"Profiles in Digital Scholarship & Publishing: Cheryl Ball"
Interview by Elizabeth Barnett

As an exclusively digital publisher, we are 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 over recent decades and forward to what lies ahead.

Here, in the final installment of this series, University of New Mexico English Master's student, Elizabeth Barnett, conducted a video interview with Dr. Cheryl Ball, of Wayne State University. In addition to shepherding authors and reviewers through the digital publishing process as the editor of Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy (http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/), Ball also works tirelessly on content management software development and evangelizing best practices in editorial systems and processes in the field of digital publishing. Their discussion of issues in digital scholarship in the 21st century began with an exploration of scholarly multimedia work.

About Cheryl Ball

Cheryl Ball is the director of the Digital Publishing Collaborative at Wayne State University Libraries. Since 2006, Ball has been editor of the online, peer-reviewed, open-access journal Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy (http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/), which is the longest continuously publishing digital journal focusing exclusively on digital media scholarship. She is also the project director for Vega (http://vegapublish.info/), an open-access, multimedia academic publishing platform due to be released in 2019. Ball also serves as the executive director of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (http://www.celj.org/).

An Evolution of Scholarly Multimedia

Xchanges: In your 2009 tenure application materials (http://ceball.com/research/tenure-letter/), you stated that your research and teaching is guided by the statement: "Digital media asks us to constantly re-evaluate what a text is, how it works, to whom it speaks, and why."

Does this statement still guide you? Has it changed in 10 years? If so, how? Is new media still new?

CB: It's funny to me looking back on that statement that I used the phrase "digital media" and not "new media," but I think that that was because I was trying to signal at the time, 2009, that shift away from the verbiage of new media into something slightly broader. I certainly would still believe that something we used to call "new media" or "emerging media" does still ask us to reevaluate what a text is and how it works. Even more specifically, maybe I would replace the term "digital media" with the term "webtext" or "scholarly multimedia." Then, I think scholarly multimedia does ask us to constantly reevaluate what a scholarly text is and how it works; typically, not necessarily to whom it speaks, because scholarly multimedia or web texts almost always have some sort of academic audience. The phrase "digital media" is purposefully broad, and too broad maybe to allow that statement to exist 10 years later because I think that digital media as a whole has become so ingrained in what we do. 2009 was a year after YouTube launched. We're in a radically different digital environment now than we were 10 years ago. I think that it is still true within scholarly publishing realms that digital media asked us to reevaluate what texts are but not necessarily digital media in itself, writ large.

For me at the time, it was trying to get at that issue of constantly reevaluating what a text is, and that was the newness of it. Again, I think that still applies in some ways to scholarly publishing, and less so to other forms of digital media texts just because that work has become so transparent to us in a way that we have established genres in digital environments now that we didn't have 10 or even 5 years ago.

In terms of an established realm of study, I think new media has been supplanted by all sorts of other things. Multimodal composition being one of them, just one of probably a dozen different terms. I do think that we're heavily into production, certainly in rhetoric and composition. When we talk about production, we're almost always talking about multimodal composition in some way or multimedia authoring.

Xchanges: Your life's work has been centered in what you call editorial pedagogy and what might be called more generally digital literacies pedagogy: educating authors, tenure reviewers, composition instructors and students, journal juries, and new journal editors about digital production, its rigor, and its focus on rhetorical choices.

What place does multimodality have in the college composition classroom today? Has it expanded in the ways you would have liked or expected in 20+ years you've participated in this composition ecosystem? And does the rigor of digital scholarly publishing still need explaining/justification?

CB: It's great to see how much it has expanded over the last near 20 years. When we were working on this stuff in the early 2000s it did seem so new and so radical. As I go around now and talk to people at different universities and hear what they're doing, schools where I wouldn't necessarily have expected them to have a multimodal curriculum have adopted one, and everyone is still interested in hearing definitions and descriptions and seeing examples of this kind of work. Of course, the mantra is that every text is multimodal, because there is no such thing as a monomodal texts. How can we then help the production of this kind of work in composition writing classes and in other types of classes too to make it more interesting and innovative? I really like some of the work that's happening with folks like Laura Gonzales (http://www.gonzlaur.com/about/) and other scholars who are bringing an intersectionality, if you will, to multimodal composition. The work those scholars are doing allow it to flourish and thrive in some ways that get us out of reproducing some of the base genres and allow even more genres of multimodal composition. It's good that we've gotten a depth to the field, and it's been really surprising that it's happened over a short amount of time.

Teaching Decoloniality & Multimodality

Xchanges: Do you still find yourself having to spend as much time cultivating a knowledge base to critique multimodal work with students, who we think of now as digital natives, with your Kairos *authors, and also with your* Kairos *reviewers?*
CB: The first thing I want to say is, I never have and never will refer to my students as digital natives because the colonialist metaphor is way too much for me to put that on students. Phill Alexander has a fantastic short essay that he wrote for the *Bad Ideas About Writing* collection that debunks the myths between the digital native and the digital immigrant, dealing in part with this concept that our students come to us with a lot of consumption practices but not a lot of production practices. That's been something that's been evident in the field since those terms first arose in the early 2000s. That hasn't changed. Students are still coming in with very little production experience in the rhetorical ways that we want and need them to have as part of a first-year writing classroom, or any writing classroom, or any classroom at all. When we ask them to do an assignment, we want them to have production experience, whether it's with linguistic text or multimodal texts. That's the first thing I'll say. And go read that essay by Phill Alexander!

Xchanges *readers can find Alexander's essay, "Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants," in the open access textbook, Bad Ideas About Writing (https://textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf).*

The second thing is that I want to make sure that I give credit to Ann Wysocki (https://uwm.edu/english/our-people/wysocki-anne-frances/), who was my dissertation adviser. She was the one from whom I first heard the phrase, "generous reading." Of course, that floats around in the field. In our field, I think her use of that is especially important in relation to new media texts and digital

media composition. She was one of the first people to remind us in the early days of writing about new media that we need to approach these texts that are on the boundaries of our genre knowledge in a way that we can assume that the authors, particularly in peer-reviewed environments, are presenting the text in a way that it's meant to be presented. That's part of the scholarly ecosystem: understanding that a text that appears in a peer-reviewed platform is in its best possible format ideally.

But we still need to be teaching students this multimodal work. At the undergraduate level, a lot of that happens in professional and technical writing classes, but we don't want to limit that work only to the workplace in the professionalization types of coursework. We want to expand that out into the same ways that we teach writing. When we're teaching writing, we are teaching production in a way. We're teaching students to sit down and create something from essentially nothing. It's the same with digital media. It's just a bunch of different layers and channels of communication added on to that. Does that mean we need to teach them how to use Final Cut Pro? No. No, we don't.

There's many different ways and many ubiquitous technologies that we can use to have our students play around and create these finger exercises, as Cindy Selfe (http://webservices.itcs.umich.edu/mediawiki/DigitalRhetoricCollaborative/index.php/Selfe,_Cynthia) used to like to say, around digital media composition.

View video clip 1 here: https://youtu.be/XJdxuCmwxYk

I think it's important to note here that I'm not teaching in the classroom anymore now; I'm teaching faculty and scholars how to author scholarly multimedia work. I'm teaching editors and publishers how to produce this kind of work. I'm still invested in going to the Computers and Writing conference and hearing the conversations that people are having there. With my role with *Kairos*, it's very important that I'm still involved with the field. One of the things that I see in my current role is that authors' ability to do anything with HTML and to produce clean code gets more difficult with the expansion of technological possibilities. Some authors at *Kairos* aren't able to author even the simplest HTML page, which is a problem for us because we require it. Some authors can use very fancy software to produce interactive web texts, but they're using them in WYSIWYG ways. What you see is what you get. It produces horrendous code that they don't know how to clean up, so we end up having to clean it up. We take that on as part of our job, part of our editorial process, but we can only do that with a limited number of texts. There's this real balance that needs to be attended to with being able to produce something that's rhetorically beautiful and useful in terms of a piece of scholarly multimedia and being able to know what's happening underneath. I think authors need to know what's happening underneath because they can't rely on publishing it in *Kairos* to get their code cleaned up. You send that stuff to another publisher and they're not going to do that work. I'm very

proud that we have that workflow built into our system. It's one of our key strengths. Also, one of the key literacies that our field needs to pay attention: learning how to just do the most basic coding there is. Even if you don't author it from scratch that way, you need to be able to go in and clean it up and edit it. Everybody needs a good editor. That's true of your writing. That's true of your multimedia design. That's true of your code.

The Rigor of Digital Scholarship

Xchanges: Does the rigor of digital scholarly publishing still need explaining/justification?

CB: All day long, every day! Within our discipline we have certainly come to understand that publishing online is not predatory within our own discipline. Predatory is a word that crops up a lot with open access journals. We have a lot of open access journals in rhetoric and composition studies that were open access before open access was a thing. That phrase, "open access," which means free to readers to access without any paywall or anything, didn't really come about until the early 2000s. *Kairos* and many other journals like it started well before that, five, six, seven years before that phrase became popular. Along with the rise of open access publishing in all disciplines, people have gotten the concept that it's really easy to publish online which delegitimizes online publishing.

There are, certainly, a rise in predatory publishers, which is when people create this publishing house facade, create a lot of journals within it and then target authors with the promise of quick publishing and quick peer review. If you've been through the peer review process for any legitimate journal you know it can take months and months and months sometimes, and yes, it takes a long time and there's a lot of reasons for that that we can talk about if you want, which are not all good and not all reasonable. But these predatory publishers prey on that and on the need of junior scholars to get things published very quickly. So open access gets conflated with predatory publishing which then gets conflated with digital publishing at large.

Textual publishing of the kind that the *Kairos* does can often get lumped in there even though a big part of what I do and every talk that I give is talk about the peer review process within *Kairos*: what the process looks like at our journal and at journals that are like us. People are amazed at the level of rigor that we bring to the table with these kinds of text. We have to because we're dealing, again, with rhetoric, design, and code. We have to be able to attend to all three of those layers simultaneously in a web text, which means we're peer-reviewing each of those in concert. They can't be divorced from each other and be adequately peer-reviewed or adequately copyedited for that matter. The argument for online publishing, as it gets conflated with digital publishing and as it gets conflated with whether something is peer-reviewed, has gotten slightly better over the years, but these texts will always be new to someone.

A big part of what I talk about with people these days is just introducing them to the 25-year history of publishing this kind of work in this particular discipline to say, "Hey, look at this example of what one disciplinary community can do and allows you all these different affordances that web affords you to communicate your research. Here's how you might adopt it to your discipline." They're always amazed by that back history because they think it started two years ago.

Issues in Open Access

Xchanges: There has always been controversy about writers, poets, and artists and their commercial value. As the entire ecosystem of publishing migrates online, more and more venues are disappearing behind paywalls.

How do you see this mass migration playing out for the future of Writing Studies and digital scholarly work? What are our obligations to authors? To audiences?

CB: I have this big match that I like to light on Facebook about once every six months about how evil and terrible the commercial publishers are. Of course, not every commercial publisher is the same. There are some commercial publishers that are non-profit and there are some that are massively corporatized. Then there's the need for junior scholars to get tenure. The biggest issue that we face right now when it comes to dealing with commercial publishers in our discipline is that they will publish anything. The production quality has really gone down, which is true of almost all the commercial publishers. They're doing a lot of outsourcing. They're also doing a lot of copy editing through AI, which is cool on the one hand, but on the other hand can lead you to problems. Then my real problem with these publishers is that they charge so much for those books, like a 180-page monograph or edited collection, and it's going to cost $250. That's the individual price, not institutional price, because, of course, institutions have to pay five times that.

View video clip 2 here: *https://youtu.be/EGRefLNGgig*

There's this whole process of unbundling that's happening now through this international initiative called OA, Open Access, OA 2020. Wayne State happens to be a U.S. signatory on that and a lot of the universities in Europe have signed it already, because there's a European mandate now for Open Access scholarship, called Plan S. It's this brand-new thing. It's mandating the all scholarly communication, including monographs, be Open Access by 2027. I want to just allow scholars to publish what they need to publish, when they need to publish it. Our tenure requirements are way too high most places and that's a different conversation. That's how I feel about paywalls. Just break them all down.

Xchanges: There is also controversy about open source regarding authorship, copyrights, collaboration, and re-mixing.

Is it fair to allow anyone and everyone to re-mix or raid digital texts/content for their own purposes? In the best of all possible digital worlds, what do you hope happens for authors and audiences in this new world?

CB: Our work as scholars requires us to remix content every day, all day long. That's what we do when we're putting sources into conversation with each other when we're citing things and when we're producing our own research. That's everything that a lit review is. It is remixing someone else's work, multiple other people's work to provide a foundation and support for our own argument that is born out of that pre-existing conversation. We need to remove the stigma that there is any sort of wrongness to that, whether we're talking about print scholarship or whether we're talking about our digital media scholarship. I wish a better mechanism for downloading and remixing digital assets existed. We're still working on those technologies, I think.

At *Kairos*, we are very generous in our fair use policies when it comes to authors remixing other authors' work. We can put clips of videos, or audio, or images and have authors present those in a way that helps facilitate their rhetorical argument, without worrying about the commercial and marketing aspects of copyright law. We also ask authors to consider not just using traditional copyright, because anytime they publish something for us, authors retain copyright, if they publish at *Kairos*.

View video clip 3 here: https://youtu.be/2C_a0-4MbYo

Kairos, though, allows authors to keep their copyright, and we encourage them to assign a Creative Commons (CC) License to their work. If they want to get into the key repository of open access journals, the Directory of Open Access Journals (https://doaj.org/), the CC license is required. CC license just means that you can reuse and remix and take that piece and do whatever the heck you want with it, in full as a complete piece, as long as you attribute it back to the original author. And isn't that what we want people to do with our work once we publish it? This is scholarship; this is not trade publishing. This is not your lovingly crafted book of poetry. This is not your short stories. This is not your artwork. This is your scholarly work that you are already paid to do as part of your job.

Toward a True OA Publishing Platform: Vega

Xchanges: In your 2015 article with Doug Eyman, "History of a Broken Thing: The Multi-Journal Special Issue on Electronic Publishing," and elsewhere, you've spoken a lot about the critical infrastructure---scholarly, social, and technical---needed to create, sustain, and archive digital scholarly work. You've also been quite honest about your anger at our relatively collective failure as a field of study to address the technical infrastructure needed to track our own scholarship.

Is the development of Vega an attempt to synthesize, or standardize, these three criteria for scholarly digital publishing? A practical response to your anger about disappearing digital scholarly work?

CB: It culminates my entire career, not to put too fine a point on it. That's the thing we learned by working primarily on a software program for the last four years: it will never be done until it just is no longer working. Software is always iterating and always improving. Vega is something that we've been wanting to do with *Kairos* for at least 15 years. I'm heading into my 18th year [with *Kairos*] now, and it became evident pretty early on that we couldn't keep crafting it by hand the way that we do, even though crafting it by hand is the only reason why we're still around. It's so ironic.

We have this massive staff that's constantly undergoing change because people have lives and academic and professional and personal lives and that requires us to train new people and training them into the ways that we do things. We have a good set of documentation, but we realized that we couldn't port that outside of *Kairos* into any other discipline because so many other disciplines don't have the editorial, pedagogical approach that we do.

View video clip 4 here: https://youtu.be/S39XJYfn76Y

Vega is an attempt to give scholarly digital publishers some structured data that they can work with that doesn't write any crap code on the back end. Something that then can be easily exportable and migrated into new systems while at the same time preservable in the backend through libraries or deep preservation archives.

There's so much more that we still have to do with the journal and I would just want to get it in the right place for that. We want to be able to teach other editors and publishers how to do successful digital publishing through the platform itself just in the same way that the most innovative web texts that Kairos publishes teach their readers how to read them through the process of engaging in that generous reading strategy. We want data; data is built to teach editors and publishers how to properly and to most sustainably create and publish digital media scholarship. It's built into the system.

All of these warm fuzzy journals, independent journals, and presses in our discipline, they're the ones who get to test it first. We're figuring out how we can get that done in a way that isn't going to take everybody's time and money. Another part of our business plan is the creation of a new publishing house that will use Vega as the platform so that we can host for people who can't host the software themselves. Vega has been built with journals like X*changes* in mind. It's nice that I can attend to those interdisciplinary journals that I came from academically.