The Mechanics of new media (science) writing
Articulation, Design, Hospitality, and Electracy

Hospitality Podcast Transcript (Katie)

Katie: [00:00] Working with new or unfamiliar technologies often means forging a new and different kind of relationship. It is one, as we shall see, marked by a profound and genuine openness toward those technologies, and it's something I choose to refer to throughout this discussion as hospitality.

[0:18 musical intro]

Emily: [0:20] I was nervous at the beginning of the course because I'm not tech savvy—I don't even have an iPhone, like, I don't even have a smart phone.

Debra: [0:26] I feel like technology had a huge part in what we were doing because you write differently for sound.

Grace: [0:32] Well, I'm not really a technological, technology person to begin with.

Katie: [0:36] So say Emily, Debra, and Grace about their relationships to and with technology surrounding their participation in Saint Louis University's New Media Science Writing Course. In these reflections we find a varying level of familiarity with technology, coupled with anxieties about lessening the gaps created by unfamiliarity.

[musical transition]

Katie: [0:54] In their article "Hospitality in College Composition Courses," Janis Haswell, Richard Haswell, and Glenn Blalock (2009) noted three elements that are central to the hospitality that crosses the divide between a host and her guests. These are: common ground, openness, and ease. These authors discuss common ground, openness, and ease as the kinds of hospitable movements central to literature, bridging the gaps between writer and reader. This New Media Science Writing course serves as an occasion for looking through hospitality in the context of a course that relies heavily upon new media and unfamiliar technologies as means of production. Looking at this course through hospitality helps us to see students and technology as partners in the endeavor to generate knowledge.

[musical transition]

Katie: [1:46] The use of technology in and for education is nothing new. Of course computer and mobile technologies have been on the rise both in accessibility and number of kind. But the nature of our *being with* technologies has not fundamentally changed. Even before the kinds of technologies utilized in this class—such as smart phones, laptops, tablets, digital cameras, microphones, and so on—the technologies of pen and paper or the essay called us to interact with them in certain ways just as these do. We can look to Walter

Ong's work, particularly *Orality and Literacy* (2002) as echoing a similar sentiment regarding newly emerging technologies. Ong (2002) noted the ways in which orality remains residual in writing and print culture. And just as elements of that earlier oral technology reside in its successors, so too do elements of print-based linear writing persist in work utilizing new media. The essay, for instance, haunts students as they write new media projects. Because a podcast, for instance, works effectively in ways distinct from that of the essay format, new media writing presents an opportunity for students to acknowledge residual elements and at the same time open themselves to the affordances and constraints of the new. Being open in this way is often made easier by students' common experience with and ease working alongside those residual elements. For this reason, I propose we consider hospitality as a central tenet in any classroom populated with less-than-familiar tools and concepts.

That our new media science writing course took the structure of a communal workshop, with the invaluable support of a well-equipped learning studio and a committed instructional designer, meant that the atmosphere was ripe for cultivating familiarity. This meant that students found a space in which to cultivate relationships with new media and technologies not marked by anxieties and a lack of expertise. Rather, the collaborative, supportive structure embodied an ease of method capable of overcoming the challenges of the mechanics. Distinct from *using* tools and mechanical skills, this course situated students as *partnering* with tools and skills in the generation of new media science writing. In this way, students worked as logomechanics who, in the words of Jenny Rice (2008), are "creators who can imagine, improvise, and enact the material deployments of meaning and its operation" (p. 368). Noting this in her article "Rhetoric's Mechanics: Retooling the Equipment of Writing Production," Rice (2008) called for us to "reinvigorate our own personal pedagogies with a stronger commitment to engaging the *means* of production" (emphasis mine, p. 368). Acting hospitably toward the means of production is one way of doing so.

Debra: [4:38] 'Cause, like, I mean manually only like one person can work on it at a time, but you both enjoy the process and, like, how you collected it together.

Emily: [4:47] The class was set up so we used these, like, recorders and these video cameras a couple classes in a row, just working with them. So then I had direction of "Which one did I feel more comfortable with, and why?" So, I feel like I had more direction.

[musical transition]

Katie: [5:04] Like a hostess who introduces one guest at her party to another by making connections based on their commonalities, a hospitable teacher and classroom does the same for its learning community. Hospitable pedagogy is one that recognizes the centrality of making these introductions. In an effort to find common ground between students and the strangeness of new media forms, we can point to, though not dwell on, the residual elements in these new forms that are carryovers of technological forms with which students are more familiar. The course introduces students to technologies and concepts; the teacher and the course structure aid in strengthening those acquaintances, and by the

end students produce their own works capable of fostering familiarity between their topics and their audiences. All of these processes oscillate on the interplay between common ground, openness and ease—those elements that Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock (2009) identified in the college composition classroom and, taken together, name hospitality.

The premise of this particular course ensured that our production of science writing worked under this hospitable brand of guidance. Our task was not simply to use new-to-us technologies and become better acquainted with their capacities and our own. We found common ground by connecting the mechanics of new technologies to the tools we knew better and were more comfortable using. But first, in order to tread on that common ground, we first had to approach it openly and honestly, admitting what we knew and admitting where our weaknesses may lie. This honesty, coupled with the support that welcomed it, put students at ease with their own strengths and their ability to adapt to a new relationship with new technologies. From this commonality, openness, and ease, students produced projects uninhibited by the sometimes paralyzing fear of strangeness. In quite a literal way, we came to know these technologies better. And this increased knowledge resulted not from speculating about them and their effects from a distance, but rather from partnering with them as means of production.

Emily: [7:15] Um, the class was set up so there was, like, no pressure. We didn't automatically go out and interview people, we went out around campus and tried to capture sounds and sights, and I thought that was a really good way to be introduced to the technology because, um, I wasn't familiar with it at all. But, just capturing a picture of the fountain, and a picture of, like, a couple trees, was a lot of, like, it was no pressure and I could learn good techniques and how to actually use this equipment.

Debra: [7:43] It's increased, like, kind of a manual skill because, like, I've work a ton in Garageband now. So there's that rich knowledge I have now with audio as opposed to, like, I already knew how to use Microsoft Word. I was fine with that. So I'm definitely gaining a lot more in that aspect by this being an audio project. And you know, like, even if I eke out one little laugh, you know, at least I brought a little bit of enjoyment or something with my piece as opposed to just, you know, that learning experience of something. You get more, more enrichment out of the work you do in this class.

Grace: [8:18] It's introduced me to a lot of, like, something I wouldn't have otherwise gone to or thought about using. It gave me good, like, boundaries, I guess, um, for what I could do versus what I wanted to do. And I guess it kind of, like, I guess the more I, like, got into it and the more I played with it, the more I realized what I wanted to do and how I could achieve that.

Katie: [8:43] These steps of practicing first and building commonality, then refining mechanical skills and learning to work within the constraints of the technologies, all reflect that hospitable model. And that model also stood for the method of our growing acquaintance with our chosen research topics. With the guiding concept of articulation—an idea with which we were also tasked with fostering a better understanding—the course privileged *producing* science writing as *doing* the work of science. In this way, our use of

new technologies not only increased our familiarity with those technologies, but it was also the method by which we increased our understanding of our research topics. And students reflected upon the impact of partnering with new media and technologies on their research and learning as something that extended beyond what we might mistake as mere mechanical skills. Emily, for instance, measured this impact by comparing her experience in this course to those she has known in courses where new media and mechanics played a less prominent role.

Emily: [9:45] I mean it definitely wouldn't have been as hands-on and I don't think, in a weird way, I would remember it as much. I feel like a lot of times you write all these papers, and then you don't even, you look at them a year later and, "Oh, I don't remember writing that" and, you know. But this, I feel like I'll remember, Like, I know when we're done with the podcast I'm gonna send it to like my family and friends and, like, hang out to it. And I'll remember what I retained, like what I talked about because I talked about it. Like, because I went and interviewed these people, I'm gonna have more of a lasting memory, I feel. And, um, I don't know. I'm kind of burnt out from writing and researching, so this was definitely, like, a good change. And I think this is definitely gonna stick with me longer.

Katie: [10:24] In order to act hospitably toward *all* means of production in a course such as this one, the conversation surrounding it cannot reference growing familiarity with computer programs, digital cameras, or the genres of podcasting and video as merely mechanics. Despite what many in the history of composition have purported, mechanics are not *merely* anything. Rather, they are themselves significant and rhetorical means of production. In the same article mentioned earlier, Rice (2008) put it best:
{music}
> The mechanics of rhetoric's production involves imagination, improvisation, and enactment. Thus, while expanding availability of digital equipment corresponds with an increasing ease in using those resources, we must also keep the *rhetorical* aspect of mechanics in mind. As Faigley writes, the ease of using software and other equipment should not occlude the fact that writers use those tools for generative purposes. (p. 378)

{/music}

Katie: [11:30] This course suggests the importance of introducing students to new media, fostering a collaborative relationship among them. And this is distinct from a course that does not call attention to or feature new media so prominently, as Emily mentions. A course that did not do this risks encouraging students to maintain a relationship of utility with technology, rather than one that acknowledges the generative role that technology and mechanics play in production.

It is this need of introduction and increased familiarity that makes these technologies and media new, after all. And it is also the kind of situation that calls for hospitality—just as a hostess is tasked with making introductions and fostering connections between her guests. Students have the power to work with these technologies, having inherited it from their literacies working with other media. New media contains many of the same elements, as Ong (2002) and many others after him have noted. And so we have two levels of

hospitality. The first is of the kind we must extend to new media in light of its newness—forgiving ourselves and it for any missteps and complications that result from our new partnership. The other is a kind of patience we must extend in light of its strangeness—looking to learn from it and manage how to be with it differently.

Katie: [12:58] The first step in acting hospitably towards new media is recognizing them, seeing them at work, and making a genuine inquiry into their affordances and constraints. In this way, we might more appropriately see them as partners in the process of production with their own generative capacities. To do so, we must not steal away generosity from our interaction with them by situating our growing familiarity as insignificant mechanical skill. Hospitable pedagogy sees production and composition as a complex system wherein all elements equally exist as generative forces.

What we are doing more and more in rhetoric and composition is inviting new media to our courses almost as featured guests. It is something we did quite explicitly in this particular course—it's even in the title.

Student experiences in this New Media Science Writing course serve as an example of how a hospitable classroom atmosphere can lead to a profound understanding of new and shifting relationships with technology. It does so precisely by situating new media as a sort of featured guest that needs and wants an introduction, and that helps us generate dynamic and well-rounded projects even if—or especially if—the getting-to-know-you-process takes some time. Because from this new relationship, we see that new media are not just tools for making things. They are instead our partners as we endeavor, together, to generate knowledge.

Without acting hospitably towards them, taking note of our growing familiarity with their capacities, we may not have realized their profound rhetorical significance.

Katie: [14:48] Many thanks to Emily, Debra, and Grace for sharing their reflections on the course with me and for allowing me to feature their voices here. Their insights and participation were invaluable for this project, and for the course overall.

References

Haswell, Janis, Haswell, Richard, & Blalock, Glenn. (2009). Hospitality in college composition courses. *College Composition and Communication*, *60*(4), 707-727.

Ong, Walter. (2002). *Orality and literacy* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rice, Jennifer Edbauer. (2008). Rhetoric's mechanics: Retooling the equipment of writing production. *College Composition and Communication, 60*(2), 366-387.