

The Conference

00:05

Lisa Gerrard: University of Minnesota had a conference. In 1983 That my colleagues on this WANDAH project went to and there were only 10 people there. They invited 10 people who were developing software for writing, so it wasn't a conference... that was the first Computers and Writing conference, but it was by invitation only and it was just a very informal meeting. And then the following year they had a full scale conference. And I went to that one. That was the first Computers that Writing conference on the model that we have now.

00:44

Cindy Selfe: “Those conferences have always been small, intimate and friendly conferences. Rather than grand, formal, serious kinds of affairs. And that’s what I think is a blessing about that conference, it just seems that in a small environment like that often what we meet is small institutions. And usually these conferences, we don’t always meet at places like the University of Michigan, we meet at Baluskington, or Washington State or other smaller institutions you know, that just want to bring that collaboration out, a mix of intellectual inquiry to their particular location. We all come there, and I think it’s because we’re a relatively small group. Because we’re a group who hasn’t always enjoyed great prestige in the field and I think a lot of us are, I don’t think we’ve ever seen computers and technology in a fixed field but as an expanding and emerging field. And so we’ve never had that sort of “turf protection” thing, where we worry about too many people coming into the field, we sort of fling open the doors and hope they come! That has always been a way of thinking in that field and I think it has shaped the entire conference. As Gail said, we always, always, value the contributions of graduate students and they have proven to be, in my opinion, the heart of the discipline in the field of computers and digital media studies. They always know what they are doing, they are always generous in helping us learn as well, and they are always good humored sorts of folks.”

02:55

Cheryl Ball: “As I have talked to people in the field we have noticed this huge shift in two different conferences that happened in the early 2000’s. The first one was in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan and that was what, five years ago I think, I’ll have to look that one up. 2011 I’m pretty sure it was. That was a big change because it was the biggest computers in writing conference we’d ever had, there were 550 people that showed up to that conference. It’s usually around 250, somewhere around there. It can go down to 275, it can go up to 400, but 550 was massive. So you see this exponential rise in the field because of the number of sites with PHD programs producing computers in writing scholars, whereas when the field first started no

one was a computers in writing scholar because that kind of PHD didn't exist, until the 90's really. So there were re-trained literature people coming out of comparative lit programs. Occasionally a rhetoric PHD program. So Ann Arbor introduced a bunch of new people to the field who were graduate students who brought a higher level of theoretical approaches. If I had to characterize it in comparison it was like, there were people who would normally go to RSA that has a much more theoretical vent than 4C's, lets say or certainly CNW. We saw the introduction of some of that and just new blood, new people, and we started seeing more diversity in the field which has been really nice and desperately needed. We've seen more of an equalling out since Raleigh I think which is good. I think having equal measure of more theoretically informed pieces that are delivered in a way that is not an MLA presentation or even a lot of 4C's presentations."

05:18

Kristin Arola: "I think we went through phases of more high theory stuff going on. If you kind of look back there's years where Tanza was attending the CNW and he doesn't really anymore and in those years you see more of that electricy stuff and a lot of things. That sort of phase and then the blips where people are going to do things with affect or whatever they are doing, these high theory moments. But it seems like computers in writing folks are inherently a little more pragmatic to me. Not that theory's not practiced and blah, blah, blah, but I think it is never going to become a super high theory conference. I think RSA is good for that and that's great, do that work there. I think computers in writing is more of folks doing what is it good for, how can we use it, how can we teach it, who is it helping, who is it hurting sort of thing. And I think more grad students come than used to, but that could be because I am not a grad student now and it just feels that way to me."

06:21

Steven Krause: "How has the conference changed... I think that's actually one of the problems is how the conference really hasn't changed much. It still is kind of, you've got some paint, I've got a bar, let's put on a show kind of operation where it gets constructed anew every single year. Where its still on a college campus, where its still held in location where frankly it doesn't make a lot of sense. Right? It's held at places where people are willing to host the conferences opposed to can one actually get there."

06:58

Cheryl Ball: "A part of Steve's complaint is really about the institutional infrastructure of the conference, of 7C's and how CNW is run. He calls it a bit antarctic, and that's not a good thing for the field, but our other option is to be a more formalized part of the 4C's environment which would be disastrous I believe to the field. I'm very outspoken about the poor relationship between 4C and CNW. That's not going to work for us I believe, I don't think it's going to be

healthy for the community of CNW. I'll tell you a story actually, because I am in my office for the first time in weeks because I have been doing a lot of traveling and I am looking over here at this business card that I have. I went to 4C for the first time in seven years this year. And actually I wasn't at 4C's I was in Houston visiting a friend during the same week that 4C's was going on and I didn't attend the conference. I was in Houston and I was at a wet clearings house meeting, which happened to be held at the same hotel that 4Cs was going on. So people saw me, I was around, and they were like 'What are you doing?' and I was like 'I'm not here!'. So I am running through the hotel, on my way to the Wet Clearing's house meeting, and Joyce Carter stops me. I'm like 'Hey Joyce! I'm so sorry I missed your keynote, I heard it was great' and I give her a big hug, and she's standing with this woman so she turns to introduce me. She's like 'This is Emily Cerpatrick' and my face just dropped. She's the new director of NCTE. Because Joyce introduces me by being like 'What are you doing here I thought you were boycotting 4C's' and I'm like 'I am I'm not actually here' and she's like 'This is Emily the new director of NCTE. I'm like 'JOYCE! Why would you do that, why would you blow my cover in front of the new director'. And Joyce looks at me and tells me she thinks I should tell Emily why I have been boycotting. So I'm like, I'm late to the elevator which is going to this private floor for a meeting that I'm about to miss so I'm all flustered and I tell her I wasn't planning on doing this today but Emily tells me she wants to know. I say "Well... NCTE has a long history of bad technology use and bad integration and infrastructure that has impacted me and people in my discipline in computers and writing in some pretty significantly negative ways.' And then I go on to elaborate some of those points. Which I won't here, I will send you the article if you want. But basically they ignored recommendations from the 7Cs committee for over a decade about wireless issues and when they did raise wireless issues they were like 'see aha we did this' and I said no, you wrapped it into the hotel costs and charged them more for their hotel and you started 3C's three times online and its debunked all three times and that's peer reviewed scholarship that people have lost because you can't get your shit together. So that's why I say that the relationship between 4Cs or NCTE and CNW shouldn't be closer together. We should have some more independent movement within this discipline."

10:47

Steven Krause: "I think the computers in writing has done a lot of good things in terms of renovating presentation formats. I think that computers in writing has been and remains a really good space for graduate students where that work is honored and wards opportunity for ways that wouldn't necessarily be at other conferences. I think it has remained, and this is among the positive, that it has remained still, in my view, a friendly place. It's kind of cliquy, I mean if you're not part of the inside crowd as it were, it can be not the most inviting. People think it's inviting but I don't think it's as inviting as people think to people on the outside as people on the inside think it is."

11:34

Jason Palmeri: “I think it is something about my identity as a scholar that computers in writing has always been a good conference for me, but i am unusual in the way that I still see 4C’s as kind of my home conference. I’ve been to all of 4C’s but one since my first year in grad school. I definitely have been to quite a few and it has been an important conference for me. A very friendly and welcoming conference, I had trouble seeing myself as a tech person since I was historically a ledite. No one ever believes me but if you talk to any of my friends from high school and undergrad they will in fact affirm this fact about me. But I found it was a community that really welcomed me in and was supportive and I thought that was good. Computers in writing was actually where Ben and I first presented the first iteration of our project where we had 50 years and it was by far the most generative presentation we ever had, and that was sort of a case of a group of people inherently interested in what we had to say, and had lots of ideas about our methodology and data visualization and it was a very collaborative environment. Whereas I presented the work in other places, which might be the sub-field versus the other field, like there’s more work to be done as to why we should care. But in computers in writing I knew people would care and had the kind of audience where people would be enthusiastic and also push us so I think it still functions that way for me.”

13:08

Laura Gonzalez: “I think maybe it's something related to like, overall changes in our political climate or something. The last year I went there seemed to be a lot more tensions, I felt a lot more tensions between people who do work about culture, race and culture, and then people who don’t incorporate that as much into their work directly. There seemed to be this tension which I don't know where that is coming from. I think it just echoes everything else that is happening in our country. There are just a lot more feelings involved in general and then some people are way more critical and those who are way less receptive to criticism so there has been a lot more of that in I’d say the last two years.”