**VIDEO TRANSCRIPT**

**“BREAKING TRAIL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF VISITING SCHOLARS IN DMAC”**

**BEN MCCORKLE**

***SHOWCASING THE BEST OF CIWIC/DMAC* 1 (2014)**

CB: I’m Cheryl Ball, and I’m here for the DMAC workshop. I’m a Visiting Scholar. That’s totally wrong. I’m gonna do it again–one more time. My name is Cheryl Ball and I’m a Visiting Scholar here at the DMAC workshop.

**[TITLE SLIDE: 1. “Breaking Trail: A Brief History of Visiting Scholars in DMAC”]**

**[TITLE SLIDE: A documentary short by Ben McCorkle]**

My name is Ben McCorkle, Videographer-in-Residence at DMAC. Since the beginning of OSU’s DMAC Institute, I’ve served informally as the in-house interviewer for the Visiting Scholars in DMAC program. Usually, I’m lurking behind the scenes, but for this particular video, I’m coming out in front of the camera to share with you some of my favorite moments from this collection.

Over these next several minutes, we’ll be looking back at this program through the words of the scholars themselves. Their interviews offer us a fascinating glimpse at the variety of projects, opinions, and personalities working in the fields of computers and writing, digital media studies, or digital humanities, typically situated within the disciplinary boundaries of rhetoric and composition studies. This documentary short will analyze that body of interviews, exploring notable common threads, points of contention, and other topics of interest within them.

As a whole, this collection of interviews makes up a useful microhistory of the still nascent field, told through the voices of many of the people who have helped, and continue to help, shape its evolution. So in the meantime, sit back, relax, and enjoy the show…

**[TITLE SLIDE: “Background.”]**

**[TITLE SLIDE: “People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.”—James A. Baldwin]**

Established in 2007, this program was designed to invite scholars currently pursuing promising work involving digital media production to participate in the Digital Media and Composition Institute [insert screenshot here] for the purpose of developing a sustained scholarly project. Additionally, Visiting Scholars are provided with office space, and given time, technical resources, and support necessary to bring the proposed project to completion. So basically, the goal is to hang out, be smart, and make cool things!

Past scholars in the program have included such prominent voices in the field as: Jonathan Alexander, Cheryl Ball, Adam Banks, Debra Journet, Hugh Burns, Richard Miller and Paul Hammond, Gary Bays, Christine Tulley, Elaine Richardson, and Melanie Yergeau.

**[series of stills w/captions for each (name and institution at the time)]**

* **Jonathan Alexander (UC Irvine)**
* **Cheryl Ball (Illinois State University, currently at  WVU)**
* **Adam Banks (Syracuse University)**
* **Debra Journet (University of Louisville)**
* **Hugh Burns (Texas Women’s University, now Professor Emeritus)**
* **Gary Bays (University of Akron-Wayne College)**
* **Christine Tulley (University of Findlay)**
* **Richard Miller & Paul Hammond (Rutgers University)**
* **Melanie Yergeau (University of Michigan)**
* **Elaine Richardson (Ohio State University)**
* **Kristine Blair (Current VS, Bowling Green State University)**

Collectively, this group embodies a diversity of voices, levels, institutional affiliations, and scholarly interests. It’s largely that variety that characterizes the field of digital media studies as a whole.

Noteworthy scholars and cultural historians ranging from Hayden White to Studs Terkel, from Alan Lomax to Cynthia Selfe, have written about the importance of recording, archiving, curating, and studying oral histories, as they can reframe, challenge, or radically upend more sanctioned, “official” histories that often reinforce, wittingly or not, cultural, material, political, or ideological pressures. In other words, oral histories have the potential to push back against the system, to fight the power, to stick it to the man.

But what can we learn from looking back at this particular series of interviews? What can they tell us about field formation, points of tension, or common themes? In this particular case, oral histories can be an effective way of chronicling the early, often messy process of institutional transformations–shift in disciplinary boundaries, emergent fields of knowledge, and so on–a premise that this video hopes to demonstrate. Let’s find out how…

**[TITLE SLIDE: “Terminology.”]**

**[TITLE SLIDE: “For all a techno-rhetorician’s rules/ Teach in part to name his or her tools.”—Samuel Butler (kinda)]**

We’re in the business of naming things.

**[Quick Montage] DJ: “Multimodality.” CB: “Digital writing studies.” GB:”Digital composing.” HB: “Digital media.” RM: “New media.” JA: “Multimodal composition.”**

As Claire Lauer finds in her 2012 *Kairos* article “What’s in a Name? The Anatomy of Defining New/Multi/Modal/Digital Texts,” our field’s terminology has historically been shaped by a number of contingencies, including audience, historical or institutional context, and the need for argumentative precision, among other factors. She argues that,

[D]efining terms helps us figure out what we think, not just find the right words for what we already know. It helps us discover what we value and where we stand in relation to what has been said and done before. It positions us in the conversation, exposes our assumptions, announces our intentions, and helps us explain to ourselves and others who we are and what we believe.

**[GB]: I would like to call it, I guess, “digital composing” because it is still composing as we did with alphabetic text, but we’re certainly bringing in new technologies to do that composing, and to limit it with just the term “writing” or to simply focus on the multimodal aspect of it, there’s still enough technology instruction and understanding involved with it that I think the digital term ought to be in there as well.**

**[CB]: I plead the fifth (laughs).**

**[CT]: I actually prefer the multimodal term, primarily because a lot of the stuff I do is not digital. For example, in one of our composition classes, we’ve actually taken students over to an art studio where they’ve created something out of clay. We’ve done graffiti. We’ve done all kinds of projects where they don’t necessarily use what we would consider technology–like, they’re not doing podcasts necessarily or film–but they do those too. So to me, it really is a multiplicity of modes.**

**[DJ]: I don’t know that I could pick one and defend it. I think I will use whichever one people are using in the conversation I’m with. Except I do distinguish between digital media, multiple media or whatever, and multiple modalities. I kind of buy Kress’s distinction between media and modes, and in my classes I tend to talk about modalities, not so much about media. We talk about what are the affordances of modes.**

**[JA]: I don’t care for “new media” anymore. I don’t necessarily think that what we’re doing is particularly new.**

**[CB]: I’ve been thinking about this a lot this week, because these questions come up all the time, right? And what I’ve realized is that even though I used to use “new media” all the time, and always as an adjective. So I’d talk about new media texts, because that is what my interest is in. And I think there’s a distinction between texts and new media technologies, you know, how we get to the textual product. And I was pretty adamant that that was what I was always going to use, and had defended that on different levels, but in the last year or so I’ve noticed myself shifting more to using whatever term my audience is expecting, or whatever they’re more familiar with.  So now I’ll use “multimodal” or “multimedia” or “digital writing studies.”**

**[AB]: I really believe context matters in terms of the department and its politics and what it’s trying to forward within the university structure that it’s in, but if we take those three terms stripped of that context… I really don’t have a cat or a dog in that fight, but if you forced me to choose a preference, it would probably be “new media.”**

**[PH]: We can’t say that they’re not new. So it’s multimedia, in the sense that we know multimedia, which is video and audio and text. But there are these combination now that we’re seeing, that digital technology is allowing and creating, ways of mashing up information, that when I see them–it’s altering, right? You look at it and you’re like, “Oh my God!” That, that’s new.**

**[RM]: But what I see through the use or emphasis of different terms is more of a recursion to more familiar ways of acting and being.**

Here we see our visiting scholars deliberately wrestling with the terms, justifying their choices based on the very criteria Lauer identifies. And given the complex, networked nature of the factors she analyzes, it’s likely we’ll continue interrogating and revising our terminology for years to come.

**[TITLE SLIDE: “Access.”]**

**[TITLE SLIDE: “I think the same kinds of themes that we have seen with connection, access, and focus on people in and around connections with technology will continue to sustain our field.”―Cynthia Selfe]**

As much as digital media studies is future oriented, still coming to terms (quite literally) with its identity, we also notice that some topics and themes persist and endure, and in fact have been since the very early days of the field we know as computers and writing. The conversation of access initiated by the likes of Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, Charles Moran, James Inman, and others, is something still at the forefront of this conversation, which we see here.

**[ER]: So I’ve been working in an after-school program with young black girls, and we explore popular culture, especially digital or digitalized representations of black women and girls. And the approach is a social literacies approach, getting girls interested in talking about how they are represented to themselves, and how they think that affects their identity. So getting them to think critically about those issues, to read, to write, to think and produce images themselves.**

**[MY]: But then I’ve also morphed into working on a “Shit Professors Say About Access” video. So long story short, that project sort of started right before CCCC, because I was on an Access Happening panel, and so a bunch of us created a massive Google Doc where we were contributing lines of shitty things people were saying to us, and over the course of CCC AND C&W, several people contributed to this growing document, so I’ve been filming people saying those lines here, so if you want to say a couple of lines, you’re welcome to (laughter).**

**[GB]: I see video being a difficult aspect for our campus because I can’t imagine doing that without iMovie or without Macs, and right now we’re not at the place where we’re gonna equip an entire lab with Macs. So I would investigate small projects, and also looking for open source types of programs that we can use–Audacity is a good one, very stable, and has been fun to work with with the students in the class that I’m in.**

**[AB]: No matter how limited the situation might seem in their home institution–whether that’s budgetary, political, student-faculty resistance, morale issues, whatever–that people begin from a place of possibility, and that that place of possibility begin with something that they can feel excited or urgent or passionate about.**

Although these scholars define access in slightly different ways, addressing not only  the digital divide, but also open access and accessibility issues as well, it’s noteworthy that it remains a central critical point of concern for those pushing at the boundaries of digital media studies.

**[TITLE SLIDE: “Capaciousness.”]**

**[TITLE SLIDE: “In diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”―Maya Angelou]**

Just as the visiting scholars themselves comprise a diverse body, so too does their approach to research and scholarship in the field. As James Purdy and Joyce Walker argue in the chapter “Scholarship on the Move: A Rhetorical Analysis of Scholarly Activity in Digital Spaces,”

scholarly activity happens in new ways in these digital spaces. Digital forms not only allow for some of the same moves that define the scholarly productions long valued in English studies, they allow for extending our definitions of the “scholarly” and provide new outlets for productive knowledge-building work.

Here’s a sampling of some of the projects incubated in the DMAC institute…

**[CLIP OF DIVERSITY OF RESEARCH inserted here.]**

**[MY]: It’s going to be a digital book project, and it’s also going to be on autism and this idea that in medical literature, autism is considered an arhetorical condition. Because autistic people, according to medical practitioners, psychological research, and things like that, lack what’s called a theory of mind, which is supposed to be the ability to recognize that other people have their own unique mental states. So the way this has trickled down into composition scholarship, which is rather unfortunate, is that autistic people supposedly lack audience awareness and also lack self awareness. And so my book project I hope will counter some of this and I’m particularly interested in online communities and in how both disability activism more generally, but autistic activism more specifically, really percolates in those spaces.**

**[CT]: But I’m really looking at it within the context of a liberal arts education. Right now there’s a lot of scholarship out there about how the liberal arts is kind of slow to catch on to multimodality, and in some ways they’re very resistant to working this type of stuff into first-year composition and beyond. So that’s one of the projects I’m looking at right now, to show that actually, multimodality doesn’t necessarily have to be at odds with the goals of a liberal arts education, and in fact can actually do some things to enhance it.**

**[CB]: My tenure binder, as a tenure-track faculty member, has always been in this big, blue, paper-filled binder. And yet most of my work is digital, and can’t be printed–you can’t print a movie, for instance. So I remediated my binder this past year to put it in a blog format so that people could access my scholarship more readily and see the narratives that you have to write to accompany those artifacts… But the navigation was all wonky, and I don’t like the consecutiveness of the way the blog functions, so I’m moving all of that information over to a better content management system, and I’m in the process of figuring out which one is going to be the best for me, and which ones–like Joomla and Drupal–and how those things work because I’ve never used one before, not as a back end, not as an administrator, And so I’m here to sort of figure out the technical how-to, but also the larger issue of whether I can host… what even to call this thing.**

**[AB]: I’ll be doing a talk on Friday where I’m using the concept of what I’m calling a “digital griot” as a model for teachers and students working in multimodal/multimedia literacies, and the point of that project is to… well, it links up in several different ways. One of the purposes is to give teachers and scholars different tools for engaging questions of race and culture as they deal with technologies and literacies. Usually, the field over the last however long has been so trapped in Ebonics as the specter of everything having to do with black people and language learning and literacy instruction. And unfortunately, people don’t understand Ebonics enough to be able to mine what is valuable in that language tradition, and so it ends up coming up in a kind of problematic that people are forced to respond to all the time. And so my contention is that the force of that narrative has taken away from a lot of valuable work that could have been done to find value in the language and literacy and discursive traditions of African Americans, not just for the purposes of teaching black students in dealing with questions like achievement gap and all of that, but for the positive value, and for everybody. I’m hoping to deal with those issues, instead of problematizing whatever might be wrong, which we’re always used to doing, I’m actually trying to put a concept out there that can actually move some work forward.**

**[JA]: My larger theoretical exploratory mission is to look critically at the work of the mid-century French filmmaker Jean Cocteau, who is not as well known in the States as he is in Europe, where he’s a phenomenally popular figure. But Cocteau was a polymath–a poet, playwright, artist, filmmaker, he wrote scenarios for ballets, worked with some of the most important artists and musicians of his time–and my argument is among the first to really embrace a multimodal composing mode, and I’m arguing in part–at least I hope to argue–that Cocteau offers us some interesting ways to think theoretically about multimodality, but more specifically, since Cocteau was among he first major artists to embrace his own queerness, I’m thinking about how Cocteau looked at queerness multimodally.**

**[HB]: The title of my project was “Rhetorical Leadership: Digital Media and Global Learning.” I’ve been able to go back and think about what got me into the business of technology in the first place, and that was the idea of making computers smarter. Rhetorical invention is a way of investigating how people create ideas and recover information, and to do that with technology was something that I did early in my career. So this was a chance to come back and renew that central interest in my research.**

**[PH]: What we’re trying to do with the Writers’ House Initiative, it’s really the first phase of a larger, the way that we imagine it, a humanities-wide initiative. And so for us to come and see what a facility like this, that is a humanities-wide initiative, helps us to imagine how we can take what we’re seeing, what you guys are doing, and map that onto what we’re doing locally at Rutgers.**

**[RM]: Another way to answer the question, “What do we do back at Rutgers?” is I think this collaboration has been so successful and so productive because the first thing we do is dream. And in so doing, I would say we’ve reclaimed a fundamental vision of higher education, that it’s a place where you can need to think about a better world, and then try and create that.**

From our perspective, it’s important to promote this kind of diversity among scholarly approaches because ultimately it results in a much more fertile and vibrant field of study. As Ben Aslinger and Nina Huntemann argue in their article “Digital Media Studies Futures,” “We find it important to stress the variety and depth of digital media scholarship as well as the theoretical and methodological vigor of ‘new’ media studies. [...]  We also want to stress a wider array of digital media scholarship [...] and point to the ways that critical race, feminist, queer, postcolonial and globalization scholars interrogate digital poetics and politics and open up new research horizons” (9). We here at DMAC couldn’t agree more.

**[TITLE SLIDE: “Looking Ahead.”]**

As the DMAC Institute continues to foster the sort of experience wherein scholars can think deeply about AND work deliberately with digital media, we expect to see even more Visiting Scholars grace our halls, adding their expertise to the conversation by posing the critical questions and developing the kind of research and scholarship that will allow digital media studies to continue growing into the future.

So for all of us here at DMAC, I’d like to say that we’ve been made stronger by their presence. Thanks for watching.

**[END CREDITS: 1. Editing/Scripting: Ben McCorkle | 2. Produced in iMovie using Bebas Neue and Arial Narrow fonts. Music: “Elevator Music 1” by jrucksaw (CC via Soundcloud) | 3. Thanks to ??? ]**

**[HB]: That’s the dog I’ll ride to the bullfight. (Laughter)**

**[TITLE SLIDE: “fin”]**