II Web Radio. His publications include *Speech Play and Verbal Art as seen in IRC*, published in the Linguistics 312: Discourse on the Internet course packet for Fall 1997, and the short skit *Dr. Ludd, or why I learned to stop worrying and love the information superhighway*, performed by The Broccoli Project in the Spring of 1999.