"Profiles in Digital Scholarship & Publishing: Douglas Eyman"
Interview by Elizabeth Barnett

As an exclusively digital publisher, Xchanges *is naturally subject to and keenly interested in the practical issues surrounding the future and preservation of digital scholarly work. In the exploration of issues surrounding digital scholarship, we've produced a series of three interviews with prominent academic scholars and editors whose work spans the intersections of rhetoric, pedagogy, publishing, and technology. We hope that* Xchanges *readers enjoy the viewpoints looking both back at what's happened in the field of digital publishing and pedagogy in the last decade or two and forward to what lies ahead.*

Here, in the current installment of this series, University of New Mexico English MA student Elizabeth Barnett shares a video interview she conducted with Professor Doug Eyman of George Mason University. In addition to teaching courses in digital rhetoric, technical and scientific communication, editing, web authoring, advanced composition, and professional writing, Dr. Eyman is the senior editor of [Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy]*. This issue of* Xchanges *focuses on graduate-student research in writing and rhetoric. Elizabeth and Doug began their discussion of issues with digital scholarship in the 21st century with a focus on the nature and definition of digital rhetoric.*

About Doug Eyman

Doug Eyman is Associate Professor of English and the Director of graduate programs in Writing and Rhetoric at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. His latest books are [Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice] and [Play/Write: Digital Rhetoric, Writing, Games]. Dr. Eyman is also the senior editor and publisher of *[Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy,]* one of the longest running, continuously published digital scholarly journals in the world.

Digital Rhetoric: Expanding Definitions

Xchanges: In your 2015 book Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*, you wrote, "the term 'digital rhetoric' itself has been applied to rhetorics of technology, network rhetorics, social media use, the use of rhetorical appeals in online discussion forums, website design, multimodal composition, and the study of new media (itself a contested term)."*

Is "new media" still new? Has Digital Rhetoric moved beyond an emerging techne into an established realm of study as well as a means of production of persuasive communication and culture?

DE: I'd say the first question about new media is one that comes up quite a lot, especially for people newer in the field. "Is new media really new anymore?" is a refrain I hear often. "New Media" is a standardized phrase at this point, which indicates a kind of hybridization of media. We're looking at how image media, motion media, interactive media, and textual media all come together, and that hybrid version, that synthesis, is "new media." We can almost call multimodal composition a form of new media as well, except that multimodal, currently, in the way it's theorized, actually bends quite a bit beyond the digital, whereas new media tends to stay rooted within the digital, in terms of the way people handle it. Multimodal composition is becoming a more expansive term in a lot of ways.

Xchanges: You talk about digital literacy being a prerequisite for understanding digital rhetoric. Let's go back. Is digital rhetoric concerned with new media, or is it concerned with all things multimodal?

DE: I think it's both and more than multimodality. There's a follow-up piece to the book that ended up in the journal *enculturation* (http://enculturation.net/looking-back-and-looking-forward) that came out of the Indiana Digital Rhetorics Symposium, where I talk about what's not in the book. Digital rhetoric is concerned with how rhetoric operates in any digital realm. That includes new media and multimodal work but also includes the interaction between humans and algorithms, the ways code creates and operates as infrastructures for the activities that we engage in or that are engaged in by systems as well as people.

The idea of networks and the connectivity of networks is an important key for digital rhetoric, but we also don't want to lose sight of the embodied nature of people using technologies. At one point, people were saying, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." It was a [*New Yorker*] cartoon. People were saying, "The body's no longer there. It no longer has this representation, so that you can move beyond your corporeal references, and then that frees you up in some ways." It turns out, that's not actually true. Coming back to the body and how the body operates is really an important component of where digital rhetoric is going. I would make the argument that rhetoric itself is a uniquely and innately human approach to communication. I don't really hold with the idea that we have animal rhetorics or computer system software agents that are creating rhetorical action on their own. I think, at the root, there's embedded humanness in it. I think with semiotics, you can get a lot of the same kinds of information and the same kinds of approaches as you would with rhetoric but applied to non-human actors. That's fine, but I want to reserve, in some ways, rhetoric as a human activity. This will probably be argued against by the folks who are interested in the new materialist/object-oriented approaches. I think there's quite a bit of value to that kind of work, but I see it as a way of re-centering, rethinking, flattening as a

useful methodological tool, but the activities of rhetoric itself are always rooted and embedded in the human.

View video clip 1 here: https://youtu.be/0KFd6BWmNqk

Those are the conversations that are happening around digital rhetoric or thinking through these issues of what constitutes rhetoric: Can a non-human actor or agency, can they operate rhetorically? Can they make rhetorical moves on their own? That's a really interesting space right now. Justin Hodgson actually has a book out. It just came out recently on post-digital rhetoric (https://ohiostatepress.org/books/titles/9780814213940.html). We're moving from human to post-human, from digital to post-digital. I'm not sure what comes next. Maybe just post-rhetoric rhetoric.

There are lots of spaces where digital rhetoric can learn from other rhetorical frameworks and practices, especially from cultural rhetorics and Native American rhetorics and rhetoric that come from other places. We tend to be pretty deeply rooted in Western versions of rhetoric. Digital rhetoric also allows us to start expanding and seeing how some of these other rhetorical practices, other rhetorical frameworks, operate when you apply them in digital spaces. That's also a really interesting space in terms of what digital rhetoric is currently doing research-wise.

One of the things I think is really fascinating right now is a real push toward de-colonizing digital methods, opening up space that we have to different kinds of theories, different kinds of methods, and different kinds of communities, and then using some of these digital humanities methods to do social justice work. I'm thinking of work by Roopika Risam (http://roopikarisam.com/), Liz Losh (http://lizlosh.com/), and Dorothy Kim (http://brandeis.academia.edu/DorothyKim), among others, who as scholars are leading us in this direction.

The Human in the Machine

Xchanges: There is talk in the U.S. and the U.K. about the need to regulate algorithms, as they seem to be operating on their own to guide people into more and more radicalized viewpoints in social and digital media. How does studying "digital rhetoric" deepen students understanding of how this works?

DE: My contention is basically that people control these algorithms. For me, there's a human element at the root of what's happening, but that doesn't mean that the algorithms don't have an effect. Clearly, they do have a very powerful effect, and studying the effects of algorithms on people and how we interrelate with them is an important part of digital rhetoric for certain. Especially looking at how algorithms and big data are being used in policing, for instance. That's a

really important place. The degree to which our daily lives are surveilled, collected, and codified is astounding. Once you start actually doing research on stuff, it's just frightening. Companies are buying this data and using it in all sorts of different, quite interesting, and sometimes horrifying ways. Now, this information can be used by companies, and the kind of predictive analytics you could get out of this big data are just absolutely fascinating. That's definitely a realm for digital rhetoric. Big data and algorithms interact. It's always an interaction, and it's that interaction that positions it in the realm of rhetoric as opposed to the realm of simple computer science analysis.

It just means that humans have to be paying attention to the technologies that are using us as we use them and see how those effects happen. The effects aren't happening on their own. They're put into place and put in motion in some ways and are being used in different ways by people.

Digital Rhetoric In the Classroom

Xchanges: You are a digital scholar, a professor of classical, contemporary, and digital rhetoric, a web author, and a digital publisher. In your book, you discuss the necessary prerequisite of digital literacy to the more complicated understanding and study of digital rhetoric.

What do you see as our obligations to students in the 21st century in terms of teaching communication and composition skills and understanding? What place does digital rhetoric have in the college composition classroom today?

DE: I think we're seeing a large rise in teaching digital literacy practices to students starting in elementary and middle schools, teaching kids programming, teaching kids about algorithms, teaching kids about digital literacy practices. We don't see this yet hitting us at the college level. But in the next five to seven years, as soon as these children are in first-year writing classes, we will see college students who are much better versed in using software but not always with a critical understanding of how the technology works. Sure, students can use cell phones to do all sorts of amazing things, but they don't always think through why they should or should not do those things or what data is being collected about them as they do those things, and why that is even a problem. We're definitely seeing a willingness to share personal lives and personal details from younger students in ways that we had not seen before. That's really fascinating and also frightening stuff. This is also something that we're paying attention to in the realm of digital rhetoric.

View video clip 2 here: https://youtu.be/v-yW-bfkFWg

When I teach composition, I teach some critical digital literacies, but I don't make it a central focus. I'm starting to rethink how that might operate. I really like the

work of folks who are doing multimodal composition, but even those aren't always focusing on digital literacy practices. When I'm talking about literacy practices, I'm thinking about basic functional literacy like how to use the thing, but then you also have to develop these critical literacies or the hows-and-whys and the moral imperatives and the ethics. These things all need to be layered in. You can't just teach how to use Excel. We have to understand how and why you would use it, and we have to understand what it's good for and how you can use and misuse it.

Thinking about this kind of focus on literacy too, thinking about how we have to understand digital literacies as we continue thinking about teaching writing, I highly recommend Annette Vee's book, [Coding Literacy: How Programming is Changing Writing (https://books.google.com/books/about/Coding_Literacy.html?id=YXQsDwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description)](https://books.google.com/books/about/Coding_Literacy.html?id=YXQsDwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description) She's done an amazing in-depth analysis.

Sustainability in the Digital Realm

Xchanges: You in particular, and in concert with [Cheryl Ball](#) (ceball.com), have done a lot work in identifying the sustainability issues of digital scholarship. In your article with Ball, "[History of A Broken Thing: The Multi-Journal Special Issue on Electronic Publication](#)" (http://602s15.ceball.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2015/01/MicrohistoriesDraft.pdf), you defined the critical infrastructures needed to mitigate archival risks. One of these infrastructures is technological.

Is there a need to teach indexing/archiving/coding skills to editors? To authors? Should everyone who wants to communicate in the digital world learn to code?

DE: I don't subscribe to the idea that there should be a blanket approach, like everybody should learn to code because we don't really know what that means. Does that mean everybody should learn Python? Should everybody learn JavaScript? Should everybody learn HTML? There's a difference between markup and coding and programming. It's important for anybody to be a functional citizen in our current digital network environment to understand what algorithms are and how they work, what coding is in both a programming and markup sense, and what affordances exist for those. Then, everyone ought to get to know at least one model for thinking through coding so that you get a sense of how that operates and how it operates on you.

These are the same kinds of arguments if we go back and look at why we ask students to learn foreign languages. To better understand the culture is to better understand their own language and how language in general operates. In a way, understanding coding is very similar. It helps them understand how their own systems operate. But I don't necessarily think that the writing class is always the one place where you can add everything. I think we need to be adding some of

these literacy practices but not layering them all into writing all the time. However, I do think a lot about how we distill our curriculum, our courses, and our pedagogies to the elements that are going to be most useful for students as they build their capacity for literacy. When I teach technical editing, for example, I have a component where I ask students to work with XML. A lot of publishing systems use XML, and students' understanding of how that works as part of a technical editing project prepares them to use it when they get into the workplace.

View video clip 3 here: https://youtu.be/vkiYiOD7JcM

Xchanges: Another infrastructure concern that you and Dr. Ball identify is archival infrastructure. But the nature of digital composition seems always to be situated in a moment in time and to potentially disappear.

How do you reconcile the mercurial nature of internet communication with the need to preserve scholarly communication?

DE: I'm going to say that it depends on the context because there is plenty of work out there on the internet that it would be fine if it disappeared. At the same time, for the purposes of scholarship and research, we want archives. Let's say, for example, we're studying the websites of white supremacists. If we disappear all those things just because it's the nature, then we can't actually study them. Maybe we should study them to better understand how these things work and how to prevent them from working too well. I think there are cases, certainly, where it's really, really important for us to have archives.

View video clip 4 here: https://youtu.be/AYHrECxxQ30

On the one hand, there's a kind of beauty to the idea that things are ephemeral in the digital realm. I think it's also something that we should strive to overcome to some extent, especially for purposes of research and archiving. There are a lot of archiving projects now. They're doing things like creating emulators, so we can read old files that are in formats that nobody can read anymore. We're facing this kind of challenge, which is a really interesting challenge that leads to us building better systems in some ways. I'll say that, on a personal level, I think people should be okay with the idea that it's vanishing, being ephemeral, because that does happen. On a professional level, when I'm thinking as a scholar, I don't want things to disappear, especially if they're things we need to study. As a journal editor, I don't want my journal to disappear.

Again, I think it depends on the context in a lot of ways. An example is an initiative like the European Union's Right To Be Forgotten. Part of being a private person on the internet also reinforces the idea that things should go away. The internet archive (http://archive.org) itself also seems to agree with this notion that things should disappear because of the way it uses robots.txt files, which are little

files that instruct Google to index this page or not. Another scenario might be where you are saying something, say, unfavorable to China, and, at some point, the Chinese government acquires your domain name, they put up this little text file, and all those things that you wrote that were critical of that political regime disappear from the archive. If we want work on the internet to last for people to see it for a longer period of time, we have to take steps to make sure that we continue to control the spaces where those things are published.

I think this is also a good place to point out the value of things like Document Object Identifiers. I recommend we use DOI, as well as your own archives, as well as putting things in Perma.cc (https://perma.cc/). I think that's really important for researchers to create their own archives of any digital text that they're looking at.

Authorship & Audience in A Digital Age

Xchanges: In your book Digital Rhetoric*, you wrote, "In a future edition of the digital text, I hope to implement a 'remix engine'—a system that will allow readers to pull elements from the book, edit them, rearrange them, add additional content, and share the results with others." This invitation to collaboration seems like it fundamentally changes our traditional notions of authorship, copyrights, and plagiarism.*

How do you see the future of authorship or ownership of digital work taking shape? What do you hope happens for authors and audiences in this new world? Is this even a concern for you? Why or why not?

DE: That's a pretty big question. First, I would say we need to separate the idea of scholarly production from creative production. Scholarly production is typically produced by people who are being paid to do that work. Also, I think the majority of scholars don't make money off of their books, and certainly, nobody makes money off of articles. The journal and book publishers make money. There's a kind of embedded system that produces a great amount of profit off of the work. The journal provides editorial services, publication, and distribution. Those things aren't free.

Kairos (http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/) is interesting because we have an economic model that relies almost entirely on volunteer labor and volunteer donations from the editors to run the thing. We don't have any income. It's a model that is completely unsustainable and unrepeatable for other systems. We've managed to make it sustainable thus far because it has value to the field, to the discipline.

So, you always have to have systems that are paid for in some way. The big problem that we have with publishing right now is that most of those systems are skewed toward providing massive profits to these very large corporations that are

really not providing as much of their digital platforms as that profit would indicate. It would be really nice to have a lot more open access venues, but even open access venues have to have some form of infrastructure that's paid for. The idea that everything is to be free is fake. We should be careful not to say things like, "Any open access publisher that charges publication fees of authors is automatically predatory." This is not the case. There are plenty of open access journals that require authors to pay to publish because that's the way that they create and fund the infrastructure. I would encourage people to examine and explore new models and see if there are different ways of doing it.

I will say that copyright, as it's currently being used, tends to be an economic exchange: scholars exchange their copyright for the privilege of being published, and the publishers then own the work. More publishers are allowing people to put Creative Commons licenses on their work, which is what we use with *Kairos*. The nice thing about Creative Commons licensing is that it allows for the author to decide what can you do with the work. The license can be really restrictive or it can be really wide open or anything specified in between. This is a little bit of a problem for us right now because the [Directory of Open Access Journals](https://doaj.org/) (https://doaj.org/) has a new requirement that all its listed journals put the least restrictive license on all of the things that are published. That to me works against the ethic that I believe that the author should have control over what anyone else can do with it. In *Kairos*, we allow authors to select whatever license that they want to put on the work, but because we do that, we're not going to be listed in the DOAJ anymore even though we meet all their other criteria.

I think this is like the Internet Archive's choice to follow robots.txt files retroactively. I think there's a philosophical reason for following these processes and practices that the Internet Archive follows and the DOAJ follows, but I think they work against what we want to happen for scholars. The task is to move publishing systems to accept this broader continuum of copyright possibilities. Despite my desires to make an updatable, remixable kind of text with my book, the University of Michigan Press didn't want to build the infrastructure for that. There were some complications with a press creating something that allows people to remix. They also have a bit more control over the copyright than I would have liked. I had somebody come to me who wanted to translate the book into Spanish, but the copyright is owned by the University of Michigan Press. The Press' response was, "Find a publisher in South America that deals with Spanish language work, have them buy the copyright from us, and then they'll publish it." We still have to use print-based publishing mechanisms even for digital projects. That makes sense because a print model is much more structured and controlled commercially. Everybody has wrestled with that. The music industry has wrestled with that too. How do you allow people to just pick and choose what they want and be able to download it and stream it? The licensing for that and the payment model for that has completely changed the way the industry works. We need change like that in how scholarship works.

Future Work: A Theory of Digital Rhetoric

Xchanges: You've explored a lot of definitions of digital rhetoric and as yet its study lacks an integrated theory. In 2015 you wrote, "this lack of 'an integrated theory' seemed to me a perfect opening for my own work toward understanding, defining, and shaping a vision of digital rhetoric (although I have moved from seeking an integrated theory to articulating digital rhetoric theories and methods)."

Will you, or have you, ever come back to trying to put together an integrated theory?

DE: I'm thinking about it. I have some thoughts on this, but I haven't put them out anywhere yet. As a scholar, I tend more toward being the person who provides the infrastructure or comes up with a way to produce the thing you want to do. That's what I really like about being a director of a Ph.D. program. All these great students come in, and I say, "How can I help you do this really interesting project?" I see that as my goal: to be the person that builds things to support people so that they can put new things in the world. That being said, I am working on a project that I think I'm going to call "Rhetoric, Design, Code" and look at how those practices and those theories interoperate.

I'll just say thanks very much for the opportunity to talk about things that are really interesting to me. I love to see more people thinking about and finding new models for producing digital scholarship. I'm so excited to see people building the infrastructures and the models for keeping those sustained.