Scholarship on the Move – 4 (Discussion Groups) 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/).

Discussion Groups

A Note on Scholarly Content and Discussion Groups

When moving into a discussion of spaces like email discussion groups and Twitter groups, it's important to recognize that these spaces seem to be more often associated with professional development than scholarship (i.e., while its possible that some institutions might allow faculty to list participation in discipline-specific discussion groups as part of their professional development contributions, permission to list the same participation as a scholarly contribution would be much less likely).

(see note 1.) NOTES In fact, in a discussion on Techrhet regarding this issue, the following exchange between two participants illustrates the ongoing dialogue regarding the place of discussion groups in tenure and promotion:

Excerpt from a post by Carrie Lamanna:

"...If you participate in a significant way in a particular thread, I'd argue for going further than listing it in the annual activities report as Mike Palmquist mentioned. I'd say that such participation is the same as presenting at a conference—you are presenting research/making arguments and engaging in discussion with colleagues about said research/arguments."

Excerpt from the response post by Michael Palmquist:

"Good point. I worry that you'd run into problems with that argument, though. Although it's pretty easy to get into some conferences, barriers usually exist. In contrast, there are few barriers (if any) to participating in online discussions. I think some online discussions are important, but I can think of a lot that aren't, and in the main I suspect most people put far more time into preparing a conference presentation than they put into the vast majority of email list posts."

 ("Using Techrhet for Tenure and Promotion," Techrhet, Jan.31, 2010)

This is, in fact, a core component of our argument. If there is evidence that scholarly kinds of activities (using our more diverse framework for identifying scholarly activity) are occurring in these spaces, then perhaps we might increase the likelihood that scholars who are active in these spaces could receive credit for this type of scholarly production.

Explicit Argument

In our sections on webtexts and blogs, we found that similar types of scholarly activity are indeed occurring, in spite of differences between the two types of texts. Some of the criteria we used to examine those sections included the use of rhetorical elements of argument, the language of argument, the use of images as evidence and illustration, a linear organization, and the inclusion of citational gestures in support of arguments.

One of the most salient features of discussion groups is that while they may indeed also contain these same elements of argument, they are not necessarily designed or intended by their users to lead to definitive statements. While we quite easily found evidence of the use of argumentative strategies, in the discussion groups these strategies are often used in the service of primarily dialogic exchanges, information sharing, the process of vetting theories or arguments in development, or exploration of a range of issues current within the discipline. However, it is certainly not impossible to argue that these same activities are similar to the primary work done by print texts in a field such as computers and writing. Therefore, in analyzing how discussion groups use argument, it seems more relevant to discuss how these uses might parallel, or depart from, the purposes for which arguments are used in conventional texts.

One common idea that has separated discussion posts from more conventional print-based texts that are seen as scholarly has been a sense of "depth-of-analysis," or the idea that discussion posts skim the surface of a topic while an article or book-length piece offers scholars a better chance to influence and shape the development of knowledge in the field. Still another assertion is that these longer scholarly texts rely on citation as a way to show an understanding of and an interaction with a topic. These are not mere conventions of argument--they point instead to ways that particular kinds of arguments, in particular genres, work within a discipline to influence thinking. Our analysis of these posts from Techrhet, then, includes evidence of how these posts do this kind of work, through argumentative structures and other means.

Depth of Analysis

It is impossible to judge the depth of text-based arguments (not to mention multi-modal or visual arguments) in terms of length, although as any academic author knows, the shape of an argument is often significantly affected by such factors as page length. In fact, as we note in our analysis of the Kairos webtexts, one advantage of these digital texts for authors was that they were allowed more space than would have been allowed in a traditional, print-based article.

A result of this perception, at least in the humanities, is that book-length texts are generally seen as more thorough than articles, and so on, in a descending order that might be marked like this...

Books

Articles

short articles

conference presentations

listserv posts

However, if we assume that "thoroughness" or "depth-of-analysis" is only one among multiple ways that we can assess argumentative strategies, then the issue of length becomes less directly relevant. While more detail may be crucial in some cases, important discussions among scholars in a field of study can also take place around a fairly narrow focus, and these are the types of discussions we found in the exchanges that tended to move toward argument (as opposed to speculation or dialogue) on Techrhet.

For example, in the discussion thread "Building websites in [an] online course," the discussion begins to turn directly argumentative when Kristin Arola posts,

"Actually, it seems to me that the \*need\* to know code is becoming less and less necessary for the everyday student. I just finished up an article on the template-drive design of Web 2.0 (so forgive me, fresh in the brain)" (June 1, 2009).

The subsequent discussion includes a whole range of argumentative moves:

When I read Patty's query my first response was "they should learn the basics of coding," and I'm not backing away from that although I agree with some (if not all) of the points made by Kristin and Steve (Julie Meloni, June 1, 2009).

I think the truth is that as a field, we don't really know what those terms mean anymore, nor exactly what it is that we should be teaching. But I do know that it's much, much more complex a discussion, as Julie has pointed out, than the HTML/CSS or not debate (Charlie Lowe, June 6, 2009).

So when we try to clarify (purify) a much needed distinction between the writer and the coder, are we doing so from that ivory tower that fails to see the practical, real world experience or just thinking exclusively about writing versus designing? (Mary wright, June 1, 2009).

Just don't see this as an either/or thing. Web editors make code available, and can help it make sense, which is as good a path in as any. A student who works with an editor and is interested in having a composition play as well on Chrome and Firefox as on IE will find herself confronting the code level soon enough, seems like. (Kathy Fitch, June 2, 2009).

The contributors to this thread make explicit references to each others' arguments, provide rebuttals, etc. The collective thread thus becomes an ongoing dialogue about the issue of teaching code in digital composition courses, providing a fairly robust treatment of the different arguments embedded in the topic.

Influencing the Discipline

One criterion for determining the value of a piece of scholarship has been assessment of how a scholar's work is influencing the work of other scholars in the field. Such value can be assessed in bibliometric terms, or in terms of how a discipline (or related disciplines) are taking up the ideas in other ways (through teaching, invitations for presentations, etc.).

In the humanities, this influence can certainly be gained through means of scholarly publication, but it can also be gained through other means (for example, editing an influential journal, or designing a software program, or creating a center for research, to name only a few). These alternate kinds of activity have often been placed under the category of "service," although arguments have certainly been made that such activities should be considered scholarship.

Certainly, when seen in terms of influencing the discipline, a journal such as Kairos, with its dedication to promoting and exploring not only issues that concern the discipline, but new forms and genres of scholarship, could certainly be considered argumentative in its stance (especially vis-a-vis more traditional publications like CCC). Therefore, a text might seem to have value if it affects the ways a discipline thinks and works, regardless of genre. Additionally, such work might be created collaboratively, rather than through the work of a single author, and contributions to these collaborations could be considered valuable as well.

Using this definition of "contribution," the Techrhet posts can certainly be seen to have value. It is quite common for members of the group to offer thanks to contributors who have brought forward new ideas, provided a useful insight, or made a clear synthesis of a complex issue, showing that it is indeed possible for members to influence the thinking (and thus potentially the scholarship) of other members of the group. For example, in the thread "Online grammar films" members comment on Mark Marino's work to create and post short films on grammatical issues.

"22 Short Films about Grammar"

http://www.bunkmag.com/grammar/

(This is my first post. Here is a new online grammar resource)

Bunk Magazine has released for download a series of very short films (.wmv files) that focus on a variety of grammatical concepts. "22 Short Films about Grammar" offers short (30 sec-1.5 minute) vignettes about common grammatical errors. Although the majority aim at higher-level issues (such as semicolon use), others treat more basic issues, such as subject-verb agreement (Marino, Sept. 15, 2006).

I clicked on several and ended up with a similar experience. Some of them, like the semicolon one, are fantastic "high concept" videos for people who already understand. I thought they were clever and creative. I didn't see them as good teaching tools; maybe they weren't meant for that purpose (Carla Beard, Sept. 15, 2006).

i watched 4 or 5 of these, and am not sure who would use them or how they would be used. they use grammatical knowledge to make the jokes, but don't really help build grammatical knowledge, and i think might further confuse the already confused. they're entertaining for english teachers, but not useful, i'd say (Mary Tigner-Rasenen, Sept. 15, 2006).

I'd use them as a lead -in to teaching a concept--they are short and attention getting and not what you'd expect in a grammar lesson (Joanna Howard, Sept. 15, 2006).

Thanks, Mark. I put on Spock ears and watched to boldly go, and I'm still achuckle. I think Joanna's idea of using them as an issue intro is a good idea (Nick Carbone, Sept. 15, 2006).

Several years later, Marino moves the posts to YouTube, and refers back to the discussion about the potential teaching value of these texts:

Hi, all,

Back when I first joined this list, I posted about:

 "22 Short Films about Grammar"

Well, several years later, I discovered this very cool online video service called YouTube.com. An online course in uploading (Kaplan) taught me how to create a "playlist" of the videos. This is a lot like a list, but you can, well, play it.

http://www.youtube.com/view\_play\_list?p=7871319DAC5DB493

Now it's easier than ever to see these machinima gems and share them with your students (unless YouTube is blocked where you teach).

I still have the full set and the "22 Short Films Error Log" here:

http://bunkmag.com/grammar/

Now that you can see them all in one shot, if you have any requests for ones I haven't made yet or other feedback, please send it along. Some of them suffer from inside jokes with classes of mine (and from the fact that I made them with a video game that I have a record low score on). Again, as techrhet suggested 2 years ago, they seem more fun as introductions to topics and grammar rather than stand alone lessons (a la School House Rock).

If you hate them or have negative reactions, please post comments directly to the YouTube.com. It apparently has some sort of forum feature that permits academic exchanges about the videos. (March 1, 2009)

The exchanges in this thread make many of the same moves as one might see, for example, in the "reviews" section of a print-based publication. However, the dialogic structure of the discussion allows multiple users to influence thinking about these texts, as well as to influence the author's future productions, and the potential use of these texts by teachers in the classroom.

Use of Citation

This category is perhaps the simplest to exemplify, as the process of citing and sharing citation is a fundamental part of listserv activity. Scholars in all of the threads we examined offered citations, referencing their own work, or adding links that supported their position or offered readers a more in-depth treatment of a topic.

In addition, many scholars use discussion groups like Techrhet as a kind of "bibliography generator," using the collective knowledge of the group to begin or expand lists of citation for research or teaching purposes. The bibliographic requests often combine responses that simply list texts with responses that are more argumentative or dialogic in nature. For example, posts to the following thread both offer citations and critique the offerings in terms of their value or perspective:

Kathie Gossett

to techrhet

Hi all,

I was hoping to pick your collective brains. I'm teaching a graduate-level new media theory course this summer and I was wondering what you all would pick as the top 10 books/articles that grad students should read in such a course? This course is set up to be the first of a three course sequence--the other two courses will be a combination of theory and practice, but this first course is all theoretical. So far my list includes:

Bolter and Grusin, Remediation

Manovich, Language of New Media (and maybe Software Takes Command, but I haven't finished reading it yet)

Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

Hayles, How we became post-human

Turkle, Life on the Screen

Murray, Hamlet on the Holodeck ("New Media Theory," March 23, 2009).

greg turner-rahman

 to techrhet

Kathie-

You might look at Hansen's New Philosophy for New Media (MIT Press). Hansen uses Bergson and the notion of the affective interface to argue t ("New Media Theory," March 23, 2009)

Michael Wojcik

 to techrhet

show details 3/24/09

Kathie Gossett wrote:

> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

Haraway is an old favorite of mine, but I've always thought "Cyborg Manifesto" was one of her weaker essays. Aside from marking (blurrily) the shift in her work from her more empirical, cohesive phase (exemplified by \_Primate Visions\_) to her more experimental phase (exemplified by much of \_Simians, Cyborgs, Women\_ and most of what came after it), and of course its historical value as a widely-read and influential piece, I don't find it all that useful ("New Media Theory," March 24, 2009).

Speculation

Language of Speculation

Speculation is often a key activity in the genre of discussion groups. Such spaces are designed to open up ideas for discussion, often serving as a first location where a scholar considers a topic he or she is planning to research in more depth. In addition, contributors often feel free to make statements that are deliberately provocative, counting on commentary from other contributors to consider opposing views. In some cases, as in the "Synecdoche heresy" thread, where contributors are discussing the concept of code as a form of writing (with its own rhetorical structure), the movement of the debate over the entire post is clearly argumentative in structure, as contributors state positions, offer support and refute counter-arguments. But the collective tone of the thread remains speculative, as when Charlie Lowe responds, "Well, don't get excited. I'm more musing at this point than certain of my position :-)." (June 8, 2009). The blending of argument, dialogue, and speculation creates a powerful space for exploring positions. No single contributor to this thread is responsible for this speculation—rather, it's a collective effort. And while most of these contributors are authors of more traditional scholarship in the field of computers and writing, their work in this thread helps to open up the topic, to expose the complicated nature of discussions about writing and potentially serves as a locus for the development of topics that are of critical importance to the field.

Refusing Conclusions

The discussion posts on Techrhet abound with a range of speculative statements that seem to resist conclusion-making. In many threads we analyzed, contributors offered multiple perspectives on an issue, moving away from assertion and toward speculation or dialogue.

e.g.

In this example from a thread titled "Dark side of the backchannel," Alex Reid offers several perspectives rather than arguing a single position on the use of social network tools at conferences:

Alex Reid

 to techrhet

I am guessing that at least within our professional context, the increasing awareness of this talk about backchannel might change our behaviors.

Also, the notion of backchennel is something of a matter of perspective. It's a backchannel if you're in the room with the presenter but to the hundreds who follow you on Twitter (and possibly Fb if one updates from one to the other) it's the main channel. For some these tweets will not only be their lens into this one presentation but into the conference or perhaps our profession.

That said, I don't want to oversell the gravity of tweets but they really aren't like pre-social media hallway chit-chat. On the flip side it makes me rethink the presentation given to 3 people in the final session of a conference. Who knows who might be reading their tweets? (December 6, 2009).

While these movements away from linearity are often a gesture that place texts within the category of "not-scholarship," these movements also tend to create content that is rich in its ability to raise interesting questions and help contributors to better understand underlying or associated arguments, personal viewpoints, and the experiences that shape others' arguments.

Multiple Alternatives

A great many exchanges on Techrhet's threads involve both practical and theoretical discussions of software and hardware products, and their implications for various cultural and educational scenarios.

At first glance, these exchanges are primarily geared towards offering information. They often move fluidly between this kind of practical knowledge-sharing and other types of exchanges, such as discussion of classroom practices, or theoretical discussions about the affordances of a technology or a mode of production. Thus, discussions not only tend to remain open; the more meandering and less linear construction of these exchanges allows for completely different kinds of scholarly activity to occur within a single thread.

For example, the discussion on the thread "Audacity Question" begins with a practical exchange related to removing "plosives" from recorded audio; however, towards the end of the thread, Michael Salvo contributes a more theoretcially-oriented post related to the use of sound:

Thomas Rickert and I were discussing the quality of the texts -- many are excellent, and the Amazon reviews are quite frank. But we both enjoyed Erik Davis' book on Led Zeppelin IV (also known as Zoso or "the symbols"). Davis also wrote Techgnosis which I know many on this list have read--great work, that.

Anyway, Davis has an excellent passage on what sound recording \_is\_ (okay, I guess I've opened up potential for a Clinton joke here). And what Davis asserts is that the process of recording sound isn't necessarily a true recording simply of the soundwaves produced by voice and instruments. Rather, whatever recording device one uses is recording sound's interaction with the recording environment within the limits of the device itself. Understanding that helped me understand and better account for both ambient noise as well as to listen differently to recorded sound, music included. There's more to say but I'l stop here.

Here's the passage:

"The example Jones cites is also the most celebrated moment of Zeppelin's conquest of ambient sound: the recording of John Bonham's monumental drums for "When the Levee Breaks." For the session, Bonham placed his new kit on the floor of a large open stairwell ..... "When the Levee Breaks" opens like a volcanic vent splitting the floor of the sea. As Andy Fyfe puts it, what you hear is not just the drums, but the drums reacting to the acoustic space of the room. But you are also hearing something more uncanny than this: you are hearing the room respond to the drums."

Led Zeppelin IV by Erik Davis p73-4 (Salvo, April 15, 2009).

Placing Texts in Relation to One Another

The threaded nature of discussion group posts means that texts are always already placed in interactive relationships. And not only are the threads themselves a weaving of argument, speculation, dialogue, knowledge-sharing, etc.; contributors bring a whole range of other texts into the conversation as well.

For example, the thread "Kaplan University Ad" begins as a simple reference to a series of ads for Kaplan University's online degree programs. However, the thread quickly moves from a critique of the ads themselves to a dialogue about online education, a discussion of the similarities and differences in the way brick-and-mortar and online programs tend to represent their digital offerings, a scathing indictment of the ways that traditional universities have allowed education strategies to follow a "training model," and then back to a specific discussion of the rhetoric of advertisements for different sorts of online education programs. Throughout the thread, contributors reference a range of different advertisements for different sorts of online education programs. They offer these sites as evidence for different arguments embedded in the thread and also as a general resource for contributors who might be interested in moving beyond critique. In its entirety, the thread offers an excellent resource for a scholar interested in this topic.

Chris Gerben

 to techrhet

show details 1/19/09

I came across this ad accidentally last night when watching the news. Has anyone else seen it? I'm teaching a class on education and technology this semester so I'm sure we'll be doing a rhetorical analysis of this; I just thought I'd pass it along for similar classes:

<http://talent.kaplan.edu/Campaign.aspx>

Implicit Association

Email-based discussion groups are not particularly artful or experimental in their presentation of information. Unlike blogs and webtexts, they are an exclusively alphabetic medium, and they do not readily lend themselves to non-alphabetic associations, multimodal forms or tools, or other methods that often make use of implicit connections to make meaning, such as the experimental webtexts that we analyze in the webtexts section. Certainly, the discussions in Techrhet do carry implied connections that help to define the space's mission and ideology—for example, the knowledge that members share certain goals for education and the use of technology, or the implied ideology of hosting the list at interversity.org, which is an open, non-profit site that promotes a range of different kinds of teacher resources.

However, in general, contributors to the space are actually careful to make fairly direct and explicit connections when presenting ideas or arguments.

Hyperlinks & Tagging

Contributors to Techrhet post many links as part of their activities in the space. They certainly post links that are meant to be informative, as well as links for new technologies or teaching resources. But, in cases such as the discussion in "Online grammar films" or "Kaplan University Ad," they also post resources in which they are explicitly asking for critique (either of their own work or of a specific text or set of texts). Additionally, linking is often used to directly support arguments.

Connecting to Issues

The thread "Really bad Social Networking sites Legislation in Illinois" offers an example of how discussions in Techrhet can often make connections to political or activist agendas within the framework of sharing information. This thread begins with a notification from Dickie Selfe regarding proposed legislation that might have the effect of restricting access to social networking sites for minors in Illinois. The discussion then evolves from the original post. In general, contributors do not present strong assertions, but rather ask questions about specific aspects of the legislation, effects it might have, and how these issues fit in with larger issues related to access and fair use. The thread, when taken as a whole, makes an implied association to the idea that, as practitioners and scholars in digital studies, we should be informed about legislation that might impact both our ability to teach and our ability to use digital resources.

The posts in the thread do not present this as a specific argument, until one contributor makes a call for Martine Courant Rife, a recognized scholar who publishes frequently on these issues, to contribute. She does, and in closing her post states, "I can't say more about this now, but I think the power to decide the outcomes is at least partially in our hands, and should be developed at least in part through scholarly conversations in our journals. We can make a contribution; I am certain" (March 19, 2009).

martine courant rife

to techrhet

Dear Kathy:

You have made my day, week, and month by asking my opinion on this topic. Thank you. I am sorry I took so long to respond but I was attending a policy briefing sponsored by a number of local organizations including the Michigan Campaign for Justice – the briefing was on the topic of Michigan’s failing public defense system. (Literally failing in that a team of legislatively commissioned national experts gave Michigan D’s and F’s on a set of eleven principles of public defense). In other words, Michigan does a horrible job at providing legal counsel to indigent individuals even though the US constitution (as well as the Michigan constitution) provides the “right to counsel” in the 6th amendment.

My attendance at the briefing has everything to do with my answer to your question regarding outcomes on these kinds of data mining and surveillance activities, as well as overreaching laws trying to regulate the use of social networking software. Consider me a perpetual idealist if you like, but more than ever I have faith in both the individual and collective to continually seek the most just outcome – and with respect to outcomes – the future is literally in our hands. I have two specific examples.

1. The policy briefing I attended was in part to remember the 46th anniversary of the landmark 1963 supreme court case of Gideon v. Wainwright. I love thinking about this case due to the fact that it illustrates a single person, writing a single writing, can change the world. (I say the world due to the fact that while this is a US case – the US is, like it or not, arguably a global hegemon setting legal standards that other countries follow).

Regarding Gideon- from the reliable source wikipedia: “Between midnight and 8:00 am on June 3, 1961, a larceny occurred at the Bay Harbor Pool Room in Panama City, Florida. Someone broke a window, smashed the cigarette machine and jukebox, and stole money from both. Later that day, a witness reported that he had seen Clarence Earl Gideon in the poolroom at around 5:30 that morning leaving with a pint of wine and bulged pockets. Based on this accusation alone, the police arrested him and charged him with breaking and entering.”

Prior to 1963, the Supreme Court had held that the right to counsel applied to capital cases only. When Mr. Gideon asked for an attorney in the Florida State Court, it was denied. Mr. Gideon was then responsible for representing himself. He lost the case and was sentenced to 5 years in prison. While in state prison in Florida, using the prison library, pencil and prison stationery, Mr. Gideon wrote an appeal to the US Supreme Court.

Here’s a copy of his appeal:

http://www.ocpd.state.ct.us/images/Gideon%20Petition.gif

Here’s Mr. Gideon:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/images/gideon.jpg>

That court appointed an attorney for him and he won the case – also setting precedent that the right to counsel applied to criminal cases where prison is a possibility (usually a felony) – if a defendant cannot pay for counsel one has to be appointed for him. This case is one of the most important cases in US legal history some say. And from my perspective, it came to fruition by a non-lawyer writing up a single document with pencil and paper.

This is an example of the role of writing in the achievement of justice.

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark\_gideon.html

2. Our colleague Renee Hobbs, Media Literacy expert, a non-lawyer, Temple University, is waiting for an exact date to appear before the copyright board at the US copyright office. She formed a coalition of teachers and wrote a petition to the office asking for the recent DMAC exemption for film studies teachers to also apply to students. If this were approved, it would mean that students who hacked into DVDs in order to retrieve clips of movies for research, teaching, and criticism, would not be in violation of the DMCA. To the best of my information and belief, she’s up again Time Warner, and entities like that. The film teachers’ exemption was obtained by a film faculty writing to the copyright office.

Again, this is the power of writing. I am continually reminded.

About half-way down this page is a discussion of the work on the DMCA that Renee is engaging in.

http://henryjenkins.org/2009/01/an\_interview\_with\_rene\_hobbs.html

And I will link Gideon v. Wainwright and the DMCA – violation of the DMCA can be a felony in certain contexts, and thus if a student were charged with this, he/she would certainly want an attorney!

I think the outcomes of the activities for social networking regulation, government surveillance, and data mining will depend on what we do or don’t do.

I am aware of a couple CFPs that will be coming out soon in publications in our field that ask us to look at legal issues more closely, including international/global issues. I can’t say more about this now, but I think the power to decide the outcomes is at least partially in our hands, and should be developed at least in part through scholarly conversations in our journals. We can make a huge contribution; I am convinced.

Martine

- Show quoted text -

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/images/gideon.jpg>

Recourse to the Personal

One type of affiliation that contributors often make on Techrhet is to connect what they believe and argue to their personal experiences (as citizens, members of the computers and writing community, teachers, and scholars). This kind of association—one that accepts that we know what we know in part because of who we are—has certainly had a somewhat dubious position in terms of its acceptance as "scholarship" in various disciplines. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to note that the combination of features in the genre of discussion groups, as they are manifested on Techrhet, seems to encourage a deeply dialogic interaction in which contributors examine carefully how their own and others' experiences might shape responses to new ideas and arguments.

For example, in the post on "Tenure in a Digital Era," multiple contributors both present and examine how their experiences and perspectives shape their response to a particular article in the online journal Kairos. Cheryl Ball, Kathy Fitch, Will Hochman, and Steven Krause all interact in a discussion about their responses to "English Downfall," a piece published in the Disputatio section of the journal ("Theamishaugur" Kairos 13.2, 2009).

The exchanges includes a significant amount of personal narrative as the authors explain their responses. Fitch explains,

"at the heart of my reaction, I think, is not the Nazi meme itself (though I'm decidedly not a fan of that). No, I think it's really a personal reaction. I lived so much of the move to digital era composition first hand that the tensions and frustrations of it aren't things I'll ever really forget [.]" (May 27, 2009).

Meanwhile, Cheryl Ball frames her response to Fitch by beginning,

"I respect your right to not like the piece and take your opinion seriously...I know you weren't prompting me to speak of this, but I want to....From an editor's standpoint -- knowing well that I cannot divorce my editorial views from my personal-academic views -- I did a spit-take the first time I saw the piece and laughed so hard that Gizmo (r.i.p.) had to get off the couch and leave the room" (May 28, 2009).

(footnote embedded as image)

(embedded YouTube video)

Ball goes on to explain that after working with a large number of Ph.D.s attempting to find positions as digital media scholars, she no longer felt the piece was as funny, but that she still felt it was a useful text for generating discussion about the topic. Many of the exchanges in this thread exhibit a similar type of personal reponse with analysis of that response within the larger issue, showing that while there is an implied valuing of the personal in this space, contributors are also using personal responses as an analytical tool to better understand the scholarly topic under discussion.

Dialogic Exchange

Dialogic exchange is the primary means through which texts on the Techrhet listserv operate. There is a clear awareness of the need for exchanges to be thoughtful, informed, open to analysis, and (especially when they are directly assertive) researched. Contributors also clearly see this process of exchange as one of the advantages of the medium. For example, in the "Synecdoche heresy" thread, Michael Salvo invites exchange as he transforms a discussion from an earlier thread, "Eating your own dog food," from the issue of software interfaces for teaching to a more theoretical discussion of whether or not writing code can be considered within the framework of "writing" more generally.

Okay, here it is: heresy. I understand the argument and the concept that code is writing, but it is not only a stretch but a misrepresenation to call code "writing" at the first-year writing level. I get (and accept, and even profess my own version of) the argument that code is rhetorical and programming is writing, but not at the point of first contact. That's why I raised my concerns about code as grammar -- for us, and with good reason, code is writing but only insofar as the metaphor helps in the devlopment of technorhetoric. For FY students, code is not writing. Code is code. And teaching code in place of writing is, well, wrong (June 5, 2009).

In his response to Salvo's post, Karl Stolley begins, "Alright Salvo, I'll bite," and in a following response, Salvo posts, "Thanks for biting, Karl." The exchanges in this thread are complex, and show a whole range of both argumentative and speculative language and intent. But the need for, and valuing of, the dialogue itself is clear. In a later post, Salvo more clearly articulates his goals for introducing the dialogue, differentiating his particular interests from those of the other contributors:

I'm not looking at writing and seeing code (as I think Charlie does in his post) but I'm also not looking at code and seeing poetry. Rather, I'm interested in the rhetorics of technology emerging from the dialogue, and insisting either code = writing or that writing [does not equal] code (or any combination therefrom) halts interchange" (Salvo, June 9, 2009).

There are a range of different types of dialogue that are promoted through the genre of the discussion group. Obviously, the kind of active dialogue represented in the "Synecdoche heresy" thread is one example. But other examples might include the notion of ongoing dialogue, where contributors revive threads that have been inactive, as Michael Wojcik does when he contributes on July 7th to the "Synecdoche" thread, which had been dormant since June 12th, 2009. Contributors also often encourage dialogue through posts that ask specific members to contribute expertise, as in the call made by Kathryn Northcut on the "Social networking" thread, for Martine Courant Rife to contribute her expertise to the discussion of access and fair use in public discourse. Contributors also encourage dialogue by welcoming new contributors, as Ben Reynolds does in his response to a post by Jule Meloni:

"I vo[t]e this to be one heck of a good contrib. Lurkers should speak up more often, especially when they are smarter than me" ("Building Websites" June 1, 2009).

Dialogue is often encouraged as well by references to discussions going on in other spaces (digital or face-to-face), references to sites that members might go to for further information and/or resources, and through the use of referencing moves in which contributors explicitly note when their own contribution is in agreement with or further develops another contributor's post.

FINIS

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