Scholarship on the Move – 3 (Blogs) 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/).

Blogs

Including thesis statements

Some blog posts are scholarly in recognizable ways. Some are constructed as explicit arguments. In his “Taking Speed Seriously” post, for instance, Alex Reid offers a thesis statement: “the point is that just because our rhetorical, discursive expectations call for certain behaviors, that doesn't mean that other compositional practices might not yield worthwhile thinking” (June 14, 2009). Reid clearly identifies his “point” for readers. In his “Digital Video and Scholarship” post, he likewise adopts the rhetoric of assertion: “Once we get past the questions of the genre that might/will develop for video humanities scholarship, including the questions of scholarly validity, we need to address the material constraints such work imposes” (June 4, 2009). Reid's call to action is clear: we “need” to identify material constraints of video scholarship. He even explicitly labels his argumentative moves:

"The best I think we can say is what should be fairly obvious. [begin italics] The more we write and the greater variety of genres in which we write, the better prepared we will be to write in a variety of genres in the future [end italics].

In short, this article indicates that we continue to ask the wrong question. And maybe I should have just written that, but I'm an academic writer by trade and my habit is to elaborate (typically beyond almost an audience's level of interest).” (“Chronicle Article on the Internet and Student Writing,” June 16, 2009)

Here Reid italicizes his thesis and explicitly classifies what he is doing as characteristic of an “academic writer.”

Such arguments are not confined to individual posts, however. Reid uses the blog as a space for composing other academic texts. He explains that some posts are writing for and drafts of his essay for the Writing Spaces textbook:

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(“On Blogging,” June 14, 2009)

See also “Why Blog?”, June 1, 2009:

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Reid composes his scholarly essay about blogging in his blog. He uses the affordances of the blog form to craft his argument.

That scholarly blogs can serve as gateways to publication is illustrated elsewhere. For example, a version of Claire Potter's “Get Ready for Your Search” article appeared on her blog Tenured Radical before being published in Inside Higher Ed (2009, June 26).

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It is perhaps the ways in which blogs can serve as compositional spaces that allow them to promote scholarly activity.

Including citational gestures

The Lovas Award-winning blogs also make direct citational gestures. Posts include links to articles referenced. For example, Elizabeth Losh hyperlinks to the texts she analyzes and responds to in her posts, as in her “Twitter Litter” and “Das Rheingold” posts:

(inserted images)

These blogs take advantage of the affordance of connectivity to link directly to analyzed and referenced texts so it is clear from where quoted and paraphrased text comes.

Using images as evidence

Bloggers also use images (still and video) for evidentiary purposes. Some posts are accompanied by images to exemplify points. Losh, for instance, explicitly references a YouTube video as evidence to support her discussion of access to graphic material online:

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“This graphic scene of Iranian protester Neda Soltani dying on the streets of Tehran as her father weeps, which was shot by a cell phone camera and uploaded onto the Internet, is been [sic] shown on network news despite its graphic content, and users are warning YouTube against takedown, although several versions of this clip now require over-18 authentication” (“Pieta in Reverse,” June 21, 2009).

Such evidentiary use of images is not restricted to overtly scholarly posts. Brooke, for instance, provides photos to illustrate the number of books he has accumulated in his large Graduate Director office (“Miles Yet to Go,” May 3, 2009):

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and Ratliff provides video of her son to support that he is indeed “cute” (“My Child Is Cute,” April 26, 2009):

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As in webtexts and other scholarly publications, such images work to support blog authors' claims.

Getting ideas “out there”

While some blog posts offer explicit arguments, other posts are more speculative discussions of events and ideas. For instance, Brooke ends his post about concerns regarding Elsevier's fake journal Australasian Journal of Bone and Joint Medicine, “Hmm. I feel like I have more to say, but I'm not sure what. Maybe I'll revisit this post after I think about it. For now, though, that's all.” (“CFP: The Australasian,” May 9, 2009). He leaves the door open for additional contribution, framing the blog as a place to stimulate thinking.

Reid explicitly introduces a video he created as speculative work: “I put together this short video on digital video and scholarship mostly as an opportunity to mess around with my new flip video camera but also as a reminder to myself of the work that goes into even the most modest of video productions” (“Digital Video and Scholarship,” June 4, 2009).

Neither author goes so far as to offer a definitive argument about the journal or video, respectively, though both suggest interpretations for their readers.

Ratliff, moreover, sets up posts as recounting her thought processes and musings: “I've been thinking for a while now about all the various skill sets required in order to write a good, source-driven research paper. . . . My notes here aren't any great contribution, but I just want to get them out there” (“Research Writing Skills,” June 17, 2009). Note Ratliff's concern with getting her ideas “out there.”

Blogs allow for this public circulation of ideas and work-in-progress, offering opportunities for invention and dialogue.

Including language of speculation

Blog language also reflects speculation. In her posts, for instance, Losh points to “ interesting rhetorical features” (“Prim and Proper,” March 28, 2009) and “features of . . . rhetorical strategy” (“Numbers Game,” March 28, 2009) in particular texts (in this case, a video and an email, respectively). She directs readers' attention to particular textual aspects without arguing how they should respond to them. She instructs readers to “Note” certain things (e.g., “Town Crier,” March 27, 2009; “If Only We,” June 14, 2009) and to “ Take close note of this process” (“Twitter Litter,” June 14, 2009).

By choosing to focus on particular elements, Losh clearly directs her audience's attention in particular ways, which can guide them in seeing certain things (both literally and figuratively). But her gaze direction is suggestive rather than forceful.

Her response to the MLB All-Star voting procedure further shows this speculative work: “I worry that the model of mass voting provides such a common -- and obviously flawed -- counter-example to traditional one-person/one-vote/one-candidate schemes, that no one will feel moved to use new computational technologies to try out alternative forms of deliberation” (“If Only We,” June 14, 2009). Rather than present her conclusion as an argument, Losh offers it as a “worry.” That she has concerns is clear, but she frames them less as assertions and more as musings for consideration.

Tagging

Tagging is another scholarly move made possible in blogs. In the blogs we studied, posts are tagged with keywords that associate content with particular idea categories (e.g., “composition pedagogy” and “technology and culture” in Ratliff's blog). These tags connect posts across different thematic areas. Readers can search for all blog posts on, for example, “academia” or “graduate study,” tags Brooke uses on his blog.

That individual posts are tagged in multiple ways allows for multiple associations—between both categories and posts. Brooke, for instance, gives his “Blogging Conferential” (May 23, 2008) post the categories and tags

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establishing implicit connections between this post and these topic areas and among these topic areas themselves.

These connections can be generative.

Readers may not previously have associated academia and blogging or graduate study and public work, for example. Reading multiple posts in one category, moreover, can likewise extend a reader's understanding of a particular category. For instance, including "comics" under "academia" situates them as part of (or at least related to) scholarly work.

Using hyperlinks

The blogs studied take advantage of hyperlink connectivity to indicate authors have scholarly credentials. Losh, Reid, and Ratliff, for instance, all include a link to their CVs on their blogs.

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Losh and Reid also include links to their recently published books, and Ratliff includes a link to her “Essays/Research.”

Losh even includes a link to the announcement of her receipt of the Lovas Memorial Weblog Award.

These links are all implicit ethos-building moves. No author explicitly directs readers to her or his CV or explicitly claims to have the necessary scholarly credentials to be believed, though all imply this conclusion through including links to scholarly accomplishments.

Including images

A blog's images associate the blogger with particular scholarly movements and tools. The home page of Reid's blog, for example, includes images of a Creative Commons icon, Google logo, pbWiki ad, and bloggapedia logo, suggesting support of these services and initiatives.

The right column of Losh's blog likewise ends with a hyperlinked image of the Blogger icon, indicating Losh supports and uses Blogger for her blog.

Ratliff's blog is similar. It includes the icons for Creative Commons, Drupal, and open access. For open access, this support is a bit more explicit: the icon includes the words “I SUPPORT OPEN ACCESS.”

On the whole, however, these images are provided without labels or explanations, though, by virtue of their inclusion, they clearly represent the bloggers' choices to be associated with the products and initiatives they represent—and signal a desire for readers to be as well.

Encouraging explicit conversation

Possibilities for conversation are structurally built in to blogs. Above or below each post is a “Comments” link where readers can respond to posts.

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Links to recent comments are provided, so the ongoing conversation surrounding each blog is visible. These appear like the script of a play, emphasizing the notion of generative conversation, as shown with this exchange from Reid's blog on June 23, 2009:

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Users can click on links to read the full content of longer posts. And they can post their own comments to contribute to the dialogue.

Promoting continued dialogue outside the space

Knowledge-producing dialogue need not be limited to the blog itself, however. Reid's and Losh's blogs, for instance, further enhance possibilities for dialogic interchange by promoting conversation beyond the blog.

Not only does a Comments link follow each blog post

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but a ShareThis link follows each of Reid's

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and an image of an envelope follows each of Losh's, providing readers the opportunity to share these posts via email and social bookmarking sites,

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thereby continuing the conversation surrounding these posts.

Dialogue, then, can extend beyond the blog itself.

That these possibilities for conversation develop ideas and generate knowledge is illustrated by a post on Brooke's blog. Brooke explicitly begins his “Course Update #4” post as a response to comments on his blog:

He uses prompting from others to expound on and refine his ideas.

This dialogue produces knowledge.

"The big news for the week is that the Virtualpolitik book now exists as a tangible entity, one that arrived in three boxes at my front door this morning. The book represents ten years of research and encapsulates topics that I have been exploring during four years of blogging. Of course, readers of this blog are thanked in the first paragraph of the acknowledgments, as the excerpts in the online copy shows." (March 31, 2009)

As Losh indicates, the content of her book was directly shaped by her blog. It was the primary space in which she composed its content. Indeed, both have the same name: Virtualpolitk.

That scholars who write blogs develop content from them for publication in recognizable scholarly forms (i.e., print monographs) reinforces that blogs themselves are sites of scholarly activity.

The blogs we studied provide spaces for developing knowledge through disseminating ideas and engaging in dialogue as well as writing scholarship. The blog space, then, not only spurs scholarship, but also is used to create it. The form of the blog itself allows scholars to enact ideas.

Reid, for instance, uses the form of the blog to compose an essay about blogging, indicating several posts are (inserted image)

Reid uses his blog to compose a scholarly piece about blogging.

Like Reid, Losh's blogging led to publication. In her “From the Blog to the Book to the Box” post, she explains:

"The big news for the week is that the Virtualpolitik book now exists as a tangible entity, one that arrived in three boxes at my front door this morning. The book represents ten years of research and encapsulates topics that I have been exploring during four years of blogging. Of course, readers of this blog are thanked in the first paragraph of the acknowledgments, as the excerpts in the online copy shows." (March 31, 2009)

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But viewing blogs as scholarly for only this reason presents a limited view of scholarship. That is, instead of seeing blogs as producing knowledge only because they are part of the process of book publication for some scholars, we profess that we should see blogs as scholarly because they allow for and promote the very activity that scholarly forms like books are intended to generate: conversation about ideas made available for public scrutiny through writing.

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