

Inventing Publishing, or How C&W Rules the World

Two years ago, almost to the date, I stood in front of a group of students and faculty at Texas Tech University's Maymester seminar **[SLIDE: me @ TTU]** where I was asked to present on some radically in-progress work -- something I hadn't yet published -- which was both scary and thrilling. **[SLIDE: me laughing at TTU]**

I spoke for a while about the *Kairos* metadata project, the journal's history of webtext design as an indicator of the history of web design itself, **[SLIDE: #writing]** the possibility of next-generation multimedia publishing and **[SLIDE: rhetoric.io]** data repositories that were specific to disciplines that are rife with boutique data sets, such as writing studies.

[SLIDE: DPI] I wanted to start a Digital Publishing Institute to branch my local knowledge of editing *Kairos* with more global pedagogical, scholarly, and service opportunities. And **[SLIDE: CMS]** I had the absolute hair-brained plan is to start a multi-year, multinational, multimillion \$ grant-writing campaign to bring together the 20 or 30 thought-leaders in digital publishing to see whether we could actually build a content-management system that would support all of this work, and the kinds of publishing that the Computers and Writing community has been doing for more than 20 years.

As I stood there in Lubbock and worked my way through these slides, through this vision for the future of digital publishing in Computer & Writing, I asked my audience **[SLIDE: crazy?]**: Is this crazy?

What struck me as odd about this vision was that two years earlier I had NO vision. I had lots of projects that accumulated towards tenure, but I was **[SLIDE: emoji]** so stressed out from the work, and the tenure process, that my friend **[SLIDE: Laura]** Laura sent me off into the woods for a camping trip and said, "While you're there, make a list of everything that you do for work that you don't have to do. And then strike four things off of that list." And she says, "Kairos counts for one of them."

[SLIDE: Kairos tent] And so I went off into the woods, into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and I camped Monday. Tuesday. Wednesday. ...

Thursday came around and I finally had the courage to start my list. And I began writing. Before I knew it, it was after lunch time, and I was still writing. And instead of the five, or six, or seven, or even eight things that Laura thought might be on my list, there were 28. **[SLIDE: list]**

Each and every article, chapter, edited collection, conference paper, workshop, mentoring session, committee assignment, administrative position – I loved. Or I *thought* I loved doing every single one of those things, but I couldn't sustain doing it anymore. I had no vision for what *I* wanted to do, which was *Kairos* and things related to *Kairos*. I was serving on disciplinary committees and doing workshops and editing collections because I thought it would make the field better. And I suppose it was. But the list also included one or two life

things that I didn't actually enjoy. Like cooking. And getting that damned CSA with god knows what kind of vegetables every week. Stupid turnips. I was DONE with the turnips!

All of these things – serious and less so – were damaging to my body and mental health. (I mean, sooo many damned turnips!!) So, that evening, **[SLIDE: lake fanny hooe]** which lasted a long time in the Upper Peninsula summer, I scratched off item after item from that list, **[SLIDE: turnips]** delegating or denying them from my future strategy. I had one question to guide myself: **[SLIDE: What?]** "What do *I* want to do?!"

When I had scratched off everything I possibly could, I realized that, *Kairos* excepting, there was nothing left on that list that I wanted to do, wanted to be known for, wanted to contribute to the field. They weren't things that I needed to do. And so, **[SLIDE: fog]** as the sun set around 10:30pm, I began the list of what I wanted to be known for.

It was all about digital publishing and THAT was the thing I could contribute to best through research, teaching, and service to the field.

[SLIDE: me, camping] When I emerged from the woods, I had a strategy, and two years later, a vision I could articulate, **[SLIDE: graph]** in this diagram, based on projects I had taken up in the intervening two years. All of these projects were about building infrastructure for digital publishing, based on work our field already does.

[SLIDE: collaborators] This is obviously not something that can be done individually, nor should it. And with each of these projects on this graph, there are dozens of people involved, hundreds of people who stand with the field in creation or support of these projects. Today, I am only a conduit for the collective vision. And the importance of this collaborative effort cannot be overlooked today or historically, because without the infrastructural support of multitudes in a discipline that values this kind of work, these projects wouldn't exist.

[TIME: 7 minutes]

[SLIDE: infrastructures] As Doug Eyman and I have written about recently, sustainable digital publishing relies on three kinds of infrastructure: scholarly, social, and technical.

The scholarly is about having a field like Computers & Writing that values digital publishing, in particular the acknowledgement that form and content cannot be separated when it comes to scholarly argument and that making screen-based, designed arguments in multiple media and technologies counts as scholarship.

This field has THE longest history of any discipline in valuing digital and media-rich publishing. **[SLIDE: 1st issue]** On January 1, 2016, *Kairos* will celebrate its 20th anniversary. We are the oldest and longest-running, web-based journal in the world. Others started before us, by months, but none of those early experiments published for more than a few years, if that. This is why the title to my talk cheekily refers to *C&W inventing* (digital)

publishing, but certainly, at least, it has invented and maintained the art of the webtext.

[SLIDE: current Kairos]

Kairos, of course, is not alone. **[SLIDE: journals]** There are a dozen journals that publish webtexts in fields related to computers and writing. We are the field that has the longest-running, most stable journals in this area, though. And yet, not all of them are as stable as each other, and acknowledging that is part of the work of scholarly infrastructures: While C&W as a field values digital publishing, our larger discipline of rhetoric and composition, our departments, and institutions don't necessarily value this form of scholarship. And that's where we run up against sustainability problems. **[SLIDE: 404]**

That's also where the social infrastructure comes in. How does a field share its knowledge internally AND externally so that socialization of its scholarly values transcends its own disciplinary boundaries? C&W is a multitudinous discipline of computers and composition, multimodal comp, digital rhetoric, digital media composition, networked writing, code studies scholars, digital pedagogy, etc. -- whatever you want to call yourself, if you're here, you're part of this community. Even if you're not here, and you cite the long history from this community, you're part of this community. If we work together, we are better. And that is something that our parent field, of rhet/comp, has known for decades: Writing is a collaborative endeavor. And so is publishing, at the intersections of authors and editors and publishers. And this is where I want to contribute to the conversations on digital publishing happening both locally and globally. This is where I want to show our departments, our uber-disciplines, our institutions how social infrastructures work and can change the face of academic publishing. I want to talk about what collaborative writing and editing and publishing actually LOOKS like in digital scholarship.

Some of you in the morning workshop on digital publishing were there to see behind the scenes of the journals represented. So, here's what it looks like when an author hands her work over to us for publication.

[SLIDE: 3 tiers of peer review]

[SLIDE: 8 stages]

[SLIDE: copy-editing matrix, cyberduck, cyberduck close-up]

[SLIDE: copy-editing stages REPEAT]

Kairos staffers, by far, spend the most time on Stage 2: Design editing. This is the stage where we ensure the webtext meets rhetorical, accessibility, usability, and sustainability guidelines. Editors who volunteer their time to do this work help us shape the webtexts so that its infrastructure is self-sustaining, for the most part, allowing the webtext to exist as a whole. And yet that webtext must exist within the technical infrastructure of an issue, within a volume, within a journal's infrastructure as a whole. And within an archive...

These technological and social and scholarly infrastructures are ones that our field has been thinking about for as long as these journals have been publishing, and longer. They are why we have scholarship about computers and writing. They are why we have professional development and pedagogical workshops such as the ones you took today, including the Graduate Research Network. Our field has been supporting this kind of work for as long as it's been around – **[SLIDE: CIWIC/DMAC]** and this year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of CIWIC and DMAC. Decades before DHSI (2001) and THATCamps started, this field was there, making and researching and publishing in digital forms.

But, as we've seen in the last few months and longer, our work isn't always sustainable. Our work sometimes disappears and not on purpose and not for good. And that is an issue of technical infrastructure that our field desperately needs. And not just our field, but many fields who want to be doing digital publishing the way that C&W has been doing it for two or more decades.

Let's put that into perspective: there are some of you at this conference who were not even old enough to speak when Kairos started publishing. There were some of you at this conference who helped **found** Kairos and journals like it. And then there are ALL of you who are here today, who make it possible for Kairos to CONTINUE to publish. **[SLIDE: Kairos at camp]** BUT...

C&W is a very special field. We are one of the few, I would argue, who has the scholarly infrastructure and certainly the social infrastructure to support digital publishing in the bleeding-edge manner that we have invented. We are one of the very few fields, I believe, who can sustain this kind of work. And even that is questionable at times, but as a field we have to be able to support each other. And that support, for me, traces back to **[SLIDE: chart]** this diagram. And the part that I never thought would happen: the CMS.

A little over a year ago, I emailed the Mellon Foundation asking if I could ASK to submit a grant to build the technological infrastructure that would support the kinds of scholarly and social work that our field has been doing for more than 20 years. When they said yes in December, **[SLIDE: Vega]** Vega was born. And with **[SLIDE: Andrew]** much research and **[SLIDE: Bengler]** amazing developers, it will come to fruition in another two years' time.

[SLIDE: Vega features]

[DISCUSS VEGA: So what IS Vega?

- name
- problem related to editing
- feature set **[SLIDE: hand-drawn process]**
- infrastructure sustainability **[SLIDE: Simen Skogsrud]**
- who might use it
- how we will give it away]

Vega isn't just about Kairos or C&C Online or C&C Digital Press or the WAC C, or any of the other wonderful scholarly endeavors and publication venues in our field. This isn't' about

Keynote script, by Cheryl E. Ball, for the 2015 Computers and Writing conference

C&W. This isn't about Rhet/comp or writing studies. **[SLIDE: graph]** It's about taking what WE have done as a field and making it available, dare I say, to the world. For free.

[SLIDE: Kairos camp] And so, as I leave C&W this year, and I drive back into the woods for my first camping trip in many years, I'm going to take with me the idea of the list, and our field's bleeding-edge qualities, and its mental and technological health, and I'm going to sit by the campfire in the 10:30pm sunset, and I'm going to think about all of you. And what WE as a discipline, as a community, have built.