"If You Don't Believe that You're Doing Some Good with the Work that You Do, then You Shouldn't Be Doing It": An Interview with Cindy Selfe

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Abstract: In this interview, Cindy Selfe talks about the intersections of technological literacy, digital scholarship, poststructuralist theory, and university politics. In doing so, she provides a lens for scholars trying to understand the milieu of the university by viewing its potential in juxtaposition to its past; explains how technology redefines the boundary between theory and experiential reality; and recommends a set of simple questions digital scholars can ask themselves when attempting to create localized, sustainable tactics demonstrating their work has the reach and scope of their immediate non-digital peers.

Digital humanists, working with networked technologies in their classrooms at the same time as they make the human use of technology a large part of their scholarship, are often dismayed by the general critique of their work as "scholarship lite," something only worthwhile as long as the current new thing from Microsoft or Apple is *en vogue*and shiny enough to capture the attention of editors and students alike. How do we historicize and theorize our work, using that contextualization as a strategic position to work from when promoting the legitimacy and value of our work to the discipline—if not the academy in general?

To gain some perspective and insight on technology in rhet-comp, I sat down in front of my computer and chatted with Cynthia Selfe over Skype. A pioneer in digital technologies in composition and rhetoric, Selfe is the first woman and the first English studies teacher ever to receive the EDUCOM Medal for innovative computer use in higher education. Selfe is the author of *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention* (SIUP 1999); *Literate Lives in the Information Age: Narratives from the United States* (with Gail Hawisher, Erlbaum 2004); *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition* (with Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, and Geoffrey Sirc); and dozens of other single- or co-authored scholarly articles and edited collections. Selfe is a Humanities Distinguished Professor at The Ohio State University (OSU), where she coordinates the Visiting Scholars in Digital Media and Composition program at OSU and directs the university's Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) summer institute. Along with Gail Hawisher, she is editor and founder of Computers and Composition Digital Press (http://ccdigitalpress.org/).

Brian Bailie (BB): A little history. How did you come to composition and rhetoric?

Cindy Selfe (CS): I was an English teacher in public schools, and I taught in a small junior high school outside of Houston, Texas. The school had an all Black population, and the only reason I got a job there was because all the other schools had already closed their applications. I had forgotten to look for a job; I had been traveling in Scotland. I really forgot that I had to come home and actually get a job because I had been a student for so long. I wasn't used to the "earning a living" kind of thing. So when I came home this was the only place I could find a job, and the only reason I could find a job there was because it was one of the poorest, most under-served school within eight zillion miles. Because the school was so poor, it was actually the only un-air conditioned school anywhere near Houston, Texas. So, my first couple years teaching at that school taught me quite a bit about how much I didn't know about teaching. It revealed this to me on a daily basis, with every single assignment I gave, with every activity that I did, it brought home to me how much I didn't know about composition and language use—even though I *thought* I knew a lot. I was a person who had gone to the University of Wisconsin. I thought I was just ready to go. I was smart, and I was capable, but I got out to that school and I thought to myself "Geez, are you stupid." The University of Wisconsin had*not* prepared me to work in a very poor

school, in a racist culture that shaped almost every aspect of the formal education those students had received. And the kids let me know it, too, in their own kind and subtle ways, and sometimes not so subtle ways. It became immediately evident I had a lot to learn.

So after I had taught in that school for about three years it occurred to me I had better go back and get some additional training if I was going to make anything of myself, if I was going to be good at what I had chosen to do, and so I applied to The University of Texas in the English Education Department. I thought I was going to learn more about English education and becoming a master teacher—or something better than I was anyway—and when I got there it was a period in University of Texas history where Jim Kinneavy held a joint appointment in English Education and in English, so there were a lot of role models of people who were in English Education and in English when I got there. The more that I kept studying and the more I blundered through graduate school, it just dawned on me that I might be better suited to teaching at the university level than I was at the junior high level or at the high school level, and that maybe I could do better for the people that I taught at that level; and that's the way it ended up being. Because of the timing of being at the University of Texas when Lester Faigley was there, Steve Witte, Maxine Hairston, Jim Kinneavy, John Ruszkiewicz and people like that, the rhetoric and comp world opened itself up to me in a very welcoming way.

BB: It sounds as if you were surrounded by an all-star group of faculty while you were there.

CS: Oh yeah. And the students were equally impressive. Hugh Burns, the guy who wrote the first dissertation about computers and composition in the country; Steve Lynn, who now teaches at the University of South Carolina; Susan Jarratt, now at the University of California, Irvine; Tom Miller, now at The University of Arizona; David Jolliffe, who teaches at the University of Arkansas; Tommy Newkirk, who now teaches at the University of New Hampshire— there were just all sorts of cool people there at that particular time; smart graduate students and smart faculty. It was a great time to be there.

BB: How did you come to work with computers?

CS: Well, when I went back to UT it was 1976, so the first fully assembled microcomputers weren't even on the market in 1976. But, what we did have at University of Texas were a lot of mainframe computers. So, you know how graduate students share things when they go through graduate school together? If someone needs readers for their study, you'll help someone else out and they'll help you out with what you're doing? Well, Hugh Burns, at the time, was completing his PhD for the Air Force, and needed readers for his study—he'd written a computer program, the first computer-assisted instruction in composition, based on the *topoi*, but needed people to rate students' responses to that program. So, I did that for him. But, I didn't have enough money to pay a typist for my dissertation—in those day we were actually typing them on carbon paper, so you had to be really good and if you made a mistake you had to rub out the little word with a razor blade on five carbons and retype. It was a mess. I mean, it was a hellish experience. It was horrible. And so in exchange, Hugh taught me how to use the university mainframe computer and the programming languages called RUNOFF, I think. I used an early text-formatting program called RUNOFF and the programming language SNOBOL. These programs used allowed you to tag something as a header, or a footer, or whatever; but you'd type it into this dumb terminal that would communicate with a mainframe computer, and then the next day you'd walk across campus and you'd get the print out on those sheets—you know, the sheets that had the little ladder things…

BB: You mean pinwheels?

CS: Right, and it was also one continuous folded sheet with perforations. So, then you'd go over and get that. In other words, I made use of the university's billion-dollar mainframe to type my dissertation, not exactly the use they envisioned for that particular machine. For me, however, this was a godsend, and by the time I graduated in 1980, this tiny bit of experience made me an expert on computers within the world of composition studies. So, the fact that I'd actually typed something on a mainframe—oh my God—that I had done any type of word processing or programming—that was something. And then, it was a pretty easy transition from there to the fully assembled commercial microcomputers that then came on the market.

BB: So was that a line on your CV? "Worked with mainframes?" (laughs)

CS: Well … (chuckles).

BB: I mean I'm sure it wasn't, but it could've been.

CS: It could have been, yeah, but it definitely was *not* because I had never worked very *well* with mainframes, you understand. Programming was never my strength—I only did it because I had to in order to do the things I wanted to

do in composition. Even later when I went to Michigan Tech I took a course in PASCAL because it still wasn't entirely clear that we wouldn't need programming to make use of computers in educational settings. I was miserable at it. So, I've always considered myself a fairly pathetic programmer although I work some in code, but it did start me thinking about using computer-assisted instruction for the purposes of teaching composition.

BB: How has the shift from terminal-centric technology to networking technologies changed your work?

CS: The obvious thing is that I live in the cloud, and I think of myself operating in the cloud. In the old days, it was much harder to stay in touch with people in the field of computers and writing, for instance, than it is today. When I first started working with Gail Hawisher, for instance, the fact we could actually send an email message back to each other was phenomenal, you know, that was like the biggest deal in the world. And we would send back and forth eight inch floppies at one point; and then at another point we would send back and forth those little hard discs; and then at another point CDs, and the we used large-file transport services like YouSendIt. But now at this moment in history when there's so much video and audio and the files are really large, I have to send her a 32-gig thumb drive in the mail. You know, so, the different technologies, the different ways of working, that we use in connection with the cloud or the other people in the universe has always changed my life. In fact the technical constraints, I think, contributed to building community—because this group of scholars faced shared challenges, we quickly came to think of ourselves as a community of scholars in computers and writing. This community was, and is, very, very important in my professional life, and in my collaboration with Gail, and in our projects that involve large extended networks of people: like the Computers and Composition Digital Press or the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives or*Computers and Composition*. If we didn't have those extended networks, we couldn't do those projects. And the only way we can maintain these extended networks is by knowing how to live and exist in a cloud that allows us to reach out to people. On the one hand it has everything to do with the technology that makes so many people accessible; on the other hand it has to do with shaping of our understanding of what collaborative work is. So, I would say both distributed computing, as in extended networks, and converging technologies, as in mobile iPhones, are absolutely some of the central tropes of my life. That's why social theories have become so central to computers and composition, because we have technologies that allow us to enact Nardi and O'Day's *intentional networks* in a very real way.

BB: Right. Network theory has been around for years, but no one in our field was really deploying it until social networking technologies became so commonplace.

CS: Yup, and it's no mistake that network theories and social theories both emerged within composition studies and computers and composition studies at a time when technology began connecting us socially. It's not a coincidence. I think there's some duality of structuration and understanding operating there.

BB: In all of your work there seems (to me at least) a focus on thinking through how technology complements and enriches classroom practices/pedagogical goals while simultaneously allowing for a shift from an instructor-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom. What would you say is the impetus behind this drive to maintain such a focus while your scholarship and research develops and responds to technological changes? Or has the impetus changed as the technology changes?

CS: I guess I'd go to Ronald Deibert for that—*Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia*. And what I'd say is there's a fit between the technologies that I use and the collaborative and student-centered philosophies that guide my work in a classroom. The relationship of fitness happens on so many different layers it's hard to even talk about it. In a social sense, collaboration happens because of the possibilities of networked distribution and circulation we were just talk about, right? And because we live and operate the cloud, in the classroom it doesn't seem to be possible to identify one central source of knowledge, or even one single instructor; the knowledge is distributed within both human systems within the classroom and in technological systems outside the classroom walls. But it also manifests itself on the level of how technology is diffused throughout a culture. Technological understandings for me generally flow upstream, that is, from students to me instead of vice versa. I depend very much on students to both show me technologies and to talk to me about how they're understanding the world with, and through, those technologies. So, you can't have a teacher-centered room if you're spending all your time doing *that* kind of work. So, working and collaborating in the cloud helps create a philosophical approach collaborating, and collaboration encourages me to pay attention to students and what they're doing with new technologies, so I try things out. I think technology and teaching and collaboration are mutually shaping phenomena to me. I think that's what makes a cultural fit for certain types of technologies: if the impulse is coming both from people and the technology, then I think there's a cultural fit. If there's not a fit both ways, then it probably means that technology is not going to flourish in a particular culture.

BB: In *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, you caution people not to take either an absolutist position of "technology as boon" or "technology as bane" to literacy because "neither group pays productive attention to technology *and* literacy" (39, emphasis mine). You continue on to explain that a

"kind of careful paying attention" is what "our culture needs so desperately if we hope to make change, to effect a productive influence on the technology-literacy link and projects surrounding technological literacy in our lives" (39). Even with the popular adoption of, and the mainstream's enthrallment with, social networking sites and technologies such as Myspace, YouTube, iPhone, Facebook, SMS text messaging, "3G" cell phones, blogs, Flickr, iPod, and Twitter, do you still see both camps present in the current literacy-technology debate, and if so, have their arguments changed any since you published *Technology and Literacy*… ten years ago?

CS: I think the argument has definitely changed. C. P. Snow's two cultures still seem to be operating. There are still a lot of humanists, who use technology, but don't think about focusing on it in their classes—especially in terms of critically informed production. So while these folks *use* a cell phone and *use* scholarly databases and *use* a lot of websites, and *use* technology in their classes in terms of making multimodal texts available for consumption by students, teaching students to analyze and criticize mediated texts, I still know plenty of teachers who avoid teaching students how to *compose* or *produce* such texts because they personally don't feel it's their responsibility to compose, or to teach composition, in any modality except the alphabetic. And I also know teachers of English who continue to be dismissive of vernacular multimodal literacy practices in digital environments, considering these to be undeserving of […] the serious attention that is so clearly paid to print texts. I still see a lot of that in English departments; I see a lot of fear in English departments. People think they're too old to take on the task of learning technologies, and they are stymied by the realization that they will never master technology, that they'll never get to where they're comfortable with it because they recognize the pace of technological change is so fast that they don't have enough time in the day to become expert at it, and they don't see how they could teach it without becoming expert at it. So, that's the humanist camp: we are *more* sophisticated about technology than we were twenty years ago, but we're nonetheless resistant to seeing technological or digital texts as "serious" texts or even resistant to seeing multimodal composition as even "real" composition.

The other side of the debate, I think are some computer enthusiasts who, the world you and I inhabit, that are always hopping from one technology to the next technology without sufficient critical attention. I'm guilty of this myself, I may really dig audio and so I use a lot of audio, and then I may really dig video, so I use a lot of video, but I sometimes fail to understand that my focus on the technology—*in and of itself*—sometimes blinds me to a critical understanding, or a more critical understanding, of how that technology functions within our culture, and in the material lives of real students, and real teachers. We can all lose sight of that in our own enthusiasm.

I think the reactions of both camps result in the same problem, that is, the lack of critical examinations and uses of technology. Half the group feels that composing digital multimodal texts is total fun all the time, and the other half of the group feels it's totally worthless to engage students in composing such multimodal texts—that it's outside our purview and undeserving of real intellectual attention. Same old problem, but maybe for slightly different reasons and slightly more sophisticated. Then there's everybody in-between. In reality these folks inhabit positions that are less dichotomous than this; when I go to different campuses there are always people there who really have an interest in digital and multimodal text production, and those who don't have any interest at all and just stay the heck away. I mean [technology] is not something they want to talk about or even think about, or even think it's *worth* thinking about.

BB: I've run into that problem, too, where anything perceived as "technology" shuts down all discussion among humanists. I mention I'm reading up on network theory, and they just turn away. I have to explain network theory is the graphing of groups—work environments, friendship circles, non-governmental organizations, classrooms, corporations—and using that resulting graph to form claims about why and how people interact and what drives the continued, consensual interactions of the individual people involved in those networks. Then they come around, and say "Oh. That's what it means. It's not just about the Internet or computers."

CS: It's true. The word "network" has become almost totally associated with technology or digital environments [and] in a weird sense when it isn't that way at all.

BB: No, it isn't, and I think that goes back to what you were saying early: A lot of technologies now allow us to live out these theories and theoretical moves we [as a field] have been talking about for awhile, but now it's like the only thing the word "network" can signify is the Internet; there is no "network" unless you're talking about the Internet. This means a lot of humanists are turned off by the whole topic, so for me, at conferences, this means a lot of shortened conversations.

CS: You're right. And in sense, it's not just that technology allows us to live out these theoretical perspectives, but sometimes technology appropriates those theoretical positions or threads; appropriates them, amplifies them, and transforms them so that there's that weird duality of structuration operating there, and you don't know which way the effects are going anymore, right? It's not always theory to embodiment, it's sometimes embodiment to theory. At Michigan Tech—when Jim Kalmbach and I both used to teach there—I was always saying "Oh, let's get this new

kind of computer." and peoples' response would always be "But what can you *do* with it? And what is it that *needs*doing that we can use this computer to do?" Jim's response to that was always "How do I know what we know can do with it until we get it? New technologies will suggest or inspire new ways of operating; and the ways that I want to work and teach will suggest new ways of using technology—but those ways emerge as we learn to use a new technology as we live with and formulate our relationship to it."

And I think that was one of the boats we missed early on with technology; we didn't describe it in that way. We only thought of technology as a prosthesis for what we already did. We didn't see it as a way of changing what we didn't know we could do.

BB: In the introduction to *Global Literacies and the World Wide-Web*, you and Gail Hawisher explain the undergirding and enabling fiction for several "technology as boon" types is "the Web forms a global literacy environment in which peoples from all over the world can communicate with one another without significant barriers posed by geopolitical location, language, culture, everyday social practice and attitudes" (2). What are your thoughts on the above mentioned applications, technologies, and websites from my previous question and the claim—not forwarded by me but the general feeling—that these developments in everyday technology are bringing the Web closer to the aforementioned global literacy environment?

CS: Yes, of course, technology is becoming increasingly diffused around the world, and therefore, more people can use it and it's more accessible to more kinds of people, but at the same time we're discovering more ways in which it shapes what's possible and limits our thinking. The utopic vision you discuss, the global village utopia myth, is still a myth. I mean, there's a difference between the kind of access which is access to *any* old computer *anywhere*and under *any* conditions, and *real* accessibility in terms of the *kinds* of machines people have; the *education* they have or bring to those machines in order to make critical use of them; the ways in which different computers and programs and learning environments are configured to accommodate *different learning styles*—especially for people who are considered disabled; the support computer systems provide for world Englishes and other languages; the*cost of and the location of* computers in poor countries and countries that don't have a technological infrastructure in terms of people to sustain networks and expand networks and engineer networks and make the technologies work. I mean, there are a million reasons why that kind of utopic myth isn't borne out at this point and may never be because, frankly, there are always inequitable power relationships operative in any field of play, and technology is a tool that is distributed and used along existing axes of power. So, unequal power relationships are reflected in technology use and distribution, and the existing systems that certainly belie any utopic myth.

BB: So if the Web is not a neutral environment where this type of global literacy can happen, then—hypothetically—if I'm a Luddite who doesn't see technology and literacy as linked and does not want to use technology in my Composition classroom, what is the point of paying attention to technology and how it's used in the everyday sense*and* appropriated by the academy?

CS: Well, I agree, technology is certainly *not* neutral, it's shaped by tangential forces aligned along existing axes of power and social formations—and like the engineers at Michigan Tech used to say, "If the only tool you have on your tool belt is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." So, you know, technology does have *tendencies*associated with it, and maybe even built into it, that either reveal or hide certain ways of being in the world. But, no system is *wholly* determined. There are all sorts of human being also enrolled as active social agents in technological systems, as Michel DeCerteau and Andrew Feenberg point out—not only technology producers, but technology users. And we can, and do, shape these systems continually. So, I think our job in such systems as humanists and teachers is use technologies in ways that can foster humanist projects and educational projects in humane ways, in ways that help us and students accomplish the ends we want to accomplish. If technology is not functioning in this way, then it's our responsibility to get in there at the local level, to be that organic intellectual, to be that person in de Certeau's terms who "writes in the margins" and "poaches in another's field," who makes their own paths instead of walking on the sidewalk. And we have lots of routes for such action open to us as teachers, through small, minute, powerful micro-political tactics that de Certeau would talk about, or as Feenberg suggest, involvement in bigger, strategic efforts designed to shape technology democratically. I think that's our obligation as human beings, as teachers, as humanists, as *homo faber*. You get in there, you mix it up, you do something on a micropolitical scale and encourage others to do the same.

I guess the final response to that question is if you don't believe that you're doing some good with the work that you do, then you shouldn't be doing it. You should not be getting up in the morning and going to teach. I have to believe that the kind of work that I do with technology makes a difference and makes a productive difference. I don't always succeed, but I have to believe that that possibility exists or I wouldn't be doing it. And this work is shaped by a little bit of optimism and a little bit of humility in understanding that I'm just one agent enrolled in some very complex system, and that my actions always have unintended consequences, as Anthony Giddens would say. But we have

to *try* to do make productive change anyway. Or we're just mushrooms or something. We're not human beings, and we're certainly not teachers if we don't believe in change.

BB: I can agree with that.

CS: Well, it's not a very popular stance—probably not in the radical postmodern context, and it's certainly not in the academic tradition to admit you think you can make a positive difference and that you're hopeful and that you're optimistic. There's a lot more encouragement to be cynical, [to say] "Oh, we're never gonna change this system so might as well complain about what's happening and have this very bleak sense of the world." I just don't think we have that luxury.

And it's not that you ever believe your work is efficient, but you strive for […] effectiveness. You strive for that productive action, and if you can pay attention closely enough you can learn to deploy [the university's] strengths, and the various elements' strengths in [the university] to certain ends that you think might prove productive […] My colleague Louie Ulman talks about operating on [the] existing margins of university infrastructures, where the infrastructure is already there, and you just *deploy* it in more creative ways to accomplish what you're trying to accomplish, you *use* it to sustain efforts that might not be mainstream efforts but are nonetheless effective and productive and humane.

BB: How does the impossibility of global literacy affect the work of literacy and the Web? What should be the goals and localized tactics for teacher-scholars who want to teach their colleagues, students, and themselves to constantly be mindful of technology and the material practices technology engenders?

CS: Well, part of that is the definition of literacy [and] how narrow it often is imagined to be. Right now, for instance, I'm working with Melanie Yergeau, whose scholarship is on autism; one of the points she makes with her work is that the conventional composition curriculum, as a technology of education—and here I'm talking about technology in a much broader way—is shaped by neuro-typical biases that help focus our attention and efforts in a fixation on the printed word. In other words, we've shaped our whole professional around a certain way of being and thinking in the world, around the printed word as both privileged tool and desired end product. And we have identified print literacy as the *sine qua non* of an educated person.

And that's why scholars like those in the New London Group are so important, I think. They write about how important difference is—understanding different people and different approaches to making meaning and understanding that such people bring a whole universe of different resources to design tasks. Difference, in other words opens up our minds to a whole universe of design resources we didn't even know existed. Although it's impossible to have a truly global village or true World Wide Web, computer networks have allowed me to see a range of different literacy practices I would have not otherwise have seen. And I suspect that makes me a better teacher. I think the reach of the web makes me a better thinker about literacy and thinker about education, and thinker about technology, it allows me to talk to more people and to go more places and see more things and do things that I would not normally be able to do.

BB: How do you think the weight and heft given to digital scholarship effects the "technology as bane to literacy" camp's continued existence? Is it possible because digital scholarship is valued less than traditional print scholarship that some faculty members are loathe to discuss or teach technology as part and parcel to literacy because they don't see it as important to their individual careers?

CS: I'm not sure about the last part of that question, but let me tell you how I think of this. Personally, I've gotten really tired of limiting my work to "flat land," so for my digital scholarship, I just don't think I can limit my work to two dimensions any more, or at least I'm dissatisfied with those two dimensions. I don't think two dimensions alone lend themselves to communicating what I need to communicate. So when I see the tools available to do that communicating, I just don't want to do it in flat land anymore. First of all, I think flatland is boring and I'm tired of it, and I don't think it's adequate or sufficient to the intellectual projects I want to do. That's why, for instance, we started C&C Digital Press. I believe that new ways of thinking and researching require new kinds of multimodal publishing formats. And I suspect these new forms of digital, multimodal publishing are changing people's opinion of technology as "the bane of literary humanistic scholarship." So many university presses are failing now. With the downturn in the economy, you can't keep presses going, and you certainly can't keep them going for the press runs of 500 that—if you're lucky—your academic book *might* be able to sell. I think so many presses are now moving to digital formats it's going to be interesting in the next ten years because digital publishing will become more the norm than it is the exception. Of course, there's digital publishing and digital publishing. All the University of Michigan stuff is now online, but very little of it is born-digital work. Most of it is .pdfs online, and .pdfs aren't necessarily media-saturated. So digital publishing can still be located in flatland. I do think that will change, and it will change pretty rapidly now, but it's not going to change overnight.

Maybe a challenge that we face is making it through this period where people don't really know how to respond and relate to born-digital work because as a profession, as a very small group, computers and composition, we've done a very bad job of showing how the values of that kind of multimodal work correspond to the values that of more traditional scholarship within departments. For instance, in our own department the "reach and scope" and of scholarship is really important. So, if your scholarship is in print, it has reach and scope, other people will be talking about it, using it in their own work, discussing it in various professional venues; it will make a difference in the field, and there will be some way of gauging that beyond just the little, narrow sub-discipline or specialty. I think we haven't done a good job as computers and composition people saying, "Look at this digital and multimodal work. It adheres to those same values of reach and scope and let me show you how it is affecting my field and how it is visible and important beyond the narrow confines of my sub-specialty.

So, that's how we structured Computers and Composition Digital Press. We built in peer review by a national *and* international editorial board, and we have a university press partner because its advisory board review also helps us gauge the reach and scope and excellence of projects. Other parts of English studies value that kind of peer review—so we built peer review into Computers and Composition Digital Press as a way of acknowledging the scholarly values to which the field as a whole subscribes. The work might be fundamentally very different—born-digital work is very different from print work—but we still maintain a value on peer review, reach and scope, and excellence. I think that computers and writing folks have to realize we're talking to people at our home institutions, on tenure and promotion committees, who have values that have been historically sedimented in English studies, and we have to find some place to meet and reference those values, even though our work is creative and inventive and different. Their work is very creative and inventive, too. So where are the places we meet? And how can we talk about those shared values? And what evidence can we provide that show our values are the same?

BB: Some critics of technology in the composition classroom contend there's no need for such "bells and whistles." They stress the fundamentals of rhetoric within the writing classroom should, if taught well, allow a student to successfully create a persuasive text whatever medium said student is composing in. What's your response to this claim?

CS: In part they're right. I think rhetoric and rhetorical understandings are themselves technologies that we can deploy when we try to make meaning in a variety of circumstances and a variety of media. But media themselves can change rhetorical approaches. Media, for example, aren't transparent or neutral, so we need to practice with media, and we need to know the affordances and the capabilities and the tendencies and the ways in which particular media and particular modalities shape our expression, before we can be rhetorically effective. If we don't do those things well, it doesn't matter how important your rhetorical purpose is or how focused your rhetorical intent is or how keen your rhetorical understanding is, you have to know how to work with the tools. Unless you know something about the tool, you're not going to be as effective in deploying the rhetorical affordances of that tool expertly. I think the two have to go hand-in-hand. So with video work in composition classes, for instance, we're not going to teach students to be Spielbergs or anyone like that. We're going to teach them to be good rhetoricians who can deploy any number of modes of expression and media to make meaning. We're going to teach them to use all available means to accomplish responsible rhetorical ends.

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