Scholarship on the Move – 1 (Introduction) by James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker

This Prezi is one of six by James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker for “Scholarship on the Move,” a piece in The New Work of Composing, forthcoming by Utah State University Press and Computers and Composition Digital Press (<http://ccdigitalpress.org/>).

Scholarship on the Move

A Rhetorical Analysis of Scholarly Activity in Digital Spaces

James P. Purdy (Duquesne University) and Joyce R. Walker (Illinois State University)

Introduction: Existing Views of Scholarship and the Need for Change

The range of scholarly activity in which academics engage is not sufficiently recognized by prevailing systems of tenure and promotion. Not only is scholarship generally limited to research—scholarly activity is equated with research publications—but that subset of scholarship is also limited by medium of dissemination—the research publications that count most are those published in print.

(inserted image)

The charts in this Prezi were created by James P. Purdy

The prevailing system of tenure and promotion likely familiar to most all of us asks faculty members to classify their work as teaching, research, or service; limits scholarship to research; and privileges research published in particular forms and media.

Print. Books.

(inserted image)

Watson, Paul. (2005, June 20). Book pile. Retrieved July 12, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

All images copied from flickr are licensed under Creative Commons licenses.

A number of scholars profess that print is the most appropriate medium in which to communicate the complex ideas that characterize rigorous academic scholarship (Birkerts, 1995; Carr, 2008; Glister, 1997; Murray, 1997). In doing so, they contrast digital texts with print ones, examining the ways in which digital texts inadequately present complexity.

(inserted image)

Viewing digital scholarship primarily (or exclusively) through the lens of print, however, misses the ways in which digital work allows for communicating complex ideas through the use of hypertextual connections, multiple modes, non-linear associations, and author-reader interactions. In other words, it misses the ways in which scholarly work happens differently in different venues.

Remixed image: SheepGuardingLlama. (2007, March 30). Eyeglasses in sunlight. Retrieved July 14, 2009, from <http://www.flick.com>.

Processes of knowledge-making change across different spaces as they are shaped and influenced by the affordances of these spaces. Definitions of scholarship intimately tied to the conventions of print, however, often do not account for other ways in which scholars "do" scholarship. Nor do they recognize the limitations of print itself. In fact, as Mike Rose argues in his analysis of print textbooks from the early 1980s (1981, 1983), because print best lends itself to chronological, step-based relationships between static elements, complex recursive processes, particularly those associated with composing and knowledge creation, can be difficult to communicate via print. Because we are seeking to move beyond print conventions, we order text in this section in ways that depart from print-based expectations: from right to left and in non-linear order.

Many print textbooks present successful composing as that which moves through the following steps in the following order:

(inserted image)

Mr.beaver. (2009, April 29). LED + light bulb. Retrieved July 13, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

(inserted image)

Andreas E J. (2008, April 14). Open book. Retrieved July 13, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

(inserted image)

Oliveri, Mike. (2007, June 30). Brainstorming. Retrieved July 13, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

(inserted image)

Becker, Nathan T. (2008, October 20). Kevin typing. Retrieved July 13, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

(inserted image)

Jakevol2. (2009, May 1). Making the grade. Retrieved July 13, 2009, from <http://www.flickr.com>.

In other words:

Formulate a thesis idea about a topic.

Go to the library and read what other smart people have to say about that topic.

Write down what you have to say in response to those people.

Type it up.

Get an A!

Such an illustration of the research-based writing process provides some helpful guidance to students, but it is oversimplified and inaccurately represents the complexity and recursiveness of these processes. Indeed, in some cases, digital scholarship provides a better venue for a more speculative, associational, networked kind of knowledge-making (Walker, 2006). Digital scholarship makes possible both different kinds of textual activities for producing, distributing, and using information and different notions of the value of these design and delivery decisions. Digital scholarship, therefore, can allow for new, non-print-bound perspectives on composing and knowledge production, which can be particularly important for generations of composers whose first texts are no longer necessarily print and whose default interactions with texts are hypertextual, associative, and non-linear.

When we disregard the knowledge-making practices and rhetorical moves possible and happening in digital spaces, we risk disenfranchising a whole generation of knowledge producers. We also risk disregarding the economic realities of academic publishing: more and more academic presses and journals are going digital as publishing print monographs becomes increasingly cost prohibitive.

For these and other reasons, this is a particularly important moment to be pursuing and valuing scholarly activity in multiple forms. The Modern Language Association (MLA) has recognized the need to account for digitally produced and disseminated scholarship. In its 2007 Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, the MLA explicitly affirms the legitimacy of digital scholarship for tenure and promotion, and in 2009 the MLA partnered with the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC) to develop guidelines for English departments to use in evaluating digital scholarship for tenure and promotion cases (see Jaschik, 2009). Moreover, as Jaschik (2009) reports, Rosemary Feal, executive director of the MLA, professes that

Digital projects are not "divided easily into teaching, research, and service. . . . Professors shouldn't be forced to pick between one category and another" (n.p.).

So not only does digital work challenge use of the print monograph as the gold standard for research excellence, but it also challenges reliance on mutually exclusive categories of teaching, research, and service as baskets into which academics must classify their work.

A Broader Conception of Scholarship

This realization that the definition of what constitutes scholarship is sorely limited is not new. In 1990 Ernest L. Boyer released a special report for the Carnegie Foundation, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, that argues for expanding our notion of scholarship beyond only published research. He calls for recognizing four kinds of scholarly activity: discovering, integrating, applying, and teaching (p. 16ff).

(inserted image)

Charles E. Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene I. Maeroff (1997) and KerryAnn O'Meara and R. Eugene Rice (2005) have taken up Boyer's call (1990) for a more "capacious" (p. 16) definition of scholarship—both in terms of form and activity. Our project continues this work and applies it more directly to English studies. So while the core of our call is not new, what is new are the ways in which this limitation is foregrounded and made more acute by the digital technologies on which students, academics, journal editors, and book publishers increasingly rely for writing, reading, publishing, and storing texts.

Our Project

Scholars in English studies (Ball, 2004; Ball & Moeller, 2008; Boyd, 2008; Lang, Walker, & Dorwick, 2000; Purdy & Walker, 2010) have begun to provide theoretical frameworks and practical strategies to help in this process of valuing and evaluating scholarship that looks, in some cases, very different from the singularly authored print monograph. Allison Warner (2007), in particular, presents a helpful assessment tool for evaluating “the scholarly value of online journal publications” arising from a genre analysis of articles published in Kairos (“Study Overview”). In some ways, her project is very much like our own, which is similarly interested in the ways in which digital webtexts are scholarly and likewise uses Kairos Best Webtext Award winners as objects of analysis. Our project, however, differs in a several important ways:

1. While Warner’s goal is to define (and justify) the genre of the scholarly webtext by offering a list of common formal features (both those consistent with and those that depart from traditional print scholarly conventions) (“Constructing the Assessment Tool”), our goal is to identify what rhetorical moves characterize and are possible in scholarly work in digital spaces, including but not limited to scholarly webtexts. In focusing on rhetorical moves, we follow Patricia Webb Boyd (2008) in believing that published texts “echo the new media research strategies new scholars are already engaging in” (“Difference," 5th screen). That is, texts reflect particular ways in which scholars seek to make meaning. They represent and influence how we produce knowledge through research and writing. In short, our research question is

Research Question

What are the ways in which we (can) do scholarly work in a range of digital spaces?

VS.

“What are some of the common characteristics that comprise scholarly online journal publications?” (Warner, 2007, “Research Questions”).

Looking at formal features helps us answer our research question, so there is certainly some overlap in our work, but we are less interested in what features comprise these texts and more concerned with how they seek to do scholarly work (broadly conceived).

Our webtext focuses on digital spaces specifically but not within a print-digital binary.

1. Our objects of analysis include all Kairos Best Webtext Award winners, whether they were published in Kairos or not, and texts other than academic articles. Warner (2007) analyzes only single or co-authored webtexts published in Kairos (“Selecting Webtexts for Analysis”), bracketing off both those scholarly texts that confound clear definition (e.g., webtexts like Adrian Miles' "Violence of Text," an edited collection of six multimodal webtexts from six different contributors) and those scholarly activities that happen in "non-academic" spaces made possible by digital technologies (e.g., blogs, discussion boards).
2. Our study provides specific evidence from the texts we analyzed. Warner’s (2007) focus in her piece is the assessment tool itself rather than the data that led her to construct it. She does not quote or paraphrase from the webtexts she analyzed. We do. Producing such evidence is key, we believe, to illustrating ways in which scholars do scholarship in multiple ways in multiple places.

In short, in this study we work to consider activities of affiliation and knowledge-making not within the confines of conventions of particular genres or media, but in their multiple manifestations in digital spaces. Like Boyd (2008), we are less interested in contrasting print and digital texts and more interested in “pulling . . . into our awareness” (“Difference,” 8th screen) the ways in which these texts afford meaning making. Our webtext identifies rhetorical moves that characterize and are possible in digital scholarship. In doing so, this webtext seeks to assist both senior faculty charged with evaluating digital work for tenure and promotion and junior faculty engaging in such work. More broadly, it endeavors to help us understand how we are making meaning in digital spaces and how we in academia need to reconsider our definition of what constitutes scholarship and, thereby, what kind of work academics should be doing and should be rewarded for doing.

FINIS

To continue, click on "the study" link of the webtext (close full screen view, if you are using it).