

**Kairos Interview with [Dr. William Endres](#), Assistant Professor at the University of Kentucky**

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## What Would You Call Yourself?

0.00

MT: I just wanted to start with first given that interdisciplinarity of your work, and what you study and research at the University of Kentucky, I would love to know how you would prefer to call what you're doing in relationship to others, not only within the academy but also outside of it.

0.18

WE: Big question, and I think it's a very intriguing question because with what is happening with digital technologies – and although we have seen them coming on for 20-30 years now, it is still... I don't think we've really gotten our minds totally wrapped around what the significance really is. But I think the larger issue is with the digital technologies what types of questions can we now ask that we haven't been able to ask in the past. In thinking about my work, I do think about it as interdisciplinary, but in some ways that's kind of a fallacy.

1:03

WE: It seems like we organize disciplines in ways to ask certain types of questions. And how we define things gives us borders so that we can ask those questions, generate knowledge,

generate understanding and have insights into things. So how I like to think about my work is that the interdisciplinary nature of it allows me to define my subjects slightly differently and my questions differently. What I should say define my subjects slightly differently so it can lead to different types of questions.

1:38

MT: You classify yourself more as – and tell me if I’m wrong – as a visual rhetorician. As someone who is definitely situated in rhetoric and composition but is looking at the visual nature of how we compose, create, and diversify arguments. Is that somewhat correct?

1:56

WE: Yes that would be correct. I think that I’m always disinclined to name what I’m doing too directly or to give myself a title or attach myself to an –ism in some way. I’ve always said that –isms make Billy a dull boy.

2:14

WE: You know I think that it’s helpful to think about and focus my research in a way of thinking about that I’m working on visuals. I do consider myself at the heart being a visual rhetorician. What that is and where that can take us is evolving as we go along. I think the issues that the digital humanities open for us, I mean, it is really astounding, but I think one way to think about digital is as a methodology. I think when you start thinking about the digital as a methodology, it shifts that sense of what it is in such a way, so I can be a visual rhetorician working in the digital realm, but it’s that digital piece that allows again certain types of questions to be answered, it redefines the world in a way, but I think through a methodological one.

### **Illuminated Manuscripts: Book of Kells and the St. Chad Gospels**

3:14

MT: In kind of thinking about what you said about subject matter, I am very curious too if you can talk about how you first got interested in studying illuminated manuscripts. If you could talk a little bit about that [research] genesis.

3:27

WE: I got interested in the Book of Kells by actually not being able to see it. My wife and I went to England and we had a couple extra days, and I had wanted to see – we both had wanted to see – Ireland for a good long while. So we took our rental car, hopped a ferry, and headed over to Dublin.

3:50

WE: Driving in Dublin is just a zoo [Well, driving in any large city that you don't know is crazy] because you have just all of these old, basically cart paths that have been turned into roads.

This is a pre-print version of the webtext published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 18(1), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/18.1/interviews/thornton>

You can have roads that parallel each other going in circles. So, we got totally lost, we never made it to Trinity College, and I was heartbroken because one of the things I wanted to see while we were there was the Book of Kells.

4:14

WE: When we returned the University of Arizona actually had the new facsimile that was done in 1990 – the first full color facsimile that was completed for the manuscript – available in special collections, and when I looked at the manuscript, I just fell in love with it. My interest in visuals has been and especially since [W.J.T. Mitchell](#) talked about “our visual turn” is that how do we migrate into a visual world from one that is based in text with all of the intellectual apparatus that surrounds text?

4:51

WE: What I have found in the Book of Kells and in illuminated manuscripts is that you had this intellectual tradition that was based in expressing itself through visuals. And in this I said, “Ah! This is what I want to look at, this is what I want to study. I want to see how another tradition developed in using the images as a way of expressing intellectual content that might tell us something about our own world and the possibilities that are before us with digital technologies.

5:30

WE: I think the interesting thing about the work is that the codex, or the book, was such a different beast at that point in time and that the printing press changed the manuscript so dramatically. So I’ve learned as much about text as I probably actually have about images themselves. That’s how I got started with the Book of Kells, but my real interest, I mean, as a work of art, it’s just absolutely gorgeous; it’s just breathtaking.

5:59

WE: That has been a joy in working with the manuscript. When I was working on my dissertation, friends would be drudging along a little bit with things and if I hit upon a problem, it was like, “Darn I have to go to special collections and look through this beautiful book. Woe is me.”

6:22

WE: So that’s been a real fun aspect of the project itself. As I’ve worked into it the thing that has surprised me about the Book of Kells is because the Vikings came through destroyed so many records, because of civil wars and other wars, we don’t know what the imagery really means. I had thought my time with the Book of Kells would be shorter than what it has turned out to be.

6:52

WE: Because there is so much mystery in the imagery, having a rhetorician approach it is much different than having an art historian approach it or a medievalist approach it. So, I'm able to ask slightly different questions, particularly questions thinking about the making, thinking about invention, thinking about rhetorical memory, that aren't at the heart of other disciplines. So, I'm hoping I can contribute some real, substantial things about the understanding of these manuscripts and in understanding their visual architecture as a whole versus individual images.

7:37

WE: We tend to think about images having individualistic meaning and not accumulating like the words do over the length of a book. When we start thinking about a book like the Book of Kells, we have references of images all the way through. So in many ways, the images can work as a counter-narrative; they can also work as a concept and meta-concept for how to read and focus on the text. It's a very sophisticated and wonderful way of using them [images].

8:08

WE: One of the things that had slowed scholars down as well is that color is very important to these manuscripts. And when you think that a book as important as the Book of Kells only had a color facsimile in 1990... With the delicacy of these manuscripts, people just couldn't spend the time looking at these images to really figure out what was going on in them. So it's really the digital that has opened up some really intriguing ways of doing scholarship and opened up avenues of knowing that we didn't have previously.

8:45

MT: Something you just said really struck me just about how advanced this is as a concept and even a meta-concept in terms of how we're pairing the visual with also the text and just reading about the Book of Kells and also other examples of just how precise these books are. It's amazing that they're hand-lettered and hand-drawn, and just the handmade aspect of it. I think in that statement one of the things that really struck me was I feel like we're seeing a huge resurgence [in pairing the visual with text]. A lot of people are talking about multimodal composition. Really reconsidering more and more about the world around us, obviously with the Internet and everything that's part of it, and how visuals play a huge role in how we consume media and text. I'm very curious too about looking back in the past and seeing those kinds of things in these illuminated manuscripts if it gives you a greater sense of perspective in how we're approaching text today.

9:55

WE: Yes. And I think one of the things that's really interesting about this period of illuminated manuscripts that I'm studying – it's called the insular period – the manuscripts were made in 550-600 to 850 until the Vikings came in and wreaked havoc. So you have this 250-300 year period of time when the Irish and the English, actually the Anglo-Saxons, are inventing a way of visual expression. And so, in many ways it's kind of a nice way of looking in and seeing how these different cultures are coming together around Christianity. When you pull in the fact that

the manuscripts are in Latin and Latin wasn't a native language in Ireland. There was still some Latin being spoken in England from the time that the Romans were there, but that had pretty much, you know, passed on with all of the Germanic tribes.

11:06

WE: So you've got this really interesting moment in time where you've got a language that isn't orally spoken that has to be learned and then you also have a visual expression and a sense of faith. So, as those things come together it's intriguing how the Celtic cultures focused on certain design features. One of the things in the Irish culture is that there's a tradition of threes...

11:38

WE: ...which some scholars have suggested or thought perhaps it was very influential in helping Christianity catch on so quickly. There was never any martyrdom of Christians in Ireland in any big fashion, which is quite astounding. They even had to invent a form of martyrdom called white martyrdom where you left your country for the sake of Christ, never to return, so they would have a gateway to heaven as a parallel path to a red martyr, someone who is killed.

12:15

WE: So these cultural manifestations play out in really fascinating ways along with the [codices] that were able to come into both England and Ireland from the Mediterranean, from the Byzantine Empire. They all had this wonderful way of picking, choosing, incorporating different aspects, and developing. And one of the interesting things I'm working on in this point of time, when you start working with images and thinking about visual expressions there seems to be two different genealogical strands that are developing.

13:01

WE: The Great Gospels, the illuminated manuscripts, were definitely for show. There's some disagreement as to whether they were actually read from or not. But there's an emphasis on reading correctly, and there was some serious penance for not reading correctly at a service. So in one strand there's a lot of attention paid to layout, where the text is actually transcribed in two columns – in sense units, so that you could speak it more easily. The Irish actually invented space between words to help people in their reading and punctuation as well. So there's an emphasis on reading. But at the same time, there's another strand that's more interested in the visual expression of the faith, which we get to with the Book of Kells. Part of that may have been that there would be processions of Saints relics that would bring money into the church. Whether the Gospel books were used for that in Ireland, it's hard to say. Clearly at large services they would open the Gospel books up at pages; there are different rites that we have records of in Rome where they would even use four different great Gospel books, and they would move around and be open to different pages throughout the services. So their focus, although they contain the word of God, was more important or just as important as the expression visually, so they start developing techniques where they can move the text around the page to make room for imagery.

14:47

WE: Suddenly we have the word not as [an] oral phenomenon or even as a literate phenomenon as we think about it for meaning, but as a visual phenomenon, as in typography. That is where suddenly it becomes more important. One of the great inventions during this period as well was the use of vellum instead of other materials to write on. The great thing about vellum is that a quill and the inks will flow very smoothly over vellum, so you can get a beautiful script. So part of the beauty of these manuscripts, which I was going to say unfortunately or I'm not quite sure what I want to say, but it's the technology. Just like our digital technologies is making video happen today. Vellum allowed for those beautiful scripts on those manuscripts.

### **How Might Illuminated Manuscripts Help Us Understand Contemporary Digital Innovations?**

15:47

MT: So in thinking about Walter Ong and his memory and the research that surrounds me at Saint Louis University, in particular, I'm really curious to hear your thoughts about – this is a huge question – but how these illuminated manuscripts might help us think a little bit more about that transition from orality to literacy, and then even thinking beyond this particular historical vantage point too to seeing the word as a feature not only of these beautifully rendered scripts and images on vellum, but also thinking through how the word is maybe shifting today to the Internet and how we see it too. I'm always really, really intrigued by that parallel, and maybe that parallelism I need to not superimpose on [your work] Bill, and feel free to say that's the wrong way to look at it. I'm really trying to wrap my head around how what you're studying [through illuminated manuscripts] is as an excellent precursor to what we're experiencing in our own time.

16:57

WE: No, I think the question you're asking is really at the heart of the matter or at one of the hearts of the matters. Some people, particularly in the 1990s, were very nervous about digital technologies and the image because of how we think about text and how Walter Ong actually opened up a sense of thinking about Gutenberg's invention, thinking about writing and how it shaped our consciousness, and how writing opened up ways of thinking to us that – it's always hard to say that they weren't possible before, but clearly they made it much easier. It's hard to think about the book-length argument before writing, and what that might look like. Clearly we have our intellectual tradition.

18:05

WE: Our intellectual tradition is the book in many ways. We can't separate the two, but when I move into this territory, I always think Plato had it right. His skepticism towards writing was really I think spot-on, in the fact that knowledge stops living when it's written down. You can't respond to context [Clarification from WE: What I meant to be saying here is that written text

can't respond to shifts in context]. I think where we probably moved through and one of our biggest challenges with writing, and what makes for good writing, bringing in that context so that context is part of the expression. I think that was probably something that Plato didn't have time to think through. I think it's probably taken us hundreds of years to think through how to weave context into a piece of writing to make it more viable, but still context shifts. We misunderstand I think a lot of what is in writing itself.

19:20

WE: So as we're kind of moving into the digital realm, I think one of the interesting things for me is that how something like video pulls context back into the equation in really dynamic ways. It's hard to feel the same way about something when you're seeing pictures of it versus just hearing about it. I can describe the Book of Kells to you, but seeing it is a whole other experience. I think with the move from writing, and where I think Plato has his finger on something and I think we're moving back towards this and we're rethinking this, and I think it's probably going to change how we write as well – because I think it will focus us on it in even more ways – is that with words it's very easy to believe in the Cartesian split between mind and body – that words on a page can feel more mental than physical. When we start doing things with the digital, when we start having images, I think it pulls the body back into play and it reunites us in a whole being kind of way, that is absolutely wonderful.

20:44

WE: Todd Taylor did a set of interviews on video of rhet-comp people. I always show a portion of those [interviews] to my 609 class, the teaching of writing class. And something that always comes out in those videos is just the joy, the dedication, and the fascination that the scholars have with teaching writing, but more so just that dedication and joy with what they're doing. It comes out in those videos in ways that I think if Todd Taylor – Todd Taylor did a great job with the video – but I think if he would have tried to edit that out, he couldn't have. When people read the scholarship, then they have a different sense having seen these scholars and reading their pieces rather than not seeing these scholars and reading these pieces, I think it brings a whole other dimension in. It's like once you've heard a poet read his own work, you read his work differently. I think that is the constant struggle with writing, that text on the page does lose something from the performance of that text by the writer. So consequently I think that Walter Ong is a perfect person to pull back into this equation because the question is how does this make our consciousness different, how does it make us different intellectuals, how does it make us different people, or invite us to be different people? We have great say in how we shape our technologies. I think that's why [Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's work](#) was so important at the get-go [and still is], is to have rhetoric and composition people studying these technologies and getting some say in this from the get-go.

22:57

WE: One other thing I'll just add on as well. In working with these manuscripts the conflict at that point in time was between the visual and the oral and not necessarily the literal and the

visual. Because it was almost accepted that not everybody would know Latin, but I have to wonder – and this is probably me speculating more than I should – but when I taught English in Japan I used to love going over to the train station and write. And hearing people talk in the background, and Japanese and Americans tend to speak very quickly, and my Japanese wasn't so good that I couldn't understand what was being said unless I really paid attention. The human voice, if it's separated from meaning, sounds just beautiful in concert. I used to enjoy that aspect of listening to the human voice. I have to wonder if that is the experience of people in general, even how well some of the monks and the priests actually knew Latin is really in question. [I wonder] if it was more of the experience of hearing the sound of the human voice and having a sense of the meaning rather than following the meaning. I think orality had a slightly different sense and tie-in to consciousness particularly in the insular world and the British Isles than what it does for us when we start to talk about literacy, orality and the visual.

24:51

WE: And I think when the visual was coming into play it was coming into play in a realm where there was that oral tradition that may not be quite as connected to meaning as we might think it would be.

### How Does Your Background as a Poet Influence Your Experience of Kairos?

25:08

MT: One of the things that you kind of hit upon that I just would love to know more about... one of the things that really makes me excited is to hear about your trajectory through the academy but also looking at your research is also hearing more about your background as a poet. I know you are an accomplished poet. One of the things I'm interested in is has your background as a poet really influenced your definition of *kairos* and how you view that?

25:43

WE: I think what it has done is it's made invention and *kairos* really central to what I do. In my beginning work on the Book of Kells, I was really looking at invention techniques that they were using, and that's still extremely intriguing to me. I think I have unraveled it to some extent, but it's really hard to prove that this was what they were up to with it. In the Book of Kells one of the things that they did, is they figured out ways of moving text and displacing it to make room for imagery.

26:30

WE: But the imagery was never, of course, random imagery; it was very important. One of the things that they, the monks, were devoted to in becoming monks was being closer to God. John Cassian had this sense that one wanted to move into a state where they were in a constant



remembrance of God. Now how do you think about God every moment of the day? That is quite a tough task. But when you start playing with imagery suddenly there's some clues on how to do this. One of the traditions has a lion as a symbol for Christ, but the lion portrays many different aspects of Christ.

27:27

WE: And one of the things that was believed about the lions, and this comes out of a book called the *Physiologus*, which goes back to Greek and Egyptian tales of animals. It was believed that the lion slept, actually slept with its eyes open, so that it was forever awake. This particular trait of the lion was associated with Christ having control over life and death, that even on the cross His spirit was watchful. It was also believed that lions were born stillborn. That after three days the male lion would roar or breathe into the cub's face and bring it to life. So here we've got the imagery of the crucifixion and resurrection. It was believed that the lion only revealed itself to whomever it wanted to see it. So that if it was out and a hunter was stalking it, it was believed that a lion would actually use its tail to cover its tracks. So when you move into the Book of Kells you find passages where suddenly if you read that passage, you can think that passage with these four or five different attributes of Christ.

28:59

WE: It has you inventing ways of seeing into scripture that you would not see into scripture otherwise. In the Book of Kells in some of the passages where these lions appear – I was trying to remember the exact Matthew chapter and verse, I won't pull that out of my head – but there's a moment where Christ is gathering his apostles. And one of them says, "Christ, I will come with you, but let me bury my father first." And Christ says something that sounds just terribly callous. It's like who is this guy? [Christ says,] "Well, let the dead bury the dead. Come on, don't worry about that." And so, in this particular passage in the Book of Kells, we see the lion appear, and it actually misplaces text, so it slows down your reading, it throws it to the line above. So in that moment when Christ says that it's a very difficult verse to understand, but if you think about the verse within the attributes of Christ, particularly Him revealing himself to those whom he wants to reveal himself to, so he's honoring the disciple or the person he's asked to be a disciple by showing His true nature. But I think the other more important attribute is Christ's control over life and death. Because He has power over life and death burying the dead isn't so important, that being part of the faith is.

30:41

WE: So I think when we start looking at these images and thinking about how invention is working with them, is that they're really having a dialogue with the text itself and giving you this collection of things to juxtapose, so you can keep thinking, turning things over in your mind in a very focused way that can lead to understanding and perspective.

31:13

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WE: So as a poet, thinking about invention has me moving in and thinking through these issues with imagery that again, I don't know if I can quite prove this is what they're up to and doing, but I'm collecting an awful lot of evidence from the pages themselves and the imagery to suggest that this is really what they were doing.

31:45

WE: When someone would join a monastery, in particular the Columba monastery, where the Book of Kells was most likely made, this would have been a true focus of their lives to enter into, boy, the top of ... the goal was to perfect the mind and heart, so you could have this oneness with Christ and to have imagery play itself out in The Book of Kells, and the Book of Kells has over 2,000 unique decorated initials in it alone. How do you invent imagery on that scale unless you have some standard techniques and practices do that?

### **Surrealism, Kairos, and Illuminated Texts: A Surprise Around Every Corner**

32:29

WE: So as a poet, I think that sense of invention comes in. I think the other thing is Book of Kells is crazy. The Medieval Period is probably closest to the Surrealist Period than any other period in time, and I love the Surrealist poets.

32:48

WE: Their sense of invention, their trust in surprise around every corner, has me looking for surprises around every corner as well. So, yeah, being a poet I think has influenced invention, but I think it also makes me very skeptical about language.

33:12

WE: I studied under Charlie Simic and one of his favorite things to always say was that, you know, the life of the poet was basically to constantly fail because you never can say things like you really want them to that do the experience justice. So you're always trying to get closer and closer and closer, but you're always going to fail. I think thinking about language as being in a constant state of failure, which that sounds very pessimistic [laughter] or cynical, I'm not sure which, but I think thinking about it as that being the state of language encourages me to push on language but also to push on other things like visuals to see how they can come together and perhaps speak to that human condition just a little bit more clearly or precisely.

34:21

MT: That's beautiful. I don't think that's pessimistic or even negative. Language it is limited in terms of what you're able to convey, but also just thinking about who has access to it and who doesn't. There are so many different things in terms of that. I think that healthy dose of skepticism that Charlie Simic and other aspects of your poetry background, I think that's really

helpful and a really powerful way to think about it. I've never quite thought of it like that, so that's really interesting.

35:00

WE: I thought of this when I started to speak and then I was going to come back to it. That sense of *kairos* – I think why I'm so taken with the Surrealists is that they believed in spontaneity; that is *kairos*. It's reading the moment, being ready for the moment.

35:23

WE: I think particularly classical rhetoricians really work to prepare for that moment because if the moment comes and you don't have the wherewithal to meet it, the rhetorical experience or rhetorical moment is lost. I think understanding a way of being in the moment so that you can respond to it or have ways of inventing things that make the moment more or meet its challenges, is really what it's all about.

35:59

WE: One of my favorite Surrealist stories comes from Octavio Paz. And he was visiting Andre Breton and Breton was doing some work on a poem, and they were meeting for lunch and [Breton] kind of held up his hand to [signal to] wait for a moment. He was crossing things out and reworking them. Octavio Paz looked at him when he got up and came to him. [Paz] said, "Well, what were you doing? You were crossing things out and rewriting; what was that all about?" And Breton said, "Well, you know I just wasn't spontaneous enough."

36:40

WE: I think that when we think about that moment and how I like to think about that moment is that when we are isolated in our writing sometimes that *kairotic* moment isn't there to push us into a context where something more interesting and exciting can happen. Kairos is really one of those things that really drives my thinking. I think we need to be always aware of that because I think sometimes, in academic life in particular, we can become isolated in our work. I think it's that involvement with people and community that really I think brings out the best of us in our best inventive moments.

### **The Future of Marginalia: Particle Accelerators**

37:38

MT: Ah, that's good. I have chills, Bill. That's awesome. [Laughter] I think that's true. I think that's the heart of why hopefully anyone begins to study, ponder, and meander among the concepts of rhetoric and what that looks like. Whatever little niche we end up inhabiting and looking through, so I love that. I am going to change gears for a moment.

38:08

MT: One of the things I did in preparation for this interview was to listen to some of the things you've said in the past. So, I went to the University of Kentucky's the College of Arts & Sciences and listened to a little short [10-minute podcast](#) you did on digitizing the past. I was really intrigued by one of the comments you said about recovering worn or erased Old Welsh writing in the margins of the St. Chad Gospels. What do you want to recover in the marginalia? Second, what do you think the future of marginalia might look like? [Laughter] That's a big loaded question, but the first one I'm really excited to hear what you're looking for or what you think or hope to find with that particular manuscript?

38:56

WE: Ah, that's a great question, particularly the one about what will marginalia look like in the future. Let me hit the first one first. [MT: Okay.] In the St. Chad Gospels one of the things that happened with the Gospels book was that it ended up in Wales. And for a long time people thought it was a Welsh manuscript; however, it didn't quite make sense, from the marginalia, of what could have happened to it. What happened was a Welshman named Gelhi – and I'm probably not pronouncing that correctly – but he actually traded his best horse for the Chad Gospels and then donated it to the Church. So what we think happened – it could have been the Vikings or some other warring faction raiding ...

39:57

WE: Anglo Saxon or actually the Welsh would raid the Mercia kingdom. It may have been a book of spoils; it would have had a jeweled cover, probably of gold with some silver in it. And they would steal these books, rip off their covers, and then pitch 'em. Somebody probably realized how important that manuscript was and thought [s/he] could get something more out of it. So if he was willing to trade a horse for it, it was probably worth more than a horse. I'm guessing [Gelhi] came to it by questionable means. So it spent this time in Wales – so, there's all sorts of wonderful mixed writing in it: it's a mixture of Latin and Old Welsh. The oldest surviving written Welsh is in the Chad Gospels. And on one page in particular it seems clear that one page has something erased off of it.

41:00

WE: And what I was hopeful to find out is if I can recover that is that it may give some serious clues about the province of the manuscript. Since we don't know for certain, it's hard to say what was there, for all we really know it could have been graffiti that someone was trying to clean off, but most likely it has something to say. It is a spot that is large enough that it should have substantial text to it. One of the interesting things is there is a technique we can use to probably recover this – and I feel silly with saying this – the only thing it requires is a particle accelerator.

41:51

WE: And for some of the pages of the [Archimedes Palimpsest](#), what they did is a physicist at Stanford University figured out how to use a particle accelerator to have a beam that is focused

enough that would actually send – I think it's an electron into the vellum – send something out, so it can read on the molecular level what is still there, and through that you can recreate the text or get a shadow of the text and actually read it. I think there's 4-7 pages of the Archimedes Palimpsest that they couldn't read through infrared or ultraviolet and this technique actually worked for.

42:42

WE: I think to do a page it takes about a day. There is hope that we can figure this out sooner or later, but it's going to take some pretty dramatic means, like a particle accelerator. But my sense is that scientists will keep getting more and more clever about recovering these sort of things. So, it's really kind of at the heart of the issue about where the Book of Kells was made [and] its history. For a long time there was real tension between the Welsh and the English, it's at an English church at this point in time, about who owned the manuscript. There are some real delicate political maneuverings that happened. Even as late as the year 2002, the British Library actually had a show of illuminated manuscripts and had the Chad Gospels there. They did some imaging and created a short turning of the pages and they had to work with both cathedrals, the cathedral in Wales and Lichfield to make that project happen.

43:56

WE: Since then there was an angel that was found buried beneath the cathedral when they were doing some reconstruction. That angel has the same pigments as the Lichfield Gospels or at least the same palate, so that seems to be pretty solid proof that the Chad Gospels [were] actually made in Lichfield.

44:21

WE: There's also a connection with Ireland and a connection with Northumbria, or northern England, that would suggest that it was to have been made in England as well. I'm pretty certain that it does have an English, Anglo-Saxon origin, but I was hoping we would find out something, even if we could recover some more Old Welsh, it would add to what scholars do have that is there. But I think figuring out some of the mysteries behind the histories of these manuscripts is just absolutely wonderful, if it can happen, but, alas, it didn't happen in this project.

45:02

MT: No, but I think that's great ... the particle accelerator aspect of it. I mean I come from an anthropology background, so just thinking about the archaeological aspects of that, it's huge. I think it's just fascinating to see this [methodology] become a part of the way we're going to be able to detect marginalia in the future. [Laughter] So, I'm absolutely blown away. Oh my gosh, this is *Back to the Future*. That's amazing.

45:31

WE: Now, the second part of your question, I think, is very intriguing. One of my greatest joys in reading a book is to write notes in the margins. So I love to scribble thoughts, questions, whatever in the margins. Digital technologies change that quite a bit, and there are basically the sticky pads for books now and PDF. Acrobat allows you to do notes, but it just doesn't seem like it's quite there yet. I'm not sure what marginalia will look like in the future, but I hope that it's good and messy, and that we have plenty of ways of doing it because I think many times that gives you a context that is lost otherwise. I think our understanding is greatly reduced without [marginalia]. So I'm hoping there will be some sorts of records, maybe it will be when somebody who is 1,000 or 2,000 years removed from us, they'll be connecting Facebook posts with an author's writing or something or what they were reading in ways that illuminate some of the issues and aspects of the culture that make for understanding the words resonate more deeply is gone.

47:16

WE: One of the things I know the librarians are thinking about this a lot. We just built a digital repository at the University of Kentucky. It's coming online literally right now [April 2012] and I've got the Chad Gospels in there. We're working out some of the interface stuff at this point in time. This system instead of going to a traditional database, they've gone to something called "micro services," which is more like a file structure, so you don't have a proprietary database that is another layer of complexity, but you've got this file system so you know where everything resides and you can just reach in and grab it.

48:05

WE: So it's going to be interesting to see if something like ... I think the goal of JavaScript was to try to come up with this universal access language that would make things programmable in ways [that] everybody can use and have some longevity. But I know this is an issue seriously on the minds of librarians because if you change databases, how do you get something out of your old database and into the new? [MT: Exactly.] It becomes a huge issue.

## The Digital as a Methodology

48:50

MT: In talking about just what the University of Kentucky is doing, they seem so forward thinking with a lot of the things they are doing, not only with the librarians you just mentioned but also with the [Center for Visualization and Virtual Environments](#) that's also there [at the University of Kentucky] that you're affiliated with. Just thinking about that forward-lookingness of your learning institution but also looking outward, I'm very much interested in terms of learning a little bit more about what your experiences have taught you about working with lots of different folks across disciplines, such as [Brent Seales](#), your collaborator who is in computer sciences, and other colleagues you have within the Viz Center, as they call it. I think the other

question I have, and again I don't like pigeonholing people, I would love to know if you consider yourself a digital humanist and if that's something you would describe yourself as?

49:48

WE: Let's see, I'll take the second part of that question first. [MT: Sure!] I think getting back to I don't like to define myself too greatly. I think that I do like calling myself a digital something. I'm comfortable being a digital humanist [and] a visual rhetorician, but I don't want to get too wrapped up in any of the titles. Again I'm always thinking about the digital as a methodology as anything else. So, I think you've got me in an illogical loop in my head.

50:44

MT: No, that makes sense. [Laughter] Well, you know the panel that I went to that I briefly shared in the context of the questions, I need to remember her name, but she's at Michigan State, [MT: I remembered! [Dr. Liza Potts](#) in the CCCC 2012 panel, "New Gateways for Research: Digital Humanities and Writing Studies"], and one of the things she said, "They're going to change the title of this. Don't get too caught up in what they're calling it." She basically said the same thing you said. It's a methodology. Whether or not this is something you call yourself or not. I think you're right. I think it's really healthy to be critical of that. I was just curious if that was something you would dub yourself or not [as a digital humanist].

51:14

WE: Yeah, I think the humanist part is in there. Because technology when it first came out – the computer – it seems so cold to people and reducing everything to bits and bytes and zeros and ones just didn't seem to have much sensibility towards the human condition whatsoever. So I think, as in all of our technologies, we figure out or how to make them feel or help us feel comfortable with them. Even something simple like our screensavers or our background images that we put on our desktops suddenly allow us an expression through the technology. I think the humanism has probably always been in that title or was thrown into that title early because it was something that would unite people working in the humanities and make the technology seem less threatening or less non-human or less artificial. I think we always have a love-hate relationship with technology; we always have to figure out how to get it to work for us, but technology also has a life of its own and invites us to do certain things that we might not like to really go down that road.

So, I think that skepticism towards technology, but that need or that desire or that sense that it could open up great possibilities is what probably united those two titles together: the digital humanist, digital humanities. But I think hopefully we'll get to the point where we can think about it as a methodology, not a ... I don't want to say that people are threatened by the digital, but I think there's a healthy skepticism towards the digital and academics tends to be a pretty conservative place, particularly with methodology and creation of knowledge, so that I think in many ways it can be slow to embrace new possibilities.

53:41

WE: Part of that is that once you have a research agenda in place, you know, it has a momentum of its own. I think figuring this stuff out is time-consuming. I'm always, you know when I think about the digital technologies, I'm always reminding myself that it took 100-120 years after the invention of the printing press for the numbered index to catch on. And you say [to yourself] how did that not catch on quicker? I think any sort of change takes time. This title [digital humanities] and the fact that people are questioning this title or thinking about this title at this point in time says we are changing and we have integrated things, the digital, into our worlds that are productive, that we're starting to get a better handle on what it is, and what we might want to call ourselves in the future.

### The Future of Computers & Writing: 3D Imaging

54:46

MT: Well switching gears from that particular question, I was going to ask you a question that's asked of many *Kairos'* profiles, people who are interviewed [by the journal]. I was looking through the [*Kairos'*] archives everyone from [Noam Chomsky](#) to [Hugh Burns](#) to all of these amazing people, and I was like oh my gosh; this is wonderful. At the kernel of [this recurring interview question] is to distill and capture the wisdom of what you have and others have as well, and that is what do you think is the most exciting aspect in terms of the future of computers and writing? What really gets you excited about thinking about that particular field?

55:28

WE: Well, wow, that is a great question. There are so many aspects to it. I think for me it's difficult to answer because I see so much open space with it. I think the possibilities of what we can do are unfathomable. When we start thinking about the digital as a methodology I think that starts us moving into the area this opens knowledge up to us that it wasn't open to us previously. Just to move this [question] down and close and near to my heart. I really am driven to figure out what these monks were up to in their visual expression. To do that I need access to these manuscripts, and the digital makes that possible. Printing facsimile versions is just too expensive. The other problem with doing the printing of facsimiles is that we need color because the color is a large part of being able to see these things and to understand what they are about. So in thinking about the digital technologies and thinking about it as a methodology, we can also think about them as a new way of seeing and opening up new possibilities that we couldn't see previously.

57:00

WE: Even with something like ultraviolet imaging and to see text that is worn and understand what's there, suddenly I'm basing my scholarship on more data, more accurate data. So I have the possibility to contribute substantially just from the possibilities of what the digital has opened up to me.



57:26

WE: Looking at the St. Chad Gospels, you've got a small cathedral that doesn't have a whole lot of money in the Midlands. It's a cathedral that when the canals went through, they were passed over; when the rail went through, they were passed over; and when the motor highway went through, they were passed over. So they're kind of sitting there in the Midlands and they've gone through a resurgence recently, but the digital technologies makes that possible in ways that for me to go in, someone from Kentucky here, to digitize this manuscript and then start unlocking its secrets. And when I start unlocking some its secrets and since [St. Chad Gospels] was made 60-70 years before the Book of Kells, by the time you get to the Book of Kells, they're taking techniques to such extremes sometimes it's hard to figure out what they're trying to accomplish. But by moving back to the St. Chad Gospels, I get an early look at those techniques as they're developing, and I get a better sense of their expression. Digital technologies make that possible for me in ways that it wasn't possible before. We also took 3D images of every page, which is very cool.

58:59

WE: We did it with a very clever... the folks at the Viz Center are very, very clever with how they figure out problems. They usually try to figure out a problem with some sort of very over-the-counter, low-cost solution. How they did the 3D imaging is that they literally project 22 patterns over a page and take pictures of it. And from how those shifting patterns change, they can read the contour of the page. So we've got 3D images of every page of these manuscripts. When you have 3D images, you can then measure everything. So we can measure holes in the vellum. In 50 years if somebody wants to know how that hole has changed, we can tell [him or her] the size of the hole was in 2010. 3D is going to open up just amazing possibilities.

59:59

WE: One of the things we can do with the 3D images as well then is flatten a page. So we can get a sense of what it looked like originally and how the text and the images were actually laid out. Some manuscripts are really buckled and in horrible shape. The St. Chad Gospels was in good shape; it had been rebound in 1962 and Roger Powell did a wonderful job with his work. Here in just this small little area, in my little corner of the world, the digital is opening up all sorts of possibilities.

1:00:36

WE: And then when we start being able to compare the Chad Gospels to the Book of Kells, pulling images side-by-side, then we can really look at these things and start understanding them. When we start doing things like encoding the decoration, we don't know exactly why they have these minor decorated initials, the letters within the Gospels themselves with decoration on them, some decorated and some not. They don't necessarily follow verses or chapters. There's something else going on with them. They are connected with Eusebian canon tables and for various readings for services. We don't really know what's going on. We can

start comparing between manuscripts and where they are similar. We can probably come up, gradually through the process of illumination, what they're visually expressing with these particular decorated initials. So to kind of, again, my little corner of the world, it's opening all sorts of possibilities for scholarship, for us to understand these manuscripts and actually to see their correspondences in ways we haven't seen previously.

1:02:03

WE: I hate to think about how this opens up the world in other ways. I know that geographers are doing some great and wonderful things as far as maps are concerned and annotations. I think we're at the very beginning stages of what is going to be possible in the future.

1:02:24

WE: That's been one of the wonderful things about the "visual turn," if I don't overuse W.J.T. Mitchell's phrasing too much here. I think it opens up normal disciplinary boundaries and that people cross over them more frequently in trying to figure out what's going on.

### Who Are Your Scholarly Influences?

1:02:53

WE: I think in thinking through as far as people are concerned one of the areas that I think has happened and is very interesting is that rhetoricians who are based in English departments and rhetoricians in communications departments, they have some interaction but not nearly what you would think that they would have. One area communications folks have done marvelous work [in] has been in the visual field. Someone like [Paul Messaris](#) has done fabulous, fabulous work. Lester Olson, [Cara Finnegan](#), and Diane Hope did a wonderful edited collection not too long ago with visual rhetoricians in it, on the communications side, which is really quite fabulous. One of my hopes is that dialogues will start coming into place with the visuals and maybe we can unite the rhetoricians in the two different fields in stronger ways. I think the other thing I think in thinking about influences, is that you start thinking about the people's work that you love, like [Anne Wysocki](#), who has been very influential. Her work is always so smart and wonderful. Of course, [Cynthia Selfe](#) and [Gail Hawisher](#), which anybody working in the fields of computers and composition owe them great gratitude and the work that they've done has been absolutely fabulous. In my work, [Geoffrey Sirc](#), who has spent time working on the Surrealists and pulling them into [composition] and computer theory has been very helpful. The edited collection by Charles Hill and Marguerite Helmers' *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, which would be the counterpart to Lester Olson and Cara Finnegan's book, which is wonderful and rich with visual rhetoricians. Somebody else who has been very important has been the work of Gunther Kress. I don't know if he would call himself a visual rhetorician, but clearly his work with the New London Group, and the work of the New London Group, has been extremely helpful. When I start combining all of that through and pulling from people in the field of Medieval Studies – Michael Camille who is absolutely fabulous – and employing someone like [Scott McCloud's](#) work in understanding comics, suddenly you have this dynamics of interacting

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voices in your head that lead to very interesting moments of *kairos* and invention. And of course: [W.J.T. Mitchell](#). I dearly love his work, and he's coming from an art historian [and] literary side. He's just absolutely fabulous.

MT: I think that's really helpful to have that context. So thank you. Thank you so much for making [your scholarly influences] even more explicit.

1:06:40

WE: Ah, good! I'm glad that was helpful.