



Digital Writing & Research Lab

DWRL Lab Coordinator Stephanie Stickney sat down with Jenna McWilliams and MIT Media Lab Coordinator Henry Jenkins to talk about how technology changes culture. The conversation took place in 2008 at MIT.

Stephanie Stickney: Let me tell you a little bit about what I'm doing here, and what we do, the Digital Writing and Research Lab at the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas at Austin has a series of computer classrooms where people teach English, Rhetoric and Writing and also five research projects. We work with about 45 PhD students in Rhetoric, Digital Literacies and Learning, and English working on these projects. So, that is where I'm coming from. The research projects: I've got one that's a computer game called Rhetorical Peaks designed to teach rhetoric, and viz. a visual rhetoric blog and Currents in Electronic Literacy an on-line journal, among others. I'm interested in what you're doing here because we have a certain amount of freedom in where we're going to go in the future and what we're going to do with the projects. So, I guess my first question for you is: what was your vision for CMS in the beginning and what ways do you feel like you've reached those goals?

Henry Jenkins – well, I think the first task was to try figure out how MIT could produce an MIT-grade media studies program with very little resources, which is more or less the task that we were given. The luxury we had was that there was relatively little in place, certainly nothing in place in the graduate level that we would have to work around. And that's a huge luxury. You know, we had certainly taught undergraduate courses here going back a good fifteen years before we launched the graduate program and there were faculty deeply invested in that. But there was a blank slate in terms of thinking about what a graduate program would look like. And the task was to figure out what a 21st century Master's program in media studies would be. The first decision to make it a Master's program rather than a PhD, and that grew out of the fact that there were just... I was Society for Cinema Studies job czar at the same time and I was trying to help people find jobs at the same time. And there were massively more people looking for jobs than there were jobs available on the market. And some incredibly qualified, even over-qualified candidates on the market were just not getting any nibbles at all on the job market. And so, one of the mandates I set on myself was to expand the range of jobs available to media studies graduate students. And as we thought about it, the most opportunities would come at the end of the Master's if you're working for non-academic jobs. So, we decided to focus our energy on the Master's program rather than the PhD. That was also gonna be plausible given that we were probably gonna have to have many of the electives be graduate/undergraduate electives, which is

what happens at Iowa, Wisconsin, ----- where I was (?) {3:12} ----, and I suspect at the media studies program at UT Austin they do more or less the same. But it's harder to do that with the PhD students. And so, we didn't have enough dedicated faculty to do a PhD, so we were gonna focus on the Master's program. The vision was to try to figure out what jobs are out there? So, Alex Shism (?) {3:32}, (who was sort of our jack-of-all-trades, but primarily a development officer) and I hit the road and we talked to about 60 different organizations – profit, non-profit, governmental, you know – and said, “what are you looking for in a graduate at this point? What would make you interested in hiring a Humanities Master's student?”

And they said, “well, they think creatively, they know a lot of things, they have pretty good skills at articulating what they know. That's their real jack of trade, and there's a lot of interest in Humanities students in that regard.

And I said, “well, what would make you hesitant?”

They said, “well, when we work with Humanities students, they've had no experience in team work, collaboration, problem solving, project completion, leadership, competition...”

And it was a pretty damning list from their point of view, especially of those who are thinking about companies who warn employees right off the bat that those were the skills they were most interested in. So there was a sense out there that there were new expertise that was required to function in an environment that was rapidly changing and that humanities people were well suited for. There was an understanding that social and cultural knowledge was going to be crucial as we moved into the next decade of digital media and indeed we could say that the changes in the last decade that were made around web 2.0 were mostly social and cultural changes, not primarily technological changes. And we heard things like: the startups typically expect to have three people on board – someone who knows the technology, someone who knows the business, and someone who knows the consumer. And the consumer expertise was the hardest to get. And those all pointed toward a really successful model.

Part of it was, how do we prepare students for the job market? Secondly, we've got almost no money. So how do we raise money to support grad students? Because basically MIT's saying, if you bag it it's yours, but we're not gonna give you any money to really start this with. And so it meant launching research initiatives. The only way to get money... We had a few individual donors who gave us some starting capital, but really the only way we were gonna be able to support students was to launch some large-scale research initiative and bring those funds into it. And so, from there grew this idea of the applied humanities – taking what humanities is now and applying it to real world problems of the kind that we could get funding [for], but also the kinds that would prepare students for the kinds of jobs we had talked about. So if we built a lab culture around the humanities at MIT, the students would have the chance to work on teams, to lead teams, to develop projects, to brainstorm and problem solve, and, you know, all of the stuff that they're saying we're missing – we could build that in on the research side and not have to expand on the courses we offered or even necessarily the faculty involved with it. Although, certainly the fantasy was to get a lot more faculty involved than we ever got on the research side. But that vision was in place, and the idea of applied humanities perspectives would

then prepare students who didn't want to go into a PhD to get jobs in the marketplace. And so we figures 65-70 percent of our students would not go on to get a PhD, at least immediately. And that's roughly the numbers we've seen. The last couple of years we've reached a point where roughly have of our students are going directly into PhD programs, but that's partially the economy and partially the kind of students that we've gradually started to get. But the goal was to be 60-70 percent non-PhD. To go into the arts, journalism, advertising, the creative industries, think tanks, policy centers and tech companies – a whole range of places that would be good places for people with humanistic expertise in media to go. Now, about the same time, we were pushing this proposal up through the pipe-line, and we kept talking about a Master's program. And we got up to a pretty high-level committee, and the head of the committee says to me, "You keep talking about a Master's program, but do you mean a Master of Arts or a Master of Science?" And it had frankly never occurred to us. All of us in the humanities have Master's of Arts degrees. But he said, "Now, careful, before you answer this question – what you need to know is that if you make it a Master of Arts degree, you're going to have to change the charter of MIT first." Right? Because MIT doesn't offer any arts degrees. And so I said, "Hey, we're all scientists here!" And I had to then figure out how to make a humanities degree and justify a Master of Science. And again, the research stuff, and the workshop requirement we added which was hands on – so, we work in labs, we work with equipment, we have procedures... we're a science! And they said, "Good enough for us." I mean they pushed us a little bit on whether we should require statistics and calculus for all of our students and we finally pushed back on that and that was a battle at the Dean's level. But it meant that we had to put serious teeth into the hands-on dimensions of the program, and that's further pushing us to the applied side.

Meanwhile, I'm trying to put together faculty from ten different disciplines and getting them to work together, and trying to figure out what they had in common and what their vision of the program was going to be. And that's how the comparative part came out – that most of the faculty we were working with had some kind of work that cut across media. Certainly my work from the very beginning cut across media. Peter Donalson does Shakespeare on film, we have people doing film and music, we had people who did opera and cinema, we had new digital people who were working on digital poetry. We had a pretty broad range of people who's work just straddled media. And so we began to define the comparative part as the central part of our program. And we figured, well, there's comp. lit., there's comparative religion... Comparative media sounds like a pretty good way of framing what it is we do. And over time, the "comparative" did more and more work for us. So we were talking across disciplines, we were talking across historical periods, we were talking across media platforms, we were talking across global systems. We added to that this idea of dialogue between the university and the public sector, which proved to be really central to what CMS did.

So, that's a long story, but that's essentially how the components started to click in for what we were gonna describe as comparative media studies. So, starting from, what does media studies need to do for the start of the 21st century, and how does MIT get into the game? We evolved toward, we're gonna do comparative media

studies with a strong applied focus. Now, the problem was that the applied focus part never really got the full buy in from the humanities faculty. And that's the stuff I've had the fight about for the last decade. If it had just been comparative, I think CMS would have thrived with faculty buy-in. I think that as it become more and more applied, and the kinds of students we got from the very beginning were more applied in their focus, had a different vision of themselves, there was gradually more and more alienation from the faculty members in the humanities who didn't know how to work that way... The world that made sense for the job market, that made sense for funding, that made sense for the students... didn't make sense to a lot of the faculty in the program. And that's been the central tension as we've gone forward: how do we sustain this when a lot of the people who said "we're with you" two or three steps back, once the program launched. And William and I, and a few other people have sort of kept it afloat for all these years. But we succeeded in doing everything on the research side that we set out to do and more.

Jenna McWilliams: It's nice to hear. It's nice to get that refresher on what CMS is.

Stephanie Stickney: So, being in the Department of Rhetoric, we have a certain number of people who are very innovative and who are very much into teaching new media, we also have sort of a push-back from a very traditional group who will come in on the first day of training and say, "I teach writing, not computers." You know? And, "computers have nothing to do with writing," that "it's a distraction for the student," and "it's just using technology for technology's sake." These are some of the arguments I get for doing the very traditional three-argument paper, intro to rhetoric, rhetoric classes. And so, I want to ask you, how do you think new media has changed the nature of argument?

HJ: Well, that depends on what form "new media" we're talking about. One, it seems to me, is that new media makes argument more dialogic in that, rather than writing an essay which stays in a published place and then someone reads it and then months later writes a response, rhetoric now is a back and forth, right? We're in a time where an on-line forum or e-mail or even Twitter, blogs... we're seeing writing that's meant to be responded to. And this is the sort of thing Jenna's been talking about - reading with your mouse in your hand. When you read someone's argument, you anticipate an expectation of response. And so, it's much closer to classical debate than it is to the classical five-paragraph writing. Because in a debate forum, you anticipate that back and forth. That means it's a rhetoric that anticipates counter-arguments and heads them off, but also has to rebut, respond, and push back at arguments that come at you. And so on that level, I'd say that just the speed back and forth of contemporary writing changes rhetoric in a fundamental way. Secondly, I'd say what you can mobilize is evidence shifts in a world where... I love that scene in *Annie Hall* when Woody Allen says, I happen to have Marshal McLuhan right here, and pulls him out to rebut someone who he's disagreeing with... Well, on the web, I happen to have everything I need right there. I can link to, pull in, embed, mobilize other people's rhetoric. I can move in visual evidence, sound files, multimedia files... and so rhetoric doesn't rest purely on words as a channel, but

there's a rhetorical dimension to how I mobilize all of those things. Even something as simple as, "where do I put the link in a sentence" has rhetorical implications. Which words are hot-lined for the link. Even if someone never clicks on the link, the hot-line of those words means that they stand out in a different way, and the result of that is the rhetorical implication, just as punctuation has a rhetorical implication. Just as italicizing or embolding has a rhetorical implication. So it's not just the words, it's how they're presented that have that level of argumentation. So the more multimedia you go, the more you have to have multi-modal argumentation a la ---- {14:54} ---- who really has done a lot of great work thinking about the rhetorical dimensions and how you combine different media elements to construct an argument.

Jenna McWilliams: It seems like there's also this issue of the essay, the traditional essay that I used to teach when I taught composition, was just that the teacher was the audience and you had to learn this fake audience thing. And that that's not even useful anymore...

Henry Jenkins: Yeah. I think that students write much better when they know that they're writing for a larger public. Yeah, I guess that's the third shift in terms of rhetoric. That it's actually real rhetoric now, not "let me suck up to the teacher and get a grade" but rhetoric to a public that could have real-world social consequences... where you write about... I mean, it amuses me from time to time, when I stumble onto a student writing about my work, to respond, just to see what kind of havoc it creates for people. But the idea that the author, even someone who's distant, that has a certain aura around them in the classroom, you know, that you break that wall and respond to the student. And most of the time the students run in utter terror, but occasionally someone will come back and engage with me on that level, and I think that's a breakthrough moment - when they realize that they're part of a community of authors that can have conversations with each other. And the hierarchies that we construct around the author are arbitrary ones that cut people off. I mean, if you go back to the first books, they would say things like, "if you don't believe me, come to my house and I'll demonstrate the experiment to you." So the early science community of the first printed books would literally invite people over to their house. And that notion that you could visit the authors that you read and have conversations with them goes through the early history of the book. We just have reached the point where the scale of printing is so massive it's inconceivable, but the web brings that scale back down to the point where writers and readers can engage with each other on different levels. And if you put bullshit out in your writing, you can get called on it... by the author. You know? I've called students, ---- {17:17} ---- my point there, here's what I meant... I try to avoid that because that's a little too much intimidating, but... or just someone else who just happens to read it and says, "no, you know, that's not what Henry meant at all," and corrects it for them. And that's a really fascinating process because it's not coming from the teacher.

Stephanie Stickney: So this is a small change of topic, but there's a debate going on in Texas right now about accepting the top ten percent of students from Texas high schools. Basically how it works is, if you are in the top ten percent of your class, you're supposed to be guaranteed a place at University of Texas and other state schools. Well, we've gotten to a point now where there's too many in the top percent to be able to accept them all. So there's a debate on how we're going to keep working towards that model. There's supposed to be a small percentage of students that are evaluated in some other way besides their top ten percent. And it's kind of a hot issue among our undergrads right now because some of them got there because they're the top ten percent, some of them got there because of something else. So my question to you is, what changes do you think universities need to make in admissions and recruiting to bridge the participation gap?

Henry Jenkins: Well, it's an interesting dilemma. Because my first response is, "ten percent of what? Ten percent of test scores? Ten percent of grades?" That already shifts fundamentally what populations you're looking at. But then, the ten percent who made the best grades are, you know, incredibly linear, obedient... they know how to get a good grade and they get there. Whereas a lot of the students we've been working with would never have made that cut in terms of that ten percent. They're more invested in what learning takes place outside the classroom than in the learning that takes place in. And that learning is taking them places that schools don't yet know how to recognize and evaluate. So we may be in a context where our best brains, those literate members of society, would not make the cut if school grades are the only thing that we look at. So someone like ---- {19:39} --- is talking about portfolios. Let's look at the range of experiences people have had, rather than the range of grades they've locked up. And those experiences should include on-line experiences as well as off-line experiences, so that we know the range of things they've done. And there are real accomplishments in the online world for a number of kids who would be undervalued so far in the school system. So why should you value someone for editing a school newspaper that reaches 200, when someone else might have edited a blog that reaches 2,000. Why should we value the yearbook over YouTube? Why should we value the chess club over World of Warcraft? These are the kinds of contrasts that I think we really have to be re-appraising. So one side is that the digital generation has not yet been able to demonstrate the skills that it really does possess by the criteria of an educational system that still thinks 10, 20, 30 years in the past. It's measuring what students should have been, not what students are, not what they should be. And that sort of tension is there. But if we move in that direction, then we automatically have the problem of the participation gap because then we are privileging those kids who had access to the technology over those kids who didn't. And unless we can, at the high school and elementary school level, really redress that participation gap, then we've created something that amplifies that gap rather than fixes it. Whereas in the school system, at least those kids who got A's, there may have been disadvantages of being able to get A's depending on which school they went to, but also the A doesn't mean the same thing at a bad school as it means at a good school, and that compensates in a way for that. But the minute we move toward really testing these new literacies, then we really

have to find a way to redress access to those experiences, and access to those literacies, that enable kids to become full participants. And this is not just a technical access question, it really is about social and cultural capital at a pretty deep level. And then if we get them to college, the thing is that at the college level we have more opportunities to redress these issues than they are at the high school. We're not locked into a fixed curriculum, we don't have to meet standardized testing, we can actually introduce courses that are more diverse and richer in their use of online literacy skills, to make up for those kids who went through school, made good grades, but actually don't know how to function in the new media landscape.

Jenna McWilliams: But then you run into this thing that Stephanie has experienced, where people go into the classroom and say, "I teach writing not computers." So you have these faculty people who... I know Jim Jee once said that all the old guard needs to die so that new people can take over.

Henry Jenkins: Well that question is "writing" in relation to what technology? Writing with a quill? Writing with a typewriter? I mean, think about how much the English language writing changed from the time of Hawthorne, say, in the 19th century when people are writing with quills, to the world of Hemingway when fiction was shaped by the need to telegraph. So, having written for the wire services, Hemingway developed a sparse, quick-clipped style that we think of as distinctly 20th century. And really, for Hemingway and Steinbeck in particular, grew out of telegraph and the particularities of that media platform. So it's not as if writing as a process hasn't changed dramatically again and again and again throughout its history. At least on the level of rhetoric and style, the technology is not neutral. It impacts how we write, and how we address the audiences we speak to. So, yeah, you can teach writing with technology. I mean, to my mind, learning how to use the keyboard is like penmanship, and probably doesn't belong in rhetoric or composition. But understanding who you're writing for, what style works in that environment, what's the context you're writing in, what kinds of arguments and logic will carry the day in that space – that's the classic function of rhetoric. And surely there's a difference between speaking in the Senate in ancient Greece and writing for a contemporary newspaper, that rhetoric faculty have long thought about. So take the technology out of the equation, and just say, "address the core questions of rhetoric, but understand that rhetoric now takes place in a different environment. And therefore, the techniques that rhetoric involves have to look, have to be different. Everyone gets preoccupied with the tools, and at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if you write with a pencil or a typewriter, *except* that you're going to write with different potentials of being read when you write with a typewriter. And that then changes the context in which the text gets circulated, and that therefore changes the rhetoric.

Stephanie Sitkney: one thing that some of our instructors love to do is have their students basically compose through google maps and do community outreach with non-profits or do something like building a pachyderm website to create your

argument. And they would say that to write for a website, to create your own website, like if your first page is your thesis and then you link off from there, you have to become a more succinct writer. You have to get your message across in fewer words, and that that is...

Henry Jenkins: That's like the change from Hemingway to Hawthorne, or Hawthorne to Hemingway, it's just the next stage of that process. And you have to learn how to chunk if you're going to write a novel in a non-linear way. So the self-contained bits that link to each other, but not necessarily read in a predictable fashion – if you're dealing in hypertext, for example. And those are issues in rhetoric. It's not about the technology at that point, right? It's about the technique and the audience and the argument. And that's something that people who just see the computer as a keyboard, don't get yet. And that's the limitation you're fighting with. But it's not actually a limitation about teaching writing versus teaching computers. It an argument about how broadly we want to think about the kinds of argumentation that our students are involved with in the course of their day-to-day lives.

Stephanie Stickney: So, you're going to be leaving MIT and going to...

Henry Jenkins: USC. Well, ---- {26:46} ---- and cinema school. So, this is a new appointment the provost has set up. They've hired I think now 6 faculty who's job is to straddle schools, and they're gonna do multi-disciplinary work. And they're all senior-level people who, therefore free of having to fight tenure battles, can just come in and do the work they want, and try to bring communities together at the axis between... So, cinema school involves a heavy... I mean, both schools have an interesting mix of theory and practice. Because I've got the journalism school in Annenberg(???), and the film production school in cinema, the new media group in cinema, but then there's also critical studies in both groups. But historically, they haven't necessarily all talked to each other as much as would be ideal. And so the hope is, through these new positions, is to really create a context where USC as a university can grow as a multi-disciplinary space, or, as I like to call it, "undisciplined." I'm very happy to be an undisciplined scholar. I'm always most unhappy when someone tries to discipline me and put me into a single category, but I think we've got to learn to communicate across fields right now, because why should the disciplines that emerged in response to the Industrial Revolution still be the "right" ways of organizing knowledge after the digital revolution?

Stephanie Stickney: How do you think your role is going to change? Or how will your vision and your goals be changing in any way when you change programs?

Henry Jenkins: Well, I think you're always shaped by your institutions. What we did at MIT was what we could do at MIT. And it had to do with the reputation of MIT. What kinds of students are we going to attract here? We got almost no historically oriented students through, that were applying to comparative media studies, because we were at MIT. MIT opened the doors to certain kinds of companies, but had no clout with other companies when it came time to fund or create jobs. We

had certain faculty resources that we could draw on, and others that were just not here. We have no sociology at MIT, for example, to speak of. There's not an ed. School at MIT. So we went as far as we've done with new media literacies without any Ed. Faculty to work with. And maybe that's what allowed us to get as far as we did, because we were thinking outside of fixed categories, but it also limits what we can do, or forced us to bring in outside people, which may have lead to a richer mix. So, the short answer is, I don't know what kind of person I'm going to be at USC, and that's part of what excites me about it. I don't know that institution well enough. I can certainly see that journalism is going to play a larger role in my identity there than it has here, and that pushes in a certain direction. That it's a university with a much stronger historical commitment to public outreach, to public intellectualism though the Annenberg school, than MIT has had. And that certainly been part of my interest all along. When I looked at it, they were already doing work on civic media and new media literacies, transmedia story-telling, and games, and expression... all of these areas that I have been working on, there's 6, 7, 8 people working in that area already. So, at that frees me to do more specialized things in that space. I'm teaching a transmedia entertainment course for the first time, which is an idea that I'm deeply interested in, but there was no way I was going to be able to teach a course quite that specialized in the configuration at CMS. There wouldn't have been enough students, and I need to teach things that have broad appeal to serve the maximum number of students here. And I was the generalist floating between things. So suddenly, I'm free to do specialized courses in my real area of interest. And after that, I don't know. I'm not racing in to start a new center, I'm carrying NML with me to continue the work we've been doing. I'm going to be associated with the Convergence Culture consortium we've created. But, I'm sure I'm going to find new projects as I start to interface with the new parts of the institution, but I'm purposely coming in with my hands open, saying, "I'm not bringing anything, and I'm not creating anything, let's see what we can create together and discover what makes sense in the context of those two schools, and particularly at the intersection of those two schools.

Stephanie Stickney: The course that you're going to be teaching, tell me again the name?

Henry Jenkins: So, it's called, "transmedia storytelling and entertainment."

Stephanie Stickney: Can you speak a little bit about that?

Henry Jenkins: basically, the argument is that increasingly in a convergence culture, stories are being told across multiple media platforms, that stories that matter to people are going to come at them from all sides, from every available media channel. Some of that is simply transmission – if I miss last night's episode of "Survivor," I can watch it this morning on CMS.com. Some of it is expansion, if I really like "Heroes," I can go online and I can read the comic and play games and engage with fan fiction. Which is to say that some of the expansion is from the authors and some of it's from the readers, but it all results in expanded media environment. Same thing's

happening in the area of journalism, and news, and documentary. Good documentaries are going to come with websites now with additional materials. The newspapers are not interfacing with radio stations and broadcast stations and the web, and the best ones are starting to think creatively about how to tell stories across those channels. So there's a new kind of skill, a new kind of knowledge that comes in understanding, both critically engaging with those stories and creatively producing those stories. And so, I've designed a course that combines looking at lots of texts and examples of that. We've got about ten guest speakers lined up already. Everything from show runners, to amusement park designers are gonna talk to students about their work and work through their projects with them. And then there's a creative component where students are forming teams and developing media franchises across the semester. And at the end of the class, they pitch their media franchise to some of the industry people I can bring in from Hollywood, and get critiqued from people that are actually doing the things that they're talking about. So, that's the sort of thing that you can do only at USC, and it's got games, it's got comics, it's got television, it's got films, it's got amusement parks... it goes back in history to things like the Wizard of Oz and some of the other stuff in the earlier 20th century and goes forward to shows that haven't even reached television yet. So I'm really fired up about teaching this class. It's gonna be an amazing class. And we're gonna film most of the guest speakers and turn them into podcasts so that it helps other courses out there. I hope I can find in the USC context that same ability we've had to spread what we produce in the classroom. So, there's no point in having someone speak to a single class if that resource is relevant to other programs, and we've had great luck recording our conferences and colloquium here and turn them into podcasts and web video and so forth, and I hope to continue that when I get at USC.

Stephanie Stickney: yeah, we've been doing that with our speaker series with vimeo, and just posting them on our front page. And when we post them, we're not really sure what kind of reaction we're going to get or what sort of audience we're going to have, and we've been really pleasantly surprised at how many people are actually going and looking at those. We have these technological pedagogy workshops, and like ten people come and you feel like it's this big waste of time and then a week later a hundred people will be at it.

Henry Jenkins: Yeah, it totally changes our understanding of what the value of a guest speaker is. And now I'm finding with Twitter, we can really amp up the number of people who watch it. I'm just throwing out our podcasts as part of my Twitter feed at this point, and a number of them have gotten picked up and relayed by a number of high-profile Twitterers, and the result has been a real increase in traffic for some of the podcasts that we're throwing out there.

Stephanie Stickney: I think Twitter's also interesting in that it can bring in outside questions. We have one of our Assistant Directors, when we have speakers, Tweets the entire thing and then brings in questions from his audience, the people that are

following him, and it's actually freaked out a few people... that's not a question for someone in here, so I don't think I want to engage with it, but...

Henry Jenkins: Well we do that in our public events a fair amount. We've gotten better and better at it. We have speakers Twittering from the stage while they're speaking... a couple of our students can do that. I'm not to that level. But a couple of times now at our conferences, we've become the top item or near the top item on Twitter at that particular moment in time – we've broken into the top topics.

Jenna McWilliams: Our NML conference, was it trending?

Henry Jenkins: yes.

Jenna McWilliams: And I don't know if you saw, but we started getting all this spam because we were trending and people just start putting those hash tags in, and it's like, "go see this, naked picture of Paris Hilton," hash tag, NML 09.

HJ: Or you see people just saying out of curiosity, "well what the hell is this? I know the other topics." So, futures of entertainment, we beat out *Twilight* the weekend before it opened, as a topic that weekend. So that was really fun. We were battling *Twilight*, Christmas, and Thanksgiving in early November, and we beat Christmas! Or, at least, we held them back for a few hours. It was quite inspiring. And we were just getting people calling from the podium for we needed more people to Twitter so we could... but there was all this amazing back-channel stuff going on that wouldn't have gone otherwise, and there were people getting pulled in and engaging with the conference through that. I mean, I think it's a wonderful, wonderful thing. Now is that the most sophisticated form of writing? No. And I understand a rhetoric department might say, well Twitter isn't writing. And there are lots of concerns I have about Twitter as writing, the sense that it really is such an abbreviated form. I, as a joke, put "the Twitter is code, brevity is the soul of wit," and threw that out there and I'm now quite distressed by the number of people who think I'm the person that invented this phrase. Which led to my launching of the Twitter Tweet game that I've been urging people to play where you throw out a sentence and people have to decide if it's an original Tweet or if it's a quote from a literary work. But the notion that ideas circulate without attribution in Twitter, bothers me the most about that form. Because I've several times quoted someone in the talk, and had it Tweeted without the quotes and without the attribution, and then gradually over time, it accrues on me as the speaker as if I made up the ideas. I'm careful to cite the people that I'm talking about when I speak, so that stripping aside the markers of citation is, I think, a serious issue with Twitter we have to deal with. What's great about Twitter is that it elicits direct attention. So I almost never publish a Tweet without some link to something. Which is just: if this topic interests you, click on this and you can read more. And even that is a rhetorical move. It says, "here's some interesting content." I always think about the bees coming back and doing the little honey dance and drawing the hive to where the good flowers are. That's what Twitter does for us as a rhetorical form, but it's not in itself a self-

contained medium yet, except for those people for whom conciseness is, indeed, the soul of wit. And there's some really good writers who've learned how to do that. And in that sense 155 characters is no different from the restrictions of a sonnet or a haiku or any other form of writing that has a very restricted structure. Good artists can work within it. It's so new that we really haven't seen very many really good writers use Twitter. But could good Twitter Tweets find their way into Bartlett's soon? Probably.

Stephanie Stickney: It's a whole new mode of writing.... Jenna and I were talking last night about some of the things that you're working on and interested in, and we were talking about civic media? Is that right?

Jenna McWilliams: And participatory democracy.

Stephanie Stickney: yeah, and I wonder if you could speak about your work?

Henry Jenkins: So, essentially the idea of civic media is any use of any communications technologies for the purposes of enhancing or supporting civic engagement. So that's intentionally a highly expansive word because I wanted to figure out a way to break people out of this framework of "citizen journalism." I increasingly have become frustrated with the phrase "citizen journalism," because it seems to me like "horseless-carriage," right? In the sense that today, when you describe an automobile the most important fact about it is not that it's horseless. That was a temporary word that allowed us to express the relationship between an older practice and a newer practice. But it would be constraining to the impact of the car to imagine it simply doing the things that horse-drawn carriages could do. My sense is that citizens are doing far more than simply journalism. And that phrase, "citizen journalism," constrains us in thinking about the journalism model carrying forward through citizens rather than saying, "what if we thought and we had an information environment {40:45} that served the needs of democracy?" And some of it is gonna be professionalized, and some of it's going to be performed by amateurs. Can we think about the functions of those technologies and who's best positioned to serve which function? And what kind of hybrid system is likely to emerge? Rather than pitting the "citizen journalists" against the "professional journalists," which is an arbitrary fight, what if we said we have a civic media-scape that allowed the information that we needed to be good citizens, including that sense of connectivity which is the heart of citizenship, right? To thrive. Then we can think about a variety of tools and a variety of hands that serve a variety of functions to stitch us together as a community and give us the information we need to act collectively at whatever scale of citizenship we're concerned with. So, that's the idea of civic media. Almost anything can become a civic media... I love, there was a case in Singapore where there was a protest in a city that prohibited public gatherings. And so, one-by-one people walked down and put an action figure on the ground carrying a picket sign and walked away. And the action figures gathered without it being illegal. And no more than one person was in the space at one time, so it was

not a public gathering, but it allowed them to articulate public sentiment in the same way that a protest march would.

Jenna McWilliams: What did they use to organize that?

Henry Jenkins: I think they used the web or mobile phones or whatnot, but they didn't break the law, right? And so the action figure, at that moment, became a civic medium – a vehicle for public expression that would not have been expressible in any other way under that system. Jean Burgess, who's a friend of the program in Queensland University of Technology, talks about Flickr and this group of people who just started taking pictures, and they became a photo club, and they'd gather because photography's localized, they started meeting in interesting places around the city and taking pictures, and gradually they started seeing problems in the city and started acting to solve those problems. As they published those pictures, people who had lived in the city at one time began to engage with them as well and they brought in new knowledge that was useful for solving the problems. So, taking pictures led to problem solving. It wasn't that anyone set out to use Flickr as a civic tool, but effectively, because it kept them looking at the city, it led them to civic awareness through a very different channel. So that's the essence of this idea of civic media. I'm particularly interested then in this bridge between what we call participatory culture and participatory democracy. So we're studying kids who get together and form social organizations face-to-face or over great distances. Some, they're interest driven, some, they're friendship driven, but they form communities and they learn to act together. So, how do we get that skill into revitalizing Democratic citizenship? Obama did a phenomenal job with that, in connecting with young people through whatever tools of communication they wanted to use. We're starting to see within many of these participatory culture spaces, what I would call "proto-political behavior." So that when a television show is threatened with being canceled, right? We're seeing, *Chuck* is a good example right now. *Chuck* is being threatened with cancelation, fans are organizing to try and keep *Chuck* on the air. This group decided that the best tactic was a boycott... in other words it was a "buycott" not a boycott, which is to say that they went into Subway which is the major sponsor of *Chuck* and bought sandwiches on a particular day, and filled out cards saying, "*Chuck* sent me." And they were able to register large numbers of things by mobilizing people to buy sandwiches, which became a political act at that point. It's an act of a group of people to a higher authority to get them to change their behavior. And so, it's training people to do that requires teaching them to understand the system of production and distribution, new forms of activism, new ways of making public your sentiments – that's the beginning of civic education, right there. If you take it a step further, a website gets a cease and desist letter and fans rally to fight it. Now, they're in a legal terrain, right? They're engaged with struggles over fair use and copyright and what the balance between those should be – often deeply radicalizing, politicizing moments. Take a step out further from that, and you have the HP Alliance, which is a fan organization inspired by J.K. Rowling's involvement with Amnesty International. It's mobilized 100,000 people to help with genocide in Darfur and other human rights issues around the world. And then a

step out from that might be a traditional civic organization that begins to re-tool its message to reflect the urges of participation that have led fans, games, bloggers to do what they do. And so what I want to do is to map out that sort of political ecosystem. Most people would say the boycott to support *Chuck* probably wasn't *civic*, although I see in it all the resources you'd need to move to political action. And each step down the line, we see more and more clearly it's political. But we've got to actually map that whole space if we're going to understand what going to motivate someone to move from just playing around with the contents of their culture to engaging with their culture as a citizen. From there, what we want to do is to develop resources through the learning library that will help people, organizations, and youth make that transition – begin to think of themselves as political agents in new ways. But that stuff will look very different from the stuff produced by traditional civic organizations that assume they're addressing an audience that already is political and simply trying to mobilize them. I think we can dip much deeper into space that doesn't look political and still pull it into a more civic space.

Stephanie Stickney: that's great. It's a lot to think about. I guess we're about out of time. One thing I wanted to ask you, and I know I've tried this before, but I'm going to try again to see if I can convince you to come be a guest speaker for us?

Henry Jenkins: Well, I'd love to be a guest speaker, it just can't be in the next year. I like Austin, I've passed through quite often through the years. So what we should try to do... I like to go to the FLOW conference, which is housed at the University of Texas. So what we should try to do if it's possible is to try to align the talk with your program with the FLOW conference, then it's easy. But I'm not going to that this year because I'm trying to restrict my travel and make the transition. But possibly by next year we could get to the point where it would work.

Jenna McWilliams: What is the FLOW conference?

Henry Jenkins: FLOW is a publication out of the radio, television, film side of UT, and you guys should know about it if you don't. It's an experiment to create a public face for media studies. It started as a blog, or an on-line web Zine, I guess you could call it. But an on-line web Zine comes out every two weeks, and includes the top figures in television studies and new media studies around the world writing original pieces and getting in conversations with each other. Then they started *In Media Res* which is a spin off of FLOW, where every day of the week people post a video from contemporary television and put critical commentary around them. So they're short, bite-sized YouTube like bits of media analysis that come out every day of the week, or five days a week, I guess. Then they started an unconference at UT that brings people together that read FLOW, who engage with the materials and write for it. And you basically send along a paper that you don't read. People who attend your panel theoretically read it ahead of time, and you do about 2 or 3 minutes of "this is what my paper's about, you should read it" and you just get into a round of conversation. First it's a conversation between the speakers, but that breaks down in like 15 minutes and it's just whoever's in the room just talking to each other

about the topic. The speakers are just there as provocateurs to get people engaging with the topic. And it's a great conference because you actually get to talk to people. So I think it's one of the best innovations of the scholarly use of new media that I've seen...

-discussion of student and trailing off... {50:00}

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