The Electronic Landscape
of Journal Editing:
Computers and Composition
as a Scholarly Collective

KRISTINE L. BLAIR, GAIL E. HAWISHER, AND
CYNTHIA L. SELFE

In their introduction to the collection *Multimodal Composition*, Pamela Ta-kayoshi and Cynthia Selfe assert that "[i]f composition instruction is to remain relevant, the definition of 'composition' and 'texts' needs to grow and change to reflect people's literacy practices in new digital communi-cation environments" (3). Although Takayoshi and Selfe are emphasizing undergraduate instruction, a parallel argument applies to journal editors in English studies and beyond: as scholars heed the call, they require contexts that enable rather than constrain scholarship about teaching and research-ing in digital environments. Certainly, the desire to create such an intellec-tual community was behind the development of *Computers and Composition* in 1983, originally edited by Cynthia Selfe and Kate Kiefer and since 1988 by Gail Hawisher and Selfe. Twenty-some years later, *Computers and Com-position* is an international journal with both print and online components, supported by a strong cohort of digital literacy and composition scholars

Kristine L. Blair is professor of English at Bowling Green State University and has edited Computers and Composition Online *since 2002. Gail Hawisher is professor of English and founding director of the Center for Writing Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana. Cynthia L. Selfe is Humanities Distinguished Professor in the Department of English at Ohio State University, Columbus. Hawisher and Selfe are cofounders and coeditors of* Computers and Composition.

as editorial board members. Perhaps more than other journals, *Computers and Composition* has had and continues to have a unique opportunity—even an obligation—to extend the spaces for scholarship on digital literacies into the electronic formats discussed in its pages. As we stress here, the digital companion journal *Computers and Composition Online* and the newly founded Computers and Composition Digital Press contribute to a scholarly collective that not only sustains the intellectual community in an era of multimodality but also serves as an advocate, continuing the call for English studies—and the humanities at large—to recognize and value the types of labor that multimodal literacy both affords and demands.

Facing the Early Challenges of a New World of Scholarship: Coediting *Computers and Composition* in Print

Except for such NCTE publications as *College Composition and Communication* or *Research in the Teaching of English*, as well as early groundbreaking collections that include the MLA's *Literacy and Computers: The Complications of Teaching and Learning with Technology* (Selfe and Hilligoss), there were few venues during the 1980s and early 1990s in which to publish scholarship that took composition and digital technology into its field of vision. Nor were there many venues that valued collaborative scholarship. Yet from the start, composition's digital explorations have developed collaboratively. Although English studies has not always prized collaboration, this mode of scholarly work made possible the rich network of productive connections that contributes to the still-emerging focus on digital literacies within the larger landscape of the humanities. Always an enterprise of the many rather than the one, *Computers and Composition* established a coeditorship and a working collaborative editorial board, with committed scholars from around the country and now from around the world; and in like spirit, from its inception, the journal recognized the group project as an accepted mode of authorship. In many respects this move anticipated the now common, indeed necessary, practice in which a team of scholars working together creates a digital multimodal production, but everyday editorial practices have also aimed at promoting the field and supporting those who produce the research and scholarship in its publications. We want all authors—writing alone or with others—to receive the recognition and attention they deserve, and we take it as our responsibility that their scholarship with us—whether alphabetic in its reliance on print presentation or multimodal in its reliance on new and mixed media—should count at critical junctures like tenure and promotion. We like to think, too, that our own partnership as editors of the *Computers and Composition*

collective has worked to validate coauthorship within and outside compo-
sition studies—not unlike the partnership between Lisa Ede and Andrea
Lunsford that issued in the important book *Singular Texts / Plural Authors*,
in the intersecting area of composition and feminist scholarship.

A telling feature of our editorial collaboration has been the penchant
for relying on what Bonnie Nardi, Steve Whittaker, and Heinrich Schwarz
term an "intensional network," that is, a network of people who support
and partake in a variety of activities necessary to launch projects and make
them a reality. In "It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know: Work in
the Information Age," Nardi and her coauthors point out that "an inten-
sional network is often much more distributed than, say, a community of
practice," in which practitioners share work-related experiences. They also
suggest that "intensional networks are personal," "often involve long-term
relationships," and entail "ongoing processes of countless everyday com-
munications and rememberings." This notion comes closest to capturing
the work of our journals and the expanding circle of people on whom
we as editors rely for inspiration, intellectual reach, good sense, collegial-
ity, friendship, and just plain hard work. As the work of the journal and
editorial responsibilities have increased, the thinking that marked early
work with the journal has spilled over into the many editorial projects.
What began as a homegrown print journal now has both an electronic and
a print presence at Elsevier, from which articles are now downloaded in
eighty-five different countries around the world.

EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF DIGITAL JOURNALS: *COMPUTERS
AND COMPOSITION ONLINE* AS SCHOLARLY DIALOGUE

Although *Computers and Composition Online* first emerged in 1996 (with
hosting at the University of Texas, Austin), it was only in 2002 as Kris Blair
assumed the online editorship that the journal began to function both col-
laboratively with and independently from the print *Computers and Compo-
sition*, establishing a separate peer-review process and a separate editorial
board with expertise in digital rhetoric, visual and Web design, and com-
puters and writing pedagogy. When we turned to developing and sustain-
ing a fully online journal, we realized that once again collaboration would
play a crucial role, particularly given our shared goal of expanding the
field's concept of what form online scholarship might take. Thus we have
encouraged *C&C Online* authors to shift away from the print-publication
format they know so well to one that embraces such multimodal compo-
nents as graphic design, animation, video, still images, and audio. Although
this shift is consistent with theoretical calls for multimodal composing

processes, it admittedly presents scholars with a variety of challenges that are often best met through collaborative efforts. Initially, *C&C Online* did not receive as many submissions as it does today, partly because of the significant learning curve required of individual authors to produce such Web-based scholarship, but also because of the presumed lack of recognition in tenure and promotion decisions in English departments, where single-authored scholarship in print venues still maintained its privileged status.

In "The Politics of Electronic Scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition," Todd Taylor contends that in the 1990s early forms of electronic discourse had yet to be defined clearly and presented as an alternative to print scholarship and that some of these forms of digital scholarship not surprisingly relied heavily on alphabetic literacy. Even with the goal of building on yet moving away from a print-on-screen model of digital scholarship, *C&C Online* has received a range of submissions that confirms Taylor's earlier concerns. Some submissions possess all the right substance but lack a solid understanding of Web design standards and continue to rely on a print-essay format; others contain all the expected design strengths in terms of navigation, accessibility, and creativity but lack an argument that is well enough supported to warrant publication; and still others, happily, contain the appropriate balance between substance and design that online publication affords both authors and readers.

Rather than lament what has been a slow paradigm shift from print to digital literacies in English studies and the humanities generally, it is essential that we as journal editors help department administrators and other evaluators understand the impact of producing and subsequently evaluating digital scholarship on the academic labor of current and future faculty members. In the 2007 "Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion," a section dedicated to scholarship in new media concludes that despite the diminishing distinction and increasing interdependence of print and online journals, thirty-five to fifty percent of department chairs surveyed "have had no experience evaluating scholarly work produced in these new forms" (42). Moreover, the report strongly suggests that this limitation creates a "cause-and-effect" relationship in which "probationary faculty members will be reluctant to risk publishing in electronic formats unless they see clear evidence that such work can count positively for tenure and promotion" (43). As a result, the task force called for a "more capacious conception of scholarship" (5) that would, among other things, accommodate new forms resembling print in their intellectual heft but departing from print conventions in their digital and often multimodal formats.

Electronic journals such as *Computers and Composition Online* can help foster this "more capacious conception" by engaging both current and future scholars in more dialogic peer review processes, acknowledging that the development of multimodal literacy is ongoing for faculty colleagues. At *C&C Online*, rather than automatically reject submissions that are not Web-ready, online editors of content sections that include "Theory into Practice," "The Virtual Classroom," and "Professional Development" help bring authors to a better understanding of what goes into effective digital scholarship—in part by establishing clear guidelines for design that is "appropriate to the content and serve[s] the scholarly and creative material presented" (Council). This mentoring model bolsters the integrity of peer review and at the same time encourages new voices in new media to contribute to the academic community. Equally important, it levels the generational playing field, given that graduate students and junior faculty members tend to be the most proficient in digital literacy specialties. *C&C Online* has relied on graduate students as section editors and has published the work not only of established scholars but also of pretenure faculty members and graduate students. Graduate students have often played a pivotal role in working with potential contributors to convert print texts to Web texts before peer review or have conducted interviews with major figures in their fields. This is mutually beneficial: established authors brought up in a print world are able to publish in multimodal form, and student editors receive designer credit that can be helpful to them on the academic job market. As a result, all Web texts published at *C&C Online* are formatted in HTML or Adobe Flash, designed with an online reader in mind, and include such multimodal elements as video and audio. Despite these efforts, if the larger profession is not more attentive to the impact of multimodal literacies on teaching and research, graduate students and new faculty members, possessing no rhetorical models and receiving mixed messages about incentives and rewards for work in new media, will inevitably reinscribe alphabetic literacy in their own discourse, marginalizing rather than mainstreaming digital scholarship.

That *Computers and Composition Online*, among other digital journals, has provided the field with useful models of multimodal scholarship is evident in the growing range of Web texts incorporating video and audio that are published in online journals—including *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, which received the Council of Editors of Learned Journals 2008 Award for Best Journal Design. A notable example of a *C&C Online* Web text is the collaborative effort by Debra Journet and graduate student colleagues at the University of Louisville, "Digital Mirrors: Multimodal Reflection in the Composition Classroom." This text is

a compelling response to Journet's 2007 *Computers and Composition* print article calling for senior faculty members to "advocate for technology" and not "leave digital media to the 'new kids'" (108). It also demonstrates the reciprocal relation between the print and online versions of the journal. The online journal further promotes this reciprocity through its Print to Screen section, where authors who have digital components to their print articles may house them on the *C&C Online* site. Ultimately, Journet's call to action should serve as a powerful reminder that shifting the paradigm from print to digital scholarship is the collective responsibility of editors, authors, faculty colleagues, and administrators—and that online journal editors need as much support as the new and established scholars they publish. As editors of *Computers and Composition* and *Computers and Composition Online*, we like to think that the intensional networks we have built over the years continue to further this support for the profession.

COLLABORATIVELY EXPANDING THE ENVIRONMENT OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING: COMPUTERS AND COMPOSITION DIGITAL PRESS

The changing environment of electronic publication, of course, refuses to stand still for any journal—or any publishing venture, for that matter—regardless of its commitment to innovation. Within this changing context and as a result of their work as journal editors, in 2008 Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher launched Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP), an open-access academic venture committed to publishing creatively multimodal e-books and digital projects that explore new genres and formats beyond those associated with conventional printed books and journals. To a great extent, CCDP has been designed to promote digital publishing, while building on the efforts of *Computers and Composition* and *Computers and Composition Online*. The press's projects are freely available both to the faculty and to the public and thus do not contribute to the rising acquisition costs currently plaguing libraries. In addition, CCDP's publications carry the validating imprint of Utah State University Press, while drawing only minimally on the resources of that press.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of all for the new press has been the delicate balancing of convention and innovation, tradition and change. With an eye toward tradition, we formulated an internationally recognized editorial board, consisting primarily of senior scholars with extensive knowledge about both the existing values of academic departments and the potential of digital media environments. Members of the board review submissions online and make recommendations to the press editors

in much the same fashion that boards at conventional presses do, a practice vital to the credentials of faculty members facing tenure and promotion review.

As for innovation and change: like online journals, CCDP affords authors scope beyond the parameters of print for presenting research in multiple semiotic dimensions. In a collaborative study under way, for example, Hawisher and Selfe are using digital video and audio to collect and report on literacy autobiographies from students with transnational connections, narratives that detail these students' use of various digital technologies to maintain their relationships with family, friends, and coworkers and to represent their literate practices. As this project progresses, we have come to recognize more and more how these multimodal developments tend to blur the lines between journal articles and monographs. How long, for example, will articles and monographs become when they move to the screen and their length is no longer judged by page numbers? Online genres are still emerging, and at the moment there is no clear distinction between what might count as an e-book, a monograph, or another genre that relies primarily on sound and on still and moving images. And not surprisingly, in the course of bringing this newest of our digital projects to fruition, we have yet again come to value the many hands that contribute to such enterprises.

A collaborative engagement around scholarly digital projects provides a powerful argument for a press like Computers and Composition Digital Press. This latest editorial project—like *Computers and Composition: An International Journal* and *Computers and Composition Online*—takes on the challenges of keeping up with a new world of publishing while serving the profession of old and its many established and emerging authors. Potentially, this new emphasis on the scholarship of digital publication—often hybrid mixes of alphabetic text, audio clips, and video reports—challenges the ways in which humanities departments typically understand research, prompting questions about how knowledge accrues and about the increasingly collaborative processes through which it comes to be prized.

Toward a Collective Conclusion, but Only for the Moment . . .

In some important ways, the landscape of academic editing and publishing has changed profoundly over the past two decades: libraries, presses, and academic journals have increasingly migrated from print to digital contexts; editors, scholars, and graduate students have come to depend more than ever on the amplified power of collaborative teams and inten-

sional networks; and the bandwidth of scholarship has expanded beyond the alphabetic to include the semiotic channels of video, audio, and still images.

Such developments invite the discipline to consider how its intellectual values can be woven into the use of new forms of literacy and communication, particularly in the arena of scholarly editing. In this essay, we stress that technological change can encourage English studies and the field of rhetoric and composition to recommit to historically informed values on the excellence, reach, and impact of scholarship, even when such work comes in an unexpected guise; to reaffirm the traditional importance and power of peer review, even when the timing of scholarly publication has accelerated and the patterns of circulation have altered; to reconfirm the value of critical thinking and intellectual innovation, even as we struggle to construct new kinds of knowledge among digitally extended networks of colleagues. In such efforts and contexts, we inevitably affirm the scholarly values of the humanities and the important role of academic journal editing in all its forms—as we expand the intellectual landscape and enable a promising future for our collective discipline.

WORKS CITED

Council of Editors of Learned Journals. "Best Practices for Online Journal Editors." Web. 1 Mar. 2009.

Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. *Singular Texts / Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990. Print.

Journet, Debra. "Inventing Myself in Multimodality: Encouraging Senior Faculty to Use Digital Media." *Computers and Composition* 24 (2007): 107–20. Print.

Journet, Debra, Tabetha Adkins, Chris Alexander, Patrick Corbett, and Ryan Trauman. "Digital Mirrors: Multimodal Reflection in the Composition Classroom." *Computers and Composition Online* (Spring 2008): n. pag. Web. 21 Oct. 2008.

MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion. "Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion." *Profession* (2007): 9–71. Print.

Nardi, Bonnie, Steve Whittaker, and Heinrich Schwarz. "It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know: Work in the Information Age." *First Monday* 5.5 (1 May 2000): n. pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2008.

Selfe, Cynthia L., and Susan Hilligoss. *Literacy and Computers: The Complications of Teaching and Learning with Technology.* New York: MLA, 1994. Print.

Takayoshi, Pamela, and Cynthia L. Selfe. "Thinking about Multimodality." *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers.* Ed. Cynthia L. Selfe. Cresskill: Hampton, 2007. 1–12. Print.

Taylor, Todd. "The Politics of Electronic Scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition." *Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition.* Ed. Gary A. Olsen and Taylor. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997. 197–210. Print.