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Electronic Hybridity: The Persistent Processes of the Vernacular Web

Through the example of a specific blog, this article locates a category of online discourse termed the "vernacular web." Because the definitive trait of the vernacular is its distinction from the institutional, the vernacular web emerges in specific network locations as a communal invocation of alternate authority. Imagining those invocations as located communication processes, the concept of a vernacular web provides the theoretical language necessary for speaking about the complex hybridity that new communication technologies make possible.

One of the earliest articles dealing with folklore and the Internet dubbed the rush toward new communication technologies during the 1990s as the dawning of a "telectronic age." In this article, John Dorst recognized the capacity for network communication to blend vernacular and institutional modes of communication in ways that frustrated distinctions between "folk" and mass media. At the beginning of the digital revolution, Dorst feared that "the electronic technologies of infinite text and image reproduction and instantaneous mass distribution" would increasingly enact "the colonization of vernacular production by the subtle agencies of advanced consumer culture" (1990:88). With today's surge in participatory Internet media like wikis, social networking tools, and folksonomy indexes, Dorst rightly saw a new era of hybridity was dawning.[1] However, he did not fully account for the ways that the technologies of cultural reproduction could be bent to vernacular ends.

While mass-mediated communication technologies have empowered the institutional, participatory media offer powerful new channels through which the vernacular can express its alterity. However, alternate voices do not emerge from these technologies untouched by their means of production. Instead, these communications are amalgamations of institutional and vernacular expression. In this situation, any human expressive behavior that deploys communication technologies suggests a necessary complicity. Insofar as individuals hope to participate in today's electronically mediated communities, they must deploy the communication technologies that have made those communities possible. In so doing, they participate in creating a telectronic world where mass culture may dominate, but an increasing prevalence of participatory media extends into growing webs of network-based folk culture.

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Since the early 1990s, scholars have recognized technologically mediated folklore in the form of online traditional discourse. In forms as diverse as jokes, contemporary legends, local rumors, folk belief, music, and storytelling, this "e-lore" is well documented and easy to assimilate into already-established genres: chain letters, personal narratives, jokes, and so on. Other online expressions have emerged as unique new genres with specific properties made possible by network technologies. Dependent on those technologies, early forms like ASCII art (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996) developed into more recent forms like the "photoshop" (Russell 2004). Named after the commercial software used to manipulate the images (Adobe Photoshop), photoshopping most commonly involves individuals sharing, editing, and exchanging digital photographs (Ellis 2001, 2002; Hathaway 2005). Often photoshops engage humorous visual commentary such as that in Figure 1. In that image, two readily available photographs were combined to make it appear that George W. Bush and his father were fishing in the catastrophic New Orleans flood of 2005. Although the photo seems obviously faked, it comments on the Bush administration's slow response to the disaster.

In addition to these smaller forms, whole genres of Web pages have emerged to mix text, graphics, sound, video, and other media into distinctly folkloric Web sites. First among these new genres is the "home" or "vanity page" (R. G. Howard 2005b).

Proclaiming them the "first digital genre," scholars in information science have conducted survey-based research suggesting that many, if not most, Internet users recognize and have expectations about the basic characteristics of home pages (Asteroff 2001; Dillon and Gushrowski 2000). Extending those findings, ethnographic methods have located a cluster of genres in the online world. Terming this cluster

Figure 1. Titled "Bush's Response to Hurricane Katrina," an e-mail message forwarded to the author on September 9, 2005, contained this photoshop.

"vanity pages," I have documented and cataloged a wide range of subgenres, includ-
ing personal vanity pages of individuals, online diaries, photo album pages, travel
pages, pet pages, birth pages, holiday pages, memorial pages (for both humans and
pets), missionary pages, political pages, and joke pages (R. G. Howard 2005a, 2005b).
For researching vanity pages, the concept of genre has proven well suited because it
can locate shared conceptions in online discourse. As more complex media have
emerged, however, a more nuanced understanding of the interactive hybridity of
online expression has become necessary. Generic analysis that demarcates and doc-
uments examples of network-based discourse is a necessary first step in online re-
search. However, treating these communication events as media objects turns our
attention away from the communities where discourse is enacted. It only becomes
possible to recognize that a specific case participates in larger discursive forms when
those examples bear some more broadly inclusive characteristics. As more than one
person recognizes those characteristics, interpretative communities develop around
them. Such communities of shared expectation have emerged around Internet forms
like vanity pages and photoshops.

These expectations are not born of institutional authority, nor are they the products
of mass culture. Instead, they emerge from the bottom up, from the volition of everyday
actors filtered through the technological mechanisms made available by global eco-
nomic structures. By focusing on the community processes that create, maintain, and
re-create these expectations, researchers can better document these communication
processes as they reforge the tools of the technology industries into shared meaning.
Here, the vernacular and institutional hybridize into everyday expressive behaviors.

When "folk" express meaning though new communication technologies, the dis-
tinction between folk and mass is, as Dorst suggested, blurred by the vernacular
deployment of institutionally produced commercial technologies. In online participa-
tory media, the distinction is further blurred because the content that emerges inter-
mingles vernacular, commercial, and institutional interests. Vanity pages are often
placed on commercial servers that mix advertising with the personal content. Most
commonly today, this mixed content is found on blogging and social networking sites
like Blogger.com, MySpace, and Facebook. Not only do these free hosting services
mix commercial content with advertising, but they also place limits on the kinds and
forms of content hosted. In this way, these new media forms incorporate both folk
and mass cultural content, interests, and agencies.

While hybridity complicates the documenting and analyzing of online communi-
cation, folklorists are particularly well equipped for these tasks, because their subject
is precisely those expressions that emerge upward from the local, the specific, and
the informal to permeate a community's shared expressive meanings. As Harris M.
Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro have recently suggested, researchers of "everyday
life" must conceptualize their subject less as a radically distinct object and more "as
an interpretative framework defined in dialectical opposition to the notion of special
events" (Berger and Del Negro 2004:4). Vernacularity can only emerge into meaning
by being seen as distinct from the mass, the official, and the institutional. In this sense,
it relies on a shared notion of the institutional to be rendered meaningful. Such shared
expectations are the means by which a community recognizes the "everyday" or the

"special," and those expectations are formed in the everyday folkloric processes that have been the primary interest of folklorists since the nineteenth century.

Folklorists need a conceptual framework for new media that allows the examination of the complex interplay between the vernacular and institutional. In this article, I argue that there is a class of online discourse that is properly termed "vernacular" because it invokes characteristics that are recognized as distinct from those that are recognized as "institutional." Taken as a whole, this technology-dependent but other-than-institutional process of dynamically interconnecting discursive activity is appropriately termed "the vernacular web." Because the definitive trait of this web is its distinction from the institutional, however, invoking the vernacular web necessarily also invokes that which is not vernacular: the institutional. While this conception might frustrate our desires to rigidly locate discrete documents that are entirely amateur or professional, traditional or mass mediated, its flexibility provides the theoretical language necessary for speaking about the inextricably intertwined nature of public and private, personal and commercial, individual and group in the communications that new technologies have made possible.

Examining this hybridity in an example of a so-called blog, we can see that the vernacular emerges as distinct from the institutional but not separable from it. As a located site for communication processes, the Official Kerry-Edwards Blog demonstrates how the vernacular and the institutional invoke each other's meaning in what Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge have termed a dynamic "zone of contestation" (1995).

The Official Kerry-Edwards Blog

In 2003, with his eye on the Democratic Party nomination to run for U.S. president, Howard Dean attended a public gathering that was organized through the Web site Meetup.com. Recognizing the potential of the Internet for building support, Dean's campaign quickly started its own "meetup group." In March 2003, "Dean for President" became the largest group on the Web site and had 15,000 members. By mid-November, it had over 140,000 members. That year, Dean set the record for the most money raised in a single quarter for a Democratic presidential campaign: over $15 million (Trippi 2004; Wolf 2004). Despite these efforts, John Kerry won the Democratic nomination and chose John Edwards as his running mate.

Meanwhile, the Republicans had already developed a robust Internet campaign strategy. Accessed through a Web link from their official campaign Web site, Bush-Cheney '04 Official Campaign Blog was a significant mechanism for galvanizing support. On the site, readers could e-mail the Bush campaign, subscribe to e-mail lists, and contribute money. However, they could not post their own comments on the so-called blog (Bush-Cheney Presidential Campaign 2004). In 2004, blogs were typically thought of as a reverse chronological list of regularly updated entries on a Web site. As discussed in detail below, an expectation had developed that blogs would offer the chance for audience members to post their own "comments" in response to these entries. However, the Bush-Cheney blog did not. In this sense, the site was not a conduit for vernacular expression and did not seem very much

like a blog at all. Although they had created a Web site that offered official information, their main Internet strategy was to use lists of e-mail addresses and local contacts to get voters involved. While this proved to be a significant factor in the campaign, because they only used it for mass mailings, the unidirectional deployment of e-mail did not generate a large amount of public expression and did not seem to harness the participatory potential of the Internet (Rainie, Cornfield, and Horrigan 2005).

Facing the formidable machinery already put in place by Bush, Kerry poured funding into interactive Internet media. Attempting to exploit the participatory potential of Internet communication, Kerry followed Trippi's example (P. Howard 2006:17). Central to these efforts was the Official Kerry-Edwards Blog. In August 2003, the Official Kerry-Edwards Blog was linked to from John Kerry's official site. The top of the front page was dominated by a graphic that included two pictures of John Kerry (one thoughtful and one smiling) and a picture of the White House with elements of an American flag swirling tastefully around it (see Figure 2).

In later versions of the site, the official Kerry campaign logo was used as a banner

Figure 2. A page titled ":::JohnKerry.com—Blog:::" on the Web site blog.johnkerry.com, as it appeared on October 1, 2003.

image across the top of the page with a title line for the blog. In May 2004, that title line read: "The Official John Kerry Blog." In August 2004, that text was changed so that everything but "Kerry-Edwards" was set in lower case letters: "the official Kerry-Edwards blog" (Kerry-Edwards 2004d).

Below these evolving titles, there was the definitive trait of blogs: dated entries in reverse chronological order with clickable headings on a white background. A blue sidebar on the left of the page offered links to information on John Kerry's life, career, and political plans. On the right, there were links to a select group of "recent entries," partial archives of the blog organized by week, a script that would automatically create a link from the Kerry blog to one's own blog, a list of "unofficial sites," and an "on-line forum" to chat with other Kerry supporters (Kerry-Edwards 2004b). Links to the dated blog entries were in the central pane of the Web page, where each was represented with a title and the first five to twenty or so lines of the entry.

Through its title, the Web site overtly identified itself as the "official" blog. Official actors wrote the main blog entries, and the majority of these posts were from Dick Bell, who was employed by the John Kerry campaign under the title of "blogmaster." First hired by the Democratic National Party in 1993, he oversaw the development of the party's Web sites. During the last three months of the Kerry campaign, Bell reported having fifteen assistants working full-time to maintain the Official Kerry-Edwards Blog (Kerry-Edwards 2004c). These elements rendered the discourse on the site overtly institutional. Exhibiting a complicating hybridity, however, the site also appealed to the noninstitutional.

Attempting to use Internet technologies to harness the "grass roots," the Kerry campaign included participatory features. Primarily, it offered what appeared to be the ability for the community to post their own comments underneath each of the official blog entries. By including this feature, the site seemed to give a voice to everyday Kerry supporters. Additionally, the language used by Bell and the other official bloggers further encouraged this vernacular ethos by using a seemingly spontaneous and informal writing style in their blog entries. The posts often included elements typical of casual e-mail, such as the use of all capital letters for emphasis, abbreviated words, and so on.

The blog chronicled many small-town and local events (see Figure 3). For example, a post titled "Baking for Barnstormers" began, "Across Iowa tonight, the gloves came off and the oven mitts went on as John Kerry supporters fed their finest baked goods to Barnstormers throughout the state." This entry featured a snapshot of a tasty-looking plate of cake. In a follow-up entry, a campaign official stated that, "We had a great Barnstorm meeting at the Zichal's home in Elkader tonight. Kenneth and Fran were terrific hosts" (Kerry-Edwards 2004a).

In another example, the community-oriented ethos of blogging was invoked by offering a personal congratulations: "Right now John Kerry is in the front seat talking with Shanna Williams from Chicago, Illinois—she's a local Kerry supporter . . . and she's getting married this fall" (Kerry-Edwards 2004e). Only identified as "davidwade," the poster was David Wade, Kerry's national press secretary for the campaign and

Figure 3. A page titled "the official Kerry-Edwards blog" on the Web site blog.johnkerry.com as it appeared on October 4, 2004.

the communications director for Kerry's U.S. Senate office. By associating this official actor with the life events of a local individual, the blog suggested that it was part of a community of Kerry supporters.

By specifically terming the Web site a "blog," the Kerry campaign generated the expectation for personal expression and interactive discourse. The site could then enact dynamic, informal, and ongoing community-oriented communication. While the Web site appealed to the institutional authority by its "official" association with the Democratic Party, it also appealed to vernacular authority by its style of writing and use of the term "blog." Appealing to the vernacular in this way, the Official Kerry-Edwards Blog created specific expectations in its audience. When it failed to deliver on those expectations, however, the blogging community rose up to contest its claim to vernacularity.

The controversy began in July 2004, when the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog announced it was removing all links to a very popular blog named Daily Kos. On Daily Kos, a Kerry supporter named Markos Zuniga made incendiary comments about American contractors who were videotaped as they were burnt, dragged from their car, and hung on a bridge during the military conflict in Iraq. The Kerry campaign dubbed Zuniga's comments "unpresidential language" and removed all links from Kerry's site to Daily Kos. The pro-Kerry blogging community perceived this move as antivernacular, and an explosive controversy arose (Penenberg 2004). Claiming that his posts to the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog were removed, one blogger proclaimed on his own Web site, "Apparently Kerry's people don't want to allow people to read anything that they don't have control over" (Huck 2004). On an-

other blog, participants in the Democratic blogging community weighed in: "Kerry is a wuss and a hawk" (Bob 2004). A commenter on a different blog called Kerry "clueless and worrisome," and another participant expanded on that comment, saying "Pathetic indeed. No wonder we [Democratic supporters] get our asses handed to us by the right year in and year out" (Metafilter 2004).

As the outcry grew, a popular Democratic blogger proclaimed with disgust that removing the links "shows they're not ready to really have a blog and interact with the rest of the blog world. They should just pull down all their links" (Atrios 2004). With this public outcry, the blogging community of Kerry supporters turned their vernacular medium against the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog. On the site, there was no evidence of this controversy—even in the comments sections. It was clear to all that the Kerry Campaign was moderating the vernacular-seeming discourse on their site.

As a result of this institutional outing, the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog appeared more "official" than "blog" to its community of supporters. The deployment of the term "blog" by the Kerry campaign is evidence that this vernacular term and the sense it indexed was seen as carrying a particular kind of authority. Noting the use of informal language, everyday topics, and community participation, the Kerry campaign appears to have sought to access that noninstitutional authority by generating a sense of community around its blog. When someone in the community went too far, however, the limit of the Democratic Party's willingness to give up power to that community was reached.

At that moment, institutional power silenced the vernacular voice by removing links to material outside of institutional control. That, in turn, created a backlash in the community, because the site had created the expectation that it would allow noninstitutional voices to be heard. As the Democratic Party sought to bend the authority of the vernacular web to its own ends, the Internet vernacular contested its authority to do so. As a result, at least some individuals called on the site to remove itself from their community and thus remove its association with the vernacular. On these blogging sites, a zone of contestation erupted around the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog.

Using the very same commercial technologies as the Democratic Party, individuals across the vernacular web vigorously contested what was seen as an attempt by official actors in the party to co-opt the authority of the blogging community. To document and begin to understand why these individuals perceived that they had some communal authority, researchers must not reduce this web of interacting communication processes to a set of static texts.

These bloggers had a stake in the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog because they perceived it as a partial product of their communal agency. This agency emerges as a result of the material factors of network communication technologies. Participatory media enable interactive communication because persistent network locations offer individuals the chance to repeatedly locate and participate with each other, without full recourse to the geography necessary in real-world communities. The interacting agencies of these network locations can only be documented if they are approached as persistent communication processes. Unlike static texts, they are always generating their shared meanings across an undulating web of informal and everyday online expressive action.

From Mass-Mediated Objects to Persistent Process

Old media (like newspapers, TV, or commercial music recordings) are typically thought of as centrally produced and static commercial objects that are sent outward. In the public sphere, these objects become "mass culture." Conceived in this way, mass-mediated objects are understood as having a limited ability to interact with the dynamic processes of lived experience. As a result, they are unlike folkloric performance because they have less local relevancy. New media, however, can be more folkloric than old media because much online communication is more like a process than an object. When these processes occur in dynamic webs of discourse, they give rise to what Appadurai and Breckenridge call zones of contestation, where "national, mass, and folk culture provide both mill and grist for one another" (1995:5).

Cultural critics have long recognized that mass media often serves the interests of institutions instead of communities (Adorno and Horkheimer [1947] 2002; Habermas [1962] 1992; Marcuse 1964; Marx [1845] 1998; see also Arato and Gebhardt 1990). Richard M. Dorson famously appealed to a sense of authenticity by coining the term "fakelore" for popular forms of apparent folklore that were actually invented by individuals or corporate interests and then disseminated by mass media (Dorson 1950; see also Bronner 1998:368–88; Stevens 1925). Many folklorists after Dorson argued that mass media creates new forms of folklore that are more homogenous and widely dispersed than more "authentic" traditions (Burns 1969; Clements 1974; Denby 1971; Dundes 1963; Green 1972; Sullenberger 1974). By 1976, Dorson worried that "popularization, commercialization, and the mass media engulf the culture" (1976:14).

Since the 1970s, however, scholars like Mikel Koven (2003), Sharon Sherman (1998), and Jan Harold Brunvand (1981) have sought to integrate folklore and media research. Linda Dégh has suggested that media "liberate" folklore so that it may "blossom . . . empowered with more authority and prestige, than ever before" (1994:1–2). She warns, however, that researchers must take care to distinguish between media-based and oral-based works: "Because both the language and background information are heavily influenced by the media, how can we be sure which had priority, the media or the oral text?" (2001:168). Distinguishing "oral" from "media" textual elements in a communication may be important when studying mass-mediated texts. When applied to participatory online discourse, however, this focus misses the significant potential of vernacularity.

To fully document the vernacular online, researchers must not imagine static texts distributed by networks. Any given communication on the Internet may be static in the sense that some producer has placed it online and does not intend to change it. It is not, however, static in the same way as the physical object of a magazine, book, or DVD recording. Because it persists at a specific network location, individuals can return to it repeatedly. With each visit there is the potential that the content has been changed, because there is no single external published version, final product, or physical object. In many locations, individuals can actually contribute to the communication process by posting their own comments. Because this communication is both persistent and mutable, it generates discursive social processes at specific

network locations. Thus, it is not like the finished products of mass media. Instead, it is the partial product of a communal agency.

Synchronous network media where individuals can exchange text such as MUDs, MUSHs, IRC, chat rooms, or messaging provide the most well-known examples of these kinds of online communication processes (see Hine 2000:14–40; Markham 1998).[2] More recently, online role-playing games offer persistent locations for communication (Gee 2003). However, more apparently static online media have the same mutability. In fact, any Web site can be changed at any time, and typically, there is no way to refer to the previous version, as there would be with a media object.[3] Many of the most popular Web sites today serve only as public network locations where individuals can post their personal content. As adaptive processes, these expressions of community clearly fall into the field of folklore studies. However, folklorists researching online communication have tended to treat them as if they were just some novel form of media object.

Studies such as Rosemary Hathaway's collection of Internet-based jokes about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, take an object-oriented approach to Internet communication by collecting and comparing e-mailed jokes as if they were analogous to "photocopy-lore" or "fax-lore" (Hathaway 2005; Marvin 1995; Preston 1994; Roemer 1994). Jan Fernback documented a collection of "urban legends" from an e-mail list to argue that the online "telling" of "urban legends" is "a means for oral popular culture to survive and prosper in an increasingly media saturated society" (2003:43). These researchers treat online communication processes as if they were media objects: traditional forms being transmitted, if in somewhat modified ways, across the Internet.

In this approach, there is an imagined sense of "authenticity," "tradition," or "orality" that is thought to transcend the individual object and connect it with some more authentic tradition. This folkloric element is seen as encased in the media object, and the folklorist's job is to extract that morsel and leave the remaining husk for others. This view of Internet media is unnecessarily limiting. If we exchange the media object approach for that of persistent processes, the folklorist is equipped to document something far more complex and powerful.

Several researchers have explored online communication in terms of everyday human behavior. Focusing on an online community, Nancy K. Baym (1993) has recognized that what is essential about folkloric expression is not a "traditional" origin. Instead, it is in what Robert Georges and Michael Owen Jones have termed the "continuities and consistencies" that allow a specific community to perceive such expression as traditional, local, or community generated (1995:1). A community creates meaning through the engagement of these continuities as they are locally recognized (Baym 1993). Gary Alan Fine termed local communities of shared norms and forms "idiocultures" (1979). Instead of "tradition," Jay Mechling has emphasized shared patterns of consistency as an important aspect of social behavior that folklorists are equipped to study (1989).

Sandra Dolby-Stahl demonstrated how the expressive choices made by individuals in presenting idiosyncratic material emerge from the shared expectations they learned in and from their informal interaction (1989). As a result, even the idiosyncratic

expressive behaviors of the personal experience narrative exhibit communally generated folkloric features. As individuals imagine both their individual and communal identities in discourse, they do so based on their perception of such shared expectations. In the online environment, there are no other markers of community. These expressive choices simultaneously enact and transmit the perceived community in an ongoing folkloric process.

In such processes, individual identities are enacted as the necessary locations from which to produce the discourse that functions to define the community (see Lievrouw 2001). Theorists of political communication have defined community as "a system of social relationships based on a perceived common identity" (Zarefsky 1995:2). To use Benedict Anderson's term, both the communities and the individuals that comprise those communities "imagine" themselves through discourse (1991). In online communities, the feedback loop of shared and individual imagining can go on independent of geographic proximity. Unlike geographical communities, online communities are often based solely on the discursive behaviors that express these social relationships.

Because they have no physical or geographic markers, online communities are radically dependent on the ongoing enactment of the shared expectations that are both witnessed and enacted by participants in the discourse (R. G. Howard 1997, 2000). In such communication, the expectations and the expression of those expectations must occur simultaneously in an ongoing process in order to sustain perceived common identity. If the vernacular process of public self-imagining were to stop, no geographic location would be there to bind the individuals together. As a result, defending the blogging community from institutional control became a central issue raised by the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog. Because the blogging community only existed online, it had no choice but to deploy the commercial and technological products of online communication to enact its resistance. When denied the ability to do this on the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog, the communication processes simply moved to other, closely linked locations in its web of vernacular discourse. So doing, vernacular agency deployed communication technologies to resist institutional control.

Before widespread popular Internet use, Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) documented similar vernacular processes of nongeographic community formation based on commercial products. Bacon-Smith expanded on an emic understanding of the novelist Gene Roddenberry's concept of "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations," or IDIC. IDIC referred to the expressive agency of everyday actors that emerged in a process of ongoing combination and recombination of content taken from the iconic television show *Star Trek*. Through "fanzines" and vernacular expression, mass culture became the means to create a discursive field from which both community and individual were enacted (1992:310). This community used mass-media content to transcend gender, ethnic identity, and even geography as a basis of perceived community.

In the case of the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog, folkloric processes such as these also deployed commercial technologies to their own ends. However, the participatory media of the Internet further commingle institutional and vernacular interests. Because Internet communication is both persistent and located, multiple individuals can return to particular network locations and interact at a vernacular level. Because

institutional and commercial agencies have (to varying degrees) created those locations, vernacular expression emerges only through institutional mechanisms. Imagining what is folkloric about these communication processes necessitates an acceptance of their inherent hybridity.

Hybridity and the Vernacular

Researchers in several fields have struggled to distinguish between vernacular and institutional discourse (Abrahams 1968a, 1968b; Hauser 1999; R. G. Howard 2005a, 2005b; Nystrand and Duffy 2003; Ono and Sloop 1995, 2002). Typically, the expectations that emerge from discourse enacted by communities on a day-to-day basis are seen as folkloric or vernacular (Bascom 1965; Gage 1991; Toelken 1996). Based on the ancient distinction between "vernacular" and "institutional," discourse can be properly termed vernacular when it fulfills the local or "home born" expectations of a particular human community. However, as Homi Bhabha has argued of the "colonial" (1995), there is no "pure" or finally "authentic" vernacular. Instead, the vernacular needs the institutional from which to distinguish itself, and in this way the vernacular takes part in the institutional. As a result, no pure vernacularity exists, only degrees of hybridity.

Today, global communication technologies have accelerated the pace of hybrid communication and expanded its role in the daily lives of many North Americans (Franco 1992; Stross 1999). Jeannie Thomas has recently demonstrated how a published mass media object can become embedded in the vernacular web and then diversify and change at frenetic pace. Similar to the discovery of both photocopy and fax distribution of published political cartoons (Preston 1994; Roemer 1994), Thomas uncovered a genre of forwarded e-mail messages that seem to derive from a humorous *Washington Post* article on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the introduction of the Barbie line of children's dolls (Thomas 2003:158).

Featuring a list of humorously imagined dolls, each of which exhibited a different symptom of human aging, individuals sent e-mails based on the idea, expanded on them, and forwarded the lists on, using the subject line "Over Forty Barbies." Most variants included "Hot Flash Barbie," "Bifocals Barbie," and "Facial Hair Barbie." Soon after, other Barbie lists emerged in diversifying variants like the "Barbies We'd Like to See," "Barbies of the '90s," "Politically Correct Barbies," and the "List of Rejected Barbie Dolls" and included specific Barbies like "Lipstick Lesbian Barbie," "B.J. Barbie," and "Bulimorexia Barbie" (Skajoseph21 2005). These examples demonstrate how a mass-media object can be "folklorized" by the rapid and easily transmittable nature of online communication processes (Thomas 2003:160).

The communal imagining of a "Bulimorexia Barbie" deploys the concept of Barbie to express resistance to the impossibly hourglass-shaped image that the mass-marketed toys embody. However, even the parodies are partially a product of institutional agencies that imagine women as Barbie-esque, because they originated from the *Washington Post* and because the Barbie is itself a mass product. For Homi Bhabha, hybrid expressive processes like these open the possibility of resistance (1994). However, in order to avoid what Deborah Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong have noted as an overemphasis on the "new" in conceiving of the hybrid, hybridity should be understood

as a product of its historicity (1999). The hybrid is not merely some third product that is born of two previous products. Instead, a fully historicized concept of the hybrid recognizes that it is less about being new than it is about containing its own alternate. In ancient Rome, the "home born" slave or *verna* was like "Bulimorexia Barbie," in that the slave was a hybrid both created by institutional power and expressing an alternate to that power.

In Roman Latin, "verna" is a noun specifically referring to slaves that were born and raised in a Roman home. Sometimes literally a hybrid between a Roman master and an enslaved servant, the verna was always a cultural hybrid. The verna was a native to Roman culture but was also the offspring of a sublimated non-Roman ethnic or culture group. In Roman society, most slaves were seized during wars, during the suppression of colonial insurrections, or even in outright piracy. The vast majority of these slaves did not speak Classical Latin or Greek.[4] Since any person born to a slave woman (without regard to the social position of the father) was automatically a slave, female slaves were encouraged to have children to increase the master's slave stock (Bradley 1987:42). These verna became even more valuable than their mothers because they were native speakers of the institutional languages and could be trained in more valuable skills. Subordinated though the verna were in relation to Roman institutions, their access to its languages made them more powerful than the average slave. Unlike their masters, however, they were typically also native speakers of their own cultural languages. In this sense, they were hybrid.

The Latin term *hibrida* was closely related to "verna." Not necessarily referring to a slave, "hibrida" referred to individual livestock that were a cross between a domesticated animal and a "wild" animal. In its most ancient meaning, "hibrida" seems to refer to the offspring of a domesticated sow and a wild boar. The boar was emblematic of a masculine ideal in both Greece and Rome. Considered a dangerous and worthy adversary, it was the most prized and respected animal of the hunt (see Xenophon 1968:429–41). When applied to a person, however, "hibrida" suggested an individual with parents from two different nations. In particular, the term was applied to individuals who acted in Roman institutions but were not of Roman birth (see Pliny the Elder 1885:2346). While the authentically Roman was seen as civilizing its counterpart, the noninstitutional had access to an alternate authority.

The verna would have been perceived as only partially "tame" because its non-Roman elements were seen as "wild." At the same time, that wildness was wild precisely because it granted access to something outside of the institutions of Rome. In one of its earliest uses to describe expressive human behavior, Marcus Tullius Cicero suggested that the "vernacular" was a source of persuasive power. He wrote of an "indescribable flavor" that rendered a particular speaker persuasive (Cicero 1971:147). Cicero understood the vernacular, linked to participation in a specific community, as set in opposition to what he and other Roman politicians saw as the institutional elements of persuasive communication codified in textbooks. Unlike the arts of oratory, the vernacular existed and was learned outside of formal Roman education. The strength of the noninstitutional aspect of the hybrid verna was seen as powerful by institutional Rome precisely because it was both able to act in institutional modes of

communication, Latin, and because it had access to something beyond the control of those institutional powers. The vernacular is powerful because it can introduce something other than the institutional into an institutional realm.

Since the term was deployed by anthropologist Margaret Lantis in 1960, researchers have struggled to theorize this particular power of the vernacular (Lantis 1960; Primiano 1995; Rapoport 1969; see also Yoder 1974). Henry Glassie has argued that vernacular should be conceptualized as embodying "values alien to the academy" (2000:20). For Glassie, the "alien" is alien precisely because it urges us to consider its alternate genesis, even as it emerges alongside the native. Writing specifically about vernacular architecture, Glassie argues, "When the builder's attention is narrowed by training, whether in the dusty shop of a master carpenter or the sleek classroom of a university, past experience is not obliterated. . . . Education adds a layer" (2000:18). What Glassie here calls a vernacular "layer" is a layer of meaning that resides among other layers. In order for the vernacular layer to appear as distinct, it must invoke its opposite, the institutional. In the moment that the object expresses its vernacular layer of meaning, it necessarily articulates the institutional from which it seeks to be distinct. As a result, vernacular expression is necessarily a hybrid containing at least these two layers of meaning.

Some researchers emphasize the institutional layer and thus see commercially mediated vernacular content as problematic (Dorst 1999; Young 1995). In contrast, Mia Consalvo (2003) has emphasized the vernacular layer in order to argue that network technologies can engender communication that contests institutional power. In either case, it is important to recognize that the vernacular can act to support or contest the institutional, and often it does a little of both. Either way, the vernacular remains the authority that is derived specifically from being noninstitutional. The verna is a slave but a slave that is in the unique position of being able to introduce extrainstitutional influence into the very institutions that render her or his enslavement. Verna were located agents, and the deployment of the term "vernacular" invokes their complex agency.

Examples of vernacular agencies contesting institutional power abound online. The so-called Rathergate scandal pitted the authority of bloggers against claims made by Dan Rather of CBS news. Ultimately, Rather was forced into early retirement in 2004. More everyday examples can be found on a Web site devoted to the stories of individuals who have been fired for keeping blogs critical of their companies (Pope 2004), a site claiming to be authored by a wolf disgruntled about the portrayal of wolves as "terrorists" in a George W. Bush campaign ad (Alpha Frank 2004), or even the forwarding of a humorous photoshop (see Figure 4).

In some cases, the institutional can call upon vernacular authority through "folk museums" or the direct government support of "traditional" activities (see, for example, Tangherlini 1999). As the sublimated member of the pair, however, the vernacular is often not clearly heard in the institutional. This is because establishing institutional authority for a claim enacts what Mikhail Bakhtin called the "centripetal force" of monologic discourse (1982:666). Claims at institutional authority press discourse inward toward a single central authorizing agent. In so doing, they limit the

Figure 4. A page titled "We Were Tricked by George W. Bush" on the Web site wolfpacksfor-truth.com, October 26, 2004.

heteroglossia characteristic of more dialogic discourse by either assimilating the ver-nacular into the institutional (as in an official "folk museum") or by enacting the in-stitutional as superior to the vernacular (as in "great art" or "pure Roman blood").

The vernacular, on the other hand, typically renders itself meaningful by enacting "centrifugal force" (Bakhtin 1982:666). Though not necessarily in opposition to the institutional, the vernacular emphasizes alternatives to the single authority of an institution. At the very least, it emphasizes two different authorities: the institution's and its own. Seeking alternatives to the institution, the vernacular often opens author-ity to the heteroglossia of the community.

In particular, participatory Web-based media open themselves to this community authority though message boards, comments sections, chat rooms, and other locations where individuals can coproduce Web content. In so doing, they incorporate the centrifugal force of multiple voices in a very real way (Endres and Warnick 2004; Foot

and Schneider 2006:72). Even the creation of a typical Web link is dialogic because it allows the user to interact through multiple other communications (Foot and Schneider 2006:37; Mitra 1999). With these alternates to singular authority, participatory media contain a vernacular layer.

As a result of its association with these sorts of community participation, the term "blog" has come to be associated with the authority that its vernacular layer affords. This accounts for why the participants in the blogging community that supported the Kerry campaign felt betrayed when the vernacular content on the site was reduced. Even when the vernacular acts in support of an institution, it perceives its choice to do so as alternate to that institution. Calling the site a blog aroused expectations that the concurring power of the vernacular would be allowed to emerge intermingled with that of the Democratic Party. When it was not, the vernacular acted against the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog.

Blogs and Vernacular Authority

Since the emergence of the term in 1999, the number of Web pages considered blogs has exploded. In July 2002, 3 percent of Internet users reported having their own blog. By November 2005, that number had jumped to 10 percent. At that time, 27 percent read other people's blogs, and 19 percent of teenage Internet users maintained their own blogs (Lenhart, Horrigan, and Fallows 2004; Lenhart and Madden 2005). Meanwhile, it has been estimated that 70,000 new blogs and about 700,000 new posts to existing blogs appear every day (Technorati Data 2006).

This explosion has fueled and been fueled by a growing diversity of forms. Famously termed "Web 2.0" by computer media CEO Tim O'Reilly in 2005, these forms have been spurred on by innovations in the original World Wide Web computer language, Hypertext Markup Language or HTML (O'Reilly 2005). Originally designed as a simple language that would allow computer programmers to offer content to any Web user, HTML is being replaced by more robust languages that make it easy for the Web users themselves to add and change Web site content. Based on these technologies, Web 2.0 has been characterized by an explosion in participatory Web sites where users can create and post their own content without knowing any computer programming at all. From wikis, to social networking, to photo-sharing, to folksonomy, to blogs themselves, these new participatory forms of Web use occur across network locations, where vernacular and institutional agencies hybridize into complex new communication processes.

With the appearance of commercial Web sites where individuals can easily create their own blogs such as Blogger.com, Blogspot.com, or Livejournal.com, significant technical skills are no longer required to post personal content online. As more and more individuals create blogs and bloglike Web pages, several companies pay these amateur content producers for advertising space. Estimated as a $50 to $100 million industry, Google's "AdSense" program debuted in 2003 to pay individual bloggers a fixed fee for each individual who "clicked through" from his or her blog to a paying advertiser (Story 2005:4).

In similar schemes offered by companies like Shareasale, Commission Junction, and

LinkShare, personal bloggers are paid to place topically related advertising on their blogs. This mixing of personal and commercial content complicates the vernacular agency of these personal blogs. For businesses, personal blogs offer access to a type of "grass roots" appeal. Michael Wiley, director of new media for General Motors, described his move to create blog content for the auto-making giant: "It's very similar to media relations, but it's a little more grass roots" (quoted in Story 2005:4).

When a powerful business or political institution deploys an interactive blog, the ability of the surrounding community to post comments there renders at least one layer of that communication vernacular. This layer generates a communal authority, distinct from the single voice of the institution. Even deploying the term "blog" is itself a gesture toward the dialogic, because terming something a blog arouses community expectations that the Web site will concede some of its institutional authority to the "grass roots" of the vernacular web. In the case of the Kerry-Edwards Official Blog, the arousal of these expectations (and the subsequent perceived failure to deliver) created a vernacular backlash against the so-called blog.

Such expectations are nothing new. At least as far back as the 1960s, the concept of "layering" in both human management and technological development overtly sought to recognize and harness the power of multiple agencies to solve technological problems. In fact, Lawrence Roberts of MIT used this concept to design the first computer networks. Working for the U.S. Department of Defense, Roberts was hired to link together computers involved in military research. Based on his plans, the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, or ARPAnet, came online in 1969. Based on the layered management style that Roberts used, the network was built to have several levels of users. At its core layer, software technologies had to be shared by all users and could be used by almost any computer. Only the network administrators could initiate changes to this layer because it functioned to make the most basic connections between all computers in the network. As this core, software was freely shared with organizations affiliated with the U.S. government, other computer networks emerged, and then they linked to the ARPAnet. In this way, layering allowed the early Internet to expand in a somewhat autonomous way (Abbate 1999:51–60).

As those core connections were established, more diverse and specialized outer layers began to emerge on the network. In these outer layers, users could produce and deploy their own software applications. One such class of these programs proved to be the first overwhelmingly popular application of computer networks. On ARPAnet, everyday users created a variety of different "e-mail" software applications, far from the centers of institutional network design. By 1980, e-mail had become so popular that designers had to integrate a standardized protocol into their network software (Abbate 1999:219–20; Ceruzzi 2003). The next "killer app," the World Wide Web, was also developed by independent users and first implemented at the fringes of the network (Abbate 1999:214–8; Ceruzzi 2003:313–44).

In 1990, Tim Berners-Lee, Robert Cailliau, and others at the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN) began developing "hypertext" to help their physics researchers share their papers through the newly integrated "Internet" network. Berners-Lee based his "hypertext" idea on an obscure 1974 countercultural manifesto titled *Computer Lib: You Can and Must Understand Computers Now/Dream Machines: New*

Freedoms Through Computer Screens—A Minority Report. In this small-scale publication, half computer-primer and half multimedia fanzine, Theodor Nelson gave voice to a community of antiestablishment hippy-hackers (Abbate 1999:214).

Nelson imagined a world where everyday individuals would learn to deploy computers to equalize the power differential between themselves and the military-industrial complex. Nelson's idea was that by creating "presentational systems" based on "branching" instead of hierarchical organization, individuals could access authority without recourse to institutional power (Nelson 1974:44).[5] For Nelson, this had significant political implications: "Deep and widespread computer systems would be tempting to two dangerous parties, 'organized crime' and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government (assuming there is still a difference between the two). If we are to have the freedoms of information we deserve as a free people, the safeguards have to be built *at the bottom, now*" (Nelson 1974:59; emphasis in original).

When Berners-Lee drew on this idea to create "Hypertext Markup Language," he kept it very simple so that individuals could produce their own Web sites with little training. In 1991, the first HTML-reading software or "browser" was offered to the public by CERN as "freeware," and the public World Wide Web was born (CERN 2000; World Wide Web Consortium 2000). For CERN, the motive for designing and then giving the original browser away to the public was to encourage open and pluralistic discourse among scientists. For Berners-Lee, the motive was to spread such discourse to everyone (Berners-Lee 2000; Castells 2001:23).

However, as the popularity of the Web medium grew, commercial interests placed pressure on the simple but functional capabilities of the early versions of HTML (Lessig 2002; Rheingold [1991] 1992, [1993] 2000, 2001). While the norm of easy access to Web pages remained, simple Web-page creation was less important to business than easy access to page content. Commercial sites began to exhibit far more complex HTML coding. Rapidly, the number of these commercial sites dwarfed the simpler noncommercial Web sites.

It is estimated that in 1992 there were one million Internet "hosts"—loosely speaking, there were a million computers regularly connected to other computers through the Internet (Public Broadcasting System 2001). Most of these hosts were computers on government and university networks that had been linked together as part of ARPAnet and its successors. Then, as a result of the newly created public access to the World Wide Web, the use of the Internet exploded. The Web went from fewer than 100 Web sites in 1992 to over 10,000 in January 1995. By 1996, the estimated numbers of Internet hosts ballooned to 9.5 million. The Web was driving the overall growth of the Internet.

In 1996, the Web was estimated to have had 650,000 Web sites. In 2001, the number of Web sites and hosts roughly doubled every six months (Gray 2001). On January 5, 2001, it had surpassed 100 million worldwide (Telcordia Technologies 2001). As the World Wide Web grew, it became synonymous with the Internet. This rapid increase in users was made possible because the Web interface was very easy to use. However, the new users had significantly fewer computer skills than did the early community; the vast majority of the new users did not create their own content.

In 1994, only 11 percent of World Wide Web users reported having been involved

in computer programming for three years or less (GVU 2001c). One year later, this number jumped to 35.5 percent, with the biggest increase in those with no high-level computer experience at all, which leapt up from nearly none to 16.78 percent (GVU 2001a, 2001b). This trend away from a high degree of technology skills for Internet use would continue. As it did so, the average user consumed far more content than she or he produced. With the emergence of the blog however, a new wave of vernacular agency began to appear.

Emerging out of personal home pages, "web logs" were part of the personal content that defined the first digital genre (see R. G. Howard 2005b). In the early days of the World Wide Web, the home page was a technical term that denoted the "root" or "index" file on a Web site: the default file accessed by an HTML browser when no particular file is specified. Typically, this page was considered the "entry" or "front" page of a Web site. All Web sites had home pages in this sense. Because many of the original "home pages" were also the personal network "homes" of individuals, home pages came to be expected to have certain characteristics (Asteroff 2001; Dillon and Gushrowski 2000). One characteristic was the "log" of Web sites that the home page builder collected and commented upon.

Over time, the "web log" itself became a genre that emerged out of the practice of documenting personal lists of favorite (or hated) Web sites. As it developed into the blogs of today, the form took on many aspects of personal journals, and soon it became associated with online statements of personal opinions on everything from politics to gardening. Exemplifying this development, Justin Hall created his home page, Justin's Home Page, in 1994. Today, that Web site has evolved into Links from the Underground, one of the first blogs to become widely popular (Hall 1994).

The term "web blog" itself did not appear until 1997, when a well-known computer programmer named Jorn Barger coined the term to refer to his Robot Wisdom Web site (Blood 2000; Jerz 2003; Turnbull 2002). In 1999, the shortened term "blog" came into common parlance as a result of the use of the term "wee-blog" by Peter Merholz, a well-known blogger (Herring et al. 2004). By 1999, the term "blog" was established, and several commercial Web sites offered free blog hosting. Providing Web page hosting as a free service in exchange for placing advertising on the sites, these ventures proved very successful. The most well known of these was Blogger.com (Blood 2004). By 2003, as many as four million blogs were hosted on these sites (Henning 2003).

Today, however, the new forms of participatory Web sites loosely referred to as blogs are expanding the genre to include an increasingly wide range of network applications and media. Because sites like Blogger.com emphasized the textual components over the link collections of the early blogs, the blog has come to denote online personal journals (Blood 2004). Meanwhile, social-networking tools like Friendster, MySpace, or Facebook combine blogging with file sharing and social functions that help individuals locate and make connections with other people who share their interests. These generally participatory sites offer easy-to-use personal content hosting services.

While it now takes very few resources beyond Internet access itself to create and maintain personal content, the content hosted by these services exhibits complex

kinds of hybridity. On the one hand, these sites allow the posting of personal content free of charge. On the other, they limit the kinds of content that they allow and integrate advertising into the personal expression. Primarily focused on personal content (and the interactive commenting on that personal content), the participatory components of these sites render them dynamic vernacular communication processes. As commerce uses advertising to harness vernacular authority, these processes necessarily exhibit varying degrees of hybridity. Recognizing this necessary hybridity has implications beyond the mere accurate representation of human behavior. In a world increasingly dominated by participatory media, this hybridity has ethical and even legal implications.

Hybrid Authority, Hybrid Responsibility

Both the institutional and the vernacular are dynamically imagined by communities enacting the zones of cultural discourse that are made possible by the persistent processes of network media. To imagine these zones as something less than the sites of hybrid processes would fail to fully account for how the vernacular can rise up to assert its alternate authority. The Official Kerry-Edwards Blog is a complicated example of such a zone: it attempted to harness vernacular authority even from within the powerful institution of the Democratic Party. To the extent that it did access that authority, the Web site exhibited a vernacular layer. That layer was not inauthentic. Instead, it revealed the electronic hybridity created by the site's opening to the vernacular. Because it was a location of communication processes instead of a discrete media object, the site could remove links and thus change its nature in ways not possible in old media. In response, however, the participants in the surrounding community could meet at other network locations to express their displeasure with the choices made by the Democratic Party. The Official Kerry-Edwards Blog serves as an example of the dynamic push and pull between vernacular and institutional authority that occurs in, between, and across the sites of the vernacular web. Recognizing the hybrid nature of these vernacular communication processes is not just important for folklore and media theory. These behaviors are increasingly subject to complicated legal and ethical considerations that have emerged as a result of the radical hybridity that new media have made possible.

As of this writing, there have been at least seventy-nine lawsuits filed against bloggers for slander and related claims. Until 2006, most of these cases had been dismissed. In September 2006, however, one case was decided against a blogger for over $11 million (Media Law Resource Center 2007). With this and a growing ledger of pending cases, bloggers must recognize that they are subject to the same scrutiny as professional publishers. In this new media environment, vernacular public speech bears the very real consequences usually associated with print publications.

Precisely because they can offer anonymous content, both blog producers and the community members that post to their sites are potential locations for defamatory speech. As became clear in Apple Computer's lawsuit regarding the posting of anonymous leaks about products under development, blog posts can be outlets to be manipulated by competing institutional powers. When threatened with legal action, how-

ever, bloggers are underequipped to compete with those institutional powers, because they often have no editorial boards or legal teams (O'Grady 2006). While a 2003 case found that individuals are not legally responsible for the comments posted by others in the participatory media that they create, the subsequent high-profile subpoena of a well-known blogger suggests that the burden of proof may lie on the accused (Baker 2007; Delaunt 2007).

However the legal issues are resolved, it is already clear that new kinds of ethical considerations are necessary in this rapidly changing telectronic age. While more and more of us look toward participatory media as both consumers and producers, the communities of discourse created through those media are increasingly *our* communities. Now, as always, we participate in the vernacular. As the vernacular becomes institutional (and the institutional vernacular), however, accounting for individual choices is not a simple matter of who said what. It is also a matter of who created the place it was said, of how we react to its saying, and of where those reactions are voiced.

The importance of recognizing the hybridity of the vernacular is the importance of acknowledging our complicity in the processes that create the symbolic webs of our world. Insofar as we engage with participatory media, either by consuming or producing them, we too are the agents of their creation. Just as we are vernacular, so too are we the institutions. More than ever before, it is the responsibility of researchers and critics to avoid romanticizing the vernacular as some object held wholly separate from any taint of institutional power. Instead, the vernacular is now, more clearly than ever, hybrid.

Notes

1. A "wiki" is network computer medium that allows users to add and edit content collaboratively. The most well-known "wiki" is Wikipedia.com. "Social-networking tools" are a computer medium through which users create profiles for themselves, view the profiles of others, and create personal connections based on shared interests or traits expressed in those profiles. The most well-known social-networking tools today are Friendster.com, MySpace.com, and Facebook.com. "Folksonomy" is a feature of some computer media that allows for the collaborative categorization or "indexing" of information by enabling users to freely attribute "keywords" or "tags" to collections of information and then to access that information based on their collective tagging.

2. MUDs, MUSHs, and IRC refer to forms of synchronous, text-only communication over computer networks. A kind of "chat room" environment, these media allow individuals to access a particular network location and exchange typed messages in real time with the other individuals accessing the network location. "IRC" refers to an early Internet protocol similar to text messaging called "Internet Rely Chat." MUDs and MUSHs are, arguably, the same medium. Both emerged from the early deployment of text-message protocols to engage in role-playing. MUD is an acronym for "Multi-user Dungeon," "Multi-user Domain," or "Multi-user Dimension," and MUSH is often understood to mean "Multi-user Shared Hallucination." While some users might try to make fine distinctions between MUDs and MUSHs, there

is little agreement about their differences. While some MUDs persist today, they have largely been replaced by more graphic-based online media, typically referred to as "VR" or "Virtual Worlds," such as SecondLife, Virtual Laguna Beach, and World of Warcraft.

3. It is true that multiple versions of Web pages can often be accessed through Internet archives or other archiving agencies; however, such archives were created precisely because Web pages are not static, as are published books or other finalized media products.

4. The Latin noun "verna" is *oikotrips* in classical Greek, and the adjective "vernacular" is *oikogenes* (literally "home-genetic"). In extant Greek writings, a distinguishing quality of the oikotrips was its ability to speak Greek. This meaning is made clear in Plato's "Meno," when Socrates asks Meno to provide a "retainer" for an experiment in learning. Meno brings a boy forward, and Socrates asks, "He is a Greek and speaks our language?" Meno responds, "Indeed yes—born and bred in the house" (lit., "yes, he is vernacular") (Plato 1989:365). By the Roman period, Latin had come to dominate the colonial holdings of the republic and later the empire. At this time, "Vulgar Latin" was used as a blanket term covering the many spoken dialectics of Latinate languages that were spread across Western Europe. These more diverse kinds of Latin were distinguished from the institutional languages of Classical Latin and the still common use of Classical Greek. It is from this usage that we get the modern meanings of "vernacular."

5. In Nelson's publication, he attempts to enact a more hypertextual approach to media by creating a book that does not have a front and back cover. Instead, there are (in effect) two "front" covers with two distinctly different styles. To keep from privileging one cover over the other, Nelson paginates the book in both directions. As a result, each page has two page numbers. One refers to the pages from one cover, and the other refers to the pages starting from the other cover. This passage is from a page numbered both 44 and 85. The passage cited below is from a page numbered both 59 and 70.

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