

## Keith Dorwick interviewed by Susan Delagrange

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### Part 1

#### Susan Delagrange

I think I want to just start with the first question that's on the list because I think because of the importance of yours as one of the earlier texts. Maybe we should start with history. So at this point, how do you feel your webtext was innovative in a historical or material context?

#### Keith Dorwick

Oh, my webtext. Well, there's a whole bunch of things I wouldn't do now. The colors, for one. But I think the most innovative thing about my webtext is that it was deliberately designed as a webtext for both print and for screen. So you have the webtext version . . . but let me go back a step. Historically, that's my dissertation perspective. And I sent a page to Mick Dougherty when he was editor of *Kairos*. I sooo miss him. I sent him the page in which he defines native hypertext in one of its earliest definitions. That was his term, I'm pretty sure And I said, "Look, I'd like to use your definition." And so I sent him the page that I had quoted him from *Kairos*, and he wrote back right away and said. "I want to publish this," because he had taken a look at the whole thing. So that's how I got my first publication. And I did a very light edit on it, just enough to get things like prospectus and dissertation out and change it to article or essay in. So that was part of it. But there's two things that I think about, that I still think are interesting formally about it. One is that I had a lot of contentions with my fem graduate school at the University of Illinois Chicago and with my dissertation director Jim Sosnoski, who was mostly supportive but worried for me. And so one of the things that happened is I designed it so that each node would reference links that were the titles of another node. And so the way it would work on the web was obvious: you click, you go. But the way it would work when it was printed out is that I arranged them alphabetically. And so then, as you move through the print text, you would see a link, denoted as a link with an underline (you lost the blue because I was printing in black and white) but when . . . you could then flip back to the table of contexts . . . contents which was also organized alphabetically and get a page number, and you open it up to the page number. So it was like one of those find-your-own-adventure novels. And so it works . . . and I was following earlier experiments with print hypertext. Like that novel that was printed on cardboard in sheets

#### Susan Delagrange

Yes.

**Keith Dorwick**

... and tied with a ribbon, and you shuffled it? That's what I was thinking about when I did this.

**Susan Delagrang**

There was never any consideration, it sounds like, that you might actually present your dissertation as a webtext?

**Keith Dorwick**

Well, I actually did, in a backwards sort of way. What I did with it was, I had originally proposed, like a seven-page dissertation, 'cause my university insisted on a print artifact; and so I said, "Well, what about the usual six pages – signature page, acknowledgements, that kind of thing - and a page saying "Here's where we're going; go visit my hypertext!" And they said, "No." But I had already prepared for that; that's why I did the print version. I didn't have to re-write that; I had planned for that. But then I... When I actually turned it in, one of the pages... I have a page in my print dissertation that says, "Go to the webtext." I just recently realized that I didn't archive it well, and that in fact is lost. I have it somewhere. It in fact is gone. So I'll reinstate that somewhere. It should live on the web somewhere just because it is an early text and I guess the first dissertation on the web.

**Susan Delagrang**

The webtext holds up very well. I mean, it still works in almost all of its parts. There are occasional links out of your webtext that are no longer there. Can't link to your syllabi any more, which is something that could be fixed, but linking out to outside things that are literally gone is trickier. Do you have any thoughts on that aspect of web publishing?

**Keith Dorwick**

Absolutely! It's a standard for us at *Technoculture*. So we don't allow linking out. Everything has to be internal. We have one exception – a document that we simply couldn't get to convert to a usable form – and so we had to leave it out on the author's space. But other than that, every single bit of *Technoculture* is on our servers. And lives there and is backed up nightly. Because it's really important not to have web rot to me. I published an article on web rot that came out of my dissertation. So I think that's part of the thing. If I can go back a step?

**Susan Delagrang**

Yes. Certainly.

**Keith Dorwick**

Okay. The other formal aspect that I still think is really valuable but I don't think plays out in execution as well as it might is the colors of pages are not random. What they are is to represent sections of the dissertation. They are in fact the equivalent of chapters. And I'm not sure that that reads because I don't think I ever explained that anywhere, but I think it anticipates things that were very hard to do back then but now are pretty straightforward like Drupal themes and subthemes, where you can put a look on a page. That's how we divide up *Technocultures* – into volumes.

**Susan Delagrang**

One artifact of the newness of webtexts that's present in your piece is the extensive directions you give to people about how to use it. Do you think that is now just unnecessary because so many people are familiar and we don't do it? Or are there reasons that we might still want to do something like that?

**Keith Dorwick**

It's a rhetorical consideration. It's audience. So if you think your webtext is going to people who don't know how to read hypertext, then we probably should still. But I think generally, I don't think we think about webtext at all as webtext. Nobody thinks about Facebook as a hypertext. Nobody thinks about chase.com as a webtext. Right? In modern application, it's the same thing. So I think people are past that point; I think everybody knows how to read hypertext. And many people know how to write it or at least engage them actively as well as just reading them. I don't think we need to give directions for how to do hypertext unless there's a reason to do so – an audience consideration. Other than that, I think people know how to engage hypertext.

**Susan Delagrang**

How do you think that the webtext influenced the trajectory of the field, you know, maybe in that it influenced other people to be brave which has always been, you know, we've . . . probably everybody on that list dealt with a dissertation director at some point who worried in the same way. But it was influential. Do you think that it is still is pertinent, or only artifactually now?

**Keith Dorwick**

I think it's mostly artifactually. In reading it, I think it still stands up. I think I said interesting and useful things. I'm not sure how many people are still citing it I'm not sure how many people are still citing it now. It's from 1996. Published in 1998. So I'm not sure that other than archival it has any influence. I think in its day it did. It

was certainly a widely cited article for a while, for probably as many as seven, 10 years after it was published. It doesn't get cited much these days. Still does though, occasionally, I will occasionally run into it in a contemporary citation, and I'm like, really? So I'm glad it's not like totally stupid! But it certainly led to a work of mine that I did . . . let's see, *Texts and Technology*? . . . Ollie Oviedo and Janice Walker. There's an essay in it that's based upon my dissertation process and that one is still being cited. That's pretty, people mention it from time to time. I have to add that Joe Moxley gave it a really bad review when he was summing up hypertext dissertations. I believe he called it garish, but that was because we loved color back then. You know how it was. We could do it for the first time without having to pay an outrageous amount of money. So I got a little [unintelligible].

**Susan Delagrange**

On the other hand, the color – there was a reason for it. So the choice of color might be different, but the color would still be incredibly useful in the sense that you've described.

**Keith Dorwick**

I think so. I think it helps move through the diss. Well, not the diss. Well both, but the *Kairos* article, I think, if I remember right in the citation, navigation was one of the big issues, because it is really easy to navigate.

**Susan Delagrange**

Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact when I occasionally went back to the table of contents when I was going through it again yesterday, I was surprised where I was, but knew why I was there.

**Keith Dorwick**

Oh, good!

**Susan Delagrange**

Because moving from link to link, you often move from one section to another part, but if it makes sense, it makes sense. So, a couple of questions about now. What are you working on now? Maybe you could talk a little bit about *Technoculture* too.

**Keith Dorwick**

Oh, I'd love to. *Technoculture* is hugely successful, I think, for a relatively new journal. We are just getting 2014, volume 4 in place. Most of it is up there, just a few little stragglers. And we changed our submission dates from August 1st cut-off to May 1st cut-off, so we'll have the summer to work on stuff. We have . . . I forget the

exact number, but it's like a huge number of readers and a huge number of hits. Let me go to TC really fast, and then I can get today's figures. So I think that's it. And I really like, the thing I like most about *Technoculture* is that it is cross-disciplinary. So we have as of, within the last year - have to take off my glasses - 524,317 visitors - in other words, hits on the site in Drupal-talk - and then the unique visitors - in other words, readers - are up to 44,475; that's since April 16, 2014. So a lot of people are reading us, and a lot of people are citing us. And I love that *Technoculture* is both a creative and a critical journal.

### **Susan Delagrang**

As do I. And it's . . . that's one thing that's unique about it, I think. I think others work across disciplines a little bit often, but you're right. The creative part, I think, is something that *Technoculture* has always emphasized.

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## **Part 2**

### **Susan Delagrang**

Anything else exciting coming along in the way of your own publications?

### **Keith Dorwick**

Yes. I just had a new hypertext come out, as a matter of fact, in *Liminalities*. It just came out a few days ago. And it's on female-to-male transgendered young men who use testosterone. And what I do is address the idea of what has been an essentialist idea of the body actually "being there" and being subject to what we know. But I argue that it's another form of social constructivism - the use of testosterone - which really does change the body amazingly. I argue that it is a method of social construction because these men are choosing to use testosterone to transition. It's not a random choice. It's been thought out. It's often been [unintelligible] really heavily fought for because it's expensive. Many of my subjects are Canadian, and that's because they have socialized medicine, so it's covered. So they just have to say "I need it," and then they go through some psychological testing, and they get testosterone. So the form of it is case studies, and I looked at some really interesting people. And these you men are very articulate and they've been using what are called T-diaries - and that's testosterone diaries - to document their change starting, for instance, with their attempts to get into the system - that's especially for the American subjects, the U.S. subjects - and then they document things like their very first shot. They'll document things like breast removal - what's called top surgery. They'll document things like their gender reassignment surgery - bottom, the addition of the penis and it's just really fascinating stuff, especially as you watch

the voices, or rather listen to the voices deepen, facial and body hair begin to sprout in ways that it hadn't before. And it is just such a stunning transformation.

I used videos from YouTube – there's tons of them out there – and in fact I want to pick up that project again and turn it into a full-length project as soon as I get some of the backlog out. But it's really interesting. One of them doesn't have videos because that young man decided to go what's called stealth. And so he was recording all these diaries and then he decided that he wanted to pass – all the time, 100% - as male, rather than passing as transgendered male. And so we asked people not to send him any of these, not to keep them, not to archive them. He didn't go so far as to say destroy them, but he did say, "Don't, don't . . . If you see me on the street, don't say "Hi" and reference to my status." And so forth. So I honored that.

**Susan Delagrang**

Interesting! A lot of your scholarship and your teaching actually has gender as a focus. I'm not exactly sure how to fold this question back into *Kairos* and webtexts, but I do think that *Kairos* has worked hard to deal with, to look for diversity within the material that it sometimes solicits, sometimes just comes to them. And I don't know if you have anything to say about that or not?

**Keith Dorwick**

I do. In terms of gender. Gender, of course, as I indicated is a social construct. We all know that. And it's very much a performance therefore. And there's no better way to document performance. It's one thing for me to say, "Their voices got very deep." It's another thing to have a series of videos in which the voices get very deep and you can hear the difference. It's one thing to say "They now have body hair where they did not." And they will do things like show their chests. They will do things like show armpits. Some of them show crotches just to show everything that is changing the bo . . . They are so proud of the change of bodies. And webtexts give a way to document that and to display that in ways that mere print can't. And that's the big difference. Anything that's a performance is benefited by this stuff.

**Susan Delagrang**

To use text as the only medium, really . . . it's like writing about dance.

**Keith Dorwick**

Yeah. As opposed to showing the dance.

**Susan Delagrang**

Yes.

**Keith Dorwick**

Or writing about film; just show the film. Happens in teaching too. I love teaching film classes on line because I could just put a link. I use a number of sources. I don't use YouTube. I use commercial sources where they can rent the video, and – or buy it. Their choice. And so there's just a lot of stuff out there and I can just put it out there and say, " You watch it by Monday at 10 pm." We begin discussing on Tuesday. We discuss it for the next week, and meanwhile also watch the next thing. Now that's not to say that students do it. [laughter] On the other hand, I've always thought that film classes that take place in a traditional face-to-face classroom where you're bringing a bunch of students together to watch a film together is eating up horribly into the time you could be discussing.

**Susan Delagrange**

There's a question here about curation. . . . I also don't worry at all about whether the work that I do lasts a huge amount of time. . . . The idea that something won't be preserved I don't think is felt as problematic by those of us who work in multimodal environments.

**Keith Dorwick**

I find it problematic. Too many web journals have broken links all over the place. *Kairos*, as you know, is really careful with that. There's still a couple of them, you know – my article included. There's a couple of broken places that I should probably fix some day. *Kairos's* then decision - I don't know if you'all are still doing it - but that archived text vs. live text distinction – that was certainly prevalent then, is really helpful. At *Technoculture* we think about it all the time. Because while we don't think we're here for the ages, on the other hand, it would be nice to be around for more than 10 years. And so things like we've just switched over to HTML5 and we use the audio and video tags. That means three different versions of video and two different versions of audio for every single piece. Well, two versions of audio if it's an audio-only work which we also publish, but if it's a video piece we will also put out audio when we have time for it. We are very, very small-staffed. But it does take three for video and two for audio. And all those have to be put up on a server and all those have to live there all the time. And I wish that people could decide which format was the right format. It's irritating. . . . Well, it's because Microsoft is dragging its heels on mp4s, so they are just . . . as long as Internet Explorer exists, we have to have backwards compatibility because so many people still use it, even though it's . . . it is what it is.

**Susan Delagrange**

Well, this has been fun! I said that I would try to take up only 30 minutes of your time, and looks like it's at about 30 minutes now. Are there other things that you'd like to talk about?

**Keith Dorwick**

Yeah, yeah. I'd like to . . . I would like to see one genre of hypertext just die. And that's the one in which there is a linear text that is chunked, and at the bottom there's a link to the top of the next page, and then there's a link at the bottom of that page to the next page, and that's altogether too prevalent. I like really heavy hypertext when I write hypertext. And the other thing I think is important to note is I think HTML, as HTML, where you have the ending .html, is dying and I don't think it's just a matter of things like . . . just of course things are moving to dynamic HTML XML, and all those kind of things, but I also think the more profound change is going to be CMSs, and it makes an invisible interface. In other words it's possible for people to write really easily and clean code with the right WYSIWYG editor. I'm a big fan of WYSIWYG editors. Not a lot of people are, but I'm a real big fan of them for writing complex texts in a short amount of time. And where you don't have to worry about someone not having all sorts of expertise. Drupal, plus CK Editor as a plug-in? Beautiful code. I love clean code. I hate code you can't read. That was a big problem with my diss, using the Word with HTML option, you got all that garbage, and you get two megabyte files for three words? Not good!

**Susan Delagrang**

Well, thanks very much, Keith!