**Week I Readings**

**Summary & Discussion**

Presented by Haris Haq

Eyman, Douglas. *Digital rhetoric: Theory, method, practice*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.

**Initial thoughts…**

* The *Introduction* of this text is, more so than anything in my opinion, the author presenting forward the rhetorical situation to guide the text. As I see it, Eyman giving an insight into his own worldview and perspectives that will later be shared throughout the text.

**What is the aim of this book?**

* “My overall goal is to provide a map of digital rhetoric as an emergent field, focusing on its history, definition, and development as an academic field by looking at the theories that inform digital rhetoric scholarship, the methods used to carry out digital rhetoric research, and the practices that lead to the production of digital texts” (9).

**Who is it for?**

* “The book aims to serve as a comprehensive introduction for scholars and students new to the field and for scholars from other fields who find their work intersecting with that of digital rhetoric” (9).

**From what disciplinary angle is the author approaching the topic from?**

* Eyman pursued his doctoral studies in Rhetoric & Composition and serves as an Associate Professor of English at George Mason University.

**What does Eyman say about Digital Rhetoric existing in, or out of a particular discipline?**

* “Depending on where the field boundaries are drawn, and what counts as digital rhetoric theory, it is possible to claim a fairly extensive literature as falling within the purview of the field: the term “digital rhetoric” itself has been applied to rhetorics of technology, network rhetorics, social media use, the use of rhetorical appeals in online discussion forums, website design, multimodal composition, and the study of new media (itself a contested term)” (8-9).
* “Through my reading and research, I am aware that more than one academic discipline and intellectual tradition can make claims to being the “home” of digital rhetoric, and I’ve worked to make sure that I don’t let my own history and bias situate it only in those traditions with which I am most familiar” (1).
* “In fact, I believe that digital rhetoric is an interdisciplinary endeavor that can as easily be situated in departments of communication or English studies and that can be performed within both broad, well-established fields, like media studies, and newer, more narrowly focused approaches such as critical code studies (the relationship between digital rhetoric and these and other disciplines” (1).

**What question(s) does Eyman pursue that are representative of his wider academic career?**

* “In 2005, Zappen argued that current work toward developing digital rhetoric has thus far resulted in “an amalgam of more-or-less discrete components rather than a complete and integrated theory in its own right. These discrete components nonetheless provide at least a partial outline for such a theory, which has potential to contribute to the larger body of rhetorical theory and criticism” (8).
  + “…this lack of “an integrated theory” seemed to me a perfect opening for *my own work toward understanding, defining, and shaping a vision of digital rhetoric (although I have moved from seeking an integrated theory to articulating digital rhetoric theories and methods)*” (8).

**What does this text cover?**

* “Rather than attempt to provide a comprehensive representation of all that is or could be digital rhetoric, I have chosen to be fairly selective in my overview, first considering works that have explicitly used the term “digital rhetoric” (or some variant thereof) and then expanding to theories, methods, and practices that implicitly draw on digital rhetoric” (9).

**What do the individual chapters cover?**

1. Chapter 1 provides a **definition** of “digital rhetoric” that distinguishes it from the generalized field of rhetoric and from related areas of concern, chiefly “digital literacy” and “new media.”
2. Chapter 2 examines **theories** of digital rhetoric (and their relations to classical and contemporary rhetorical theory).
3. Chapter 3 looks at **research methods** for digital rhetoric, examining current rhetorical and writing studies methods, methods from other fields that might be applied to digital rhetoric research, and a call for the development of new, “born-digital” research methods.
4. Chapter 4 provides a series of case studies and examples that focus on digital rhetoric as **practice**—in terms of pedagogy, scholarship, and performance.

(From p. 10)

Moran, Charles. "Computers and Composition 1983–2002: What we have hoped for." *Computers and Composition* 20.4 (2003): 343-358.

**Initial thoughts…**

* Moran, writing in 2003, reflects on twenty years of the Journal, *Computers and Composition*, specifically with regard to the hopes and aspirations the various authors (including himself) had as computers made their way into the writing classroom.
  + Much of the aspirations ended up being overly idealistic (for instance, that computers would undoubtedly and clearly improve student writing). These weren’t necessarily realized.
* All in all, however, Moran defends these aspirations in the sense that they served as drivers towards a better society the *Computers and Composition* community aspired to.

**What exactly were these hopes and ambitions?**

* Moran presents forward two initial hopes, as follows:
  + “A hope often articulated in the early volumes of Computers and Composition was that computers would somehow eliminate what the authors defined as drudgery, both for student writers and writing teachers” (345).
  + “A second early hope was that computer-based writing had the potential to produce global improvement in the quality of student writing” (347).
    - “The hope for global improvement of writing should have come to its natural end with two articles, one by Carolyn Dowling (1994) and another by Richard Collier and Clifford Werier (1995). After interviewing professional writers, Dowling suggested that although computers make writing easier, they might be making it worse. There might be, she hypothesized, a close connection between difficulty and quality: remove the one and you remove the other” (348).
* However, as time passed, “contributors to the journal anticipated the advice of Joel Nydahl (1991), who asked us to “take a much closer and more careful look at the electronic pen” (p. 34). In taking this “closer and more careful look” we disaggregated the broad terms “computers,” “writers,” and “writing,” into their elements” (349).
  + “By dividing our three initial terms we generated hundreds of possible hopes: for example, that word-processing software would help basic writers with revision (Crafton, 1996), that style-checkers would stimulate writers-in-general to do more revising, that networking would facilitate ESL writers’ learning (Braine, 1997), that hypertext would stimulate invention, that hypermedia would help students in synthesis writing (Palumbo & Prater, 1993), or that composing in hypertext would help students see the need for structure (Fischer, 1996)” (349).
* Finally, “In the pages of Computers and Composition, we have often expressed the hope that through our quick grasp of technology’s potential, we and the community of composition teachers will become established, more secure in our research, scholarship, tenure, and promotion” (350).
  + The outcome of this was more positive, as “For the computers and composition community, the journal had become something we could all be proud of, both a symbol and a cause of our professional status” (352).

**Why were the authors/contributors so idealistic?**

* “I can account for some of the forces that have made us hopeful. First, we are participants in the discourses of technology, which carry with them the assumptions that technology is good and that it will bring good” (344).
* “Second, we are teachers, and teachers are by profession—or should be—hopeful. Students embody society’s hope for continuance and change, and as teachers we are the agents of society’s hopes” (344).

**What, if anything, is the current hope of the contributors (as of 2003)?**

* “Yet the 1996–1997 issues seem a kind of watershed; before these issues, hopes for improved writing and the teaching of writing through technology predominated; after these volumes, we increasingly saw the computer as potentially, or inherently, supportive of critical pedagogy and, through this pedagogy, of a new and more just society” (352).
* “Despite the fact that they were working within the frame of a critical pedagogy, contributors to the journal have often shown an uncritical hope for technology’s agency in furthering pedagogical and political ends” (353).

Selfe, Cynthia L., and Gail E. Hawisher. "A historical look at electronic literacy: Implications for the education of technical communicators." *Journal of business and technical communication* 16.3 (2002): 231-276.

**Exigence:**

* “Unfortunately, to date, the profession of technical communication has lacked specific information about how and why individuals gain access to technology and instruction in electronic literacy—at home, in school, and in the workplace” (232).

**Centering the conversation:**

* “…we all know that the technology is with us today and that our jobs—either as students, as instructors, or as professional communicators—have become virtually impossible without the new information technologies. However, we should not forget how these technologies made, and continue to make, their way through our culture in general and our profession in particular” (235).

**Problems:**

* “…we continue to have a limited understanding of how the specific social factors associated with the acquisition of electronic literacy work within our culture. Nor do we know how such factors serve to limit access to the academic programs of technical communication that feed into and, ultimately, comprise our profession” (232).

**Research Questions:**

* How and why have technical communicators in the period from 1978 to 2000 acquired electronic literacy?
* What factors (e.g., social, economic, cultural, educational, political) influenced this acquisition?
* What patterns or trends are evident in these data that can assist technical communication instructors, program directors, and workplace supervisors in identifying increasingly effective approaches to teaching electronic literacy and in setting professional policy concerning such literacies?

(p. 232)

**Research Method:**

* “In an effort to address this situation, we have collected literacy autobiographies1 from 55 participants on the Techwr-l listserv” (232).
  + “Techwr-l, a nonacademic listserv with more than 4,900 subscribers, was founded in 1993 for the express purpose of providing a forum for any and all technical writing issues” (235).
  + “55 individuals—46 women and 9 men—chose to complete the online form, which was stored on a Web site and password protected” (236).
  + “…we asked participants on the Techwr-l listserv to volunteer for the task of completing literacy autobiographies, self-told personal histories focused around a standard set of questions about family literacy practices and values, individual literacy practices and values, and the processes through which they learned to use computers to read and write in computer-based contexts” (235).

**What was learned?**

* “The written autobiographies that we collected for this project provided a rich tracing of the routes through which computers, in general, and personal computers, in particular, came to shape the profession of technical communication and the literacy practices of technical communicators within the changing cultural ecologies of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s” (239).
* “These autobiographies contributed a great deal of information about how and why 55 technical communicators living from 1978 to 2000 have acquired electronic literacy, and about some of the social, economic, cultural, educational, and political factors that influenced this acquisition” (239).

**Some highlights:**

* “For a time, in the early age of personal computers—the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s—being computer literate meant being able to program computers” (239).
* “If the 1960s and 1970s marked a time of radical political transition, the 1970s and 1980s marked a time of radical literacy transition” (250).
* “By the end of the 1980s, then, although computers were increasingly present in many schools, they were being used in ways that sustained educational problems aligned along the axes of race and poverty” (253).

**Summarized observations:**

1. “To be considered fully literate at the beginning of the twenty-first century, technical communicators must be able to read, write, and navigate in technological contexts” (260).
2. “Literacy exists within a complex cultural ecology of social, historical, and economic effects” (261).
3. “…race and class—and sometimes gender and age—can assume all too important a role in the lives of some individuals” (263).
4. “Technical communication programs need to be increasingly active in properly addressing emerging and fading literacy practices” (265).
5. “Individual technical communicators may need to be increasingly active in teaching both themselves and their peers emerging forms of electronic literacy” (267).
6. The current digital divide can only be addressed when “electronic literacy is understood as a vital, multidimensional part of a larger cultural ecology” (268-269).