

Transcript for “Multimodal Editing: An Interview with Stephanie Vie”

Voiceover (Tina): Scholars in academia are frequently confronted by the need to publish their research. While publication opportunities used to be limited to print-based journals and books, more and more scholars are seeking multimodal publication venues like Computers and Composition Digital Press in order to share their born-digital projects.

Because print-based texts have been around for so long, one can easily imagine the kind of work an editor does: correct typos, grammatical errors, and works cited inconsistencies. But there is still some level of mystery involved with multimodal texts when it comes to the editing process, especially when we think about all the different kinds of media that go into their production. To help add a level of transparency to the work of a multimodal editor, I interviewed Stephanie Vie, one of the Project Directors at Computers and Composition Digital Press.

An Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Stephanie has worked as a Project Director with Computers and Composition Digital Press since its inception in 2007. Her work has appeared in journals like *Computers and Composition* and *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, and her textbook *E-Identity* has been adopted nationally by over fifty different institutions (University of Central Florida, n.d.). Stephanie is also a co-editor for the Reviews section of the online journal *Kairos*.

In the video that follows, you will learn about the kind of work Stephanie does as a Project Director, hear some advice about preparing a multimodal text for publication, and join her in anticipating the next steps for Computers and Composition Digital Press as an academic publisher for scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition.

What is a Project Director for Computers and Composition Digital Press?

Tina: The interview started with an overview of the duties Stephanie performs as a project director for Computers and Composition Digital Press.

Stephanie: A project director really is the sort of final step in a project that’s going through the Computers and Composition Digital Press. So up until that point the editors or the authors have been working with various staff. And then once it’s really in its final form and it’s ready to be looked at for accessibility, for proofreading, copyediting, all those kinds of things, it comes over to me or to Kris Blair, who’s the other Project Director. And we really then go intensively into looking at it and breaking it down through all these different elements.

The Editing Process

Tina: Referring to her Project Directors’ guide for editing, Stephanie described the editing process through which all projects go.

Stephanie: Here's the different steps that the Project Director will go through on a project: First, we go through editing, of course. So reading through the entire thing. Is it clear? Is it correct? And this includes mechanics, grammar, content, years, facts, figures, things like that. But then, what's really specific to, I think, the multimodal element in the projects that we get is looking at the design next. So it's not just editing, it's also looking at the design and making sure the design elements are consistent and that they're rhetorically effective. So, for example, the use of images, the use of color, the links, the placement of different elements. Is it working? Is it pleasing? Is it rhetorically effective? Is it working across different browsers? Does it work on different types of devices?

With that design, then think about the navigation. So does all the navigation work? Think about how somebody might go through this project—this final edited collection or this book—where will they start, where can they go, what kind of reading process might they be invited into by the navigation? And, again, I think that's really, really important from a multimodal standpoint because with an article or print-based document, you have pretty much one reading that you're invited into beginning to end. Of course, with the projects that come out of CCDP, you can choose to read from beginning to end, chapter-by-chapter as you might do with a normal book or edited collection, or you can skip around. You can read just smaller sections. Especially for someone who is a teacher maybe looking at an edited collection from CCDP, they're probably not going to assign their students the whole thing. So does that navigation set it up so that a reader, a teacher, someone looking at it might be able to say, "How can I use this in various ways?" What's the overall structure, and does it make sense?

And then finally, something that's also incredibly important is the accessibility. So, one of the last steps is to look at: "Is this an accessible document?" Do we have, again, the alt text for all images so that someone who is going to be visually impaired and reading this project with the assistance of a screen reader: Will their screen reader technology be able to read the images? And that's, again, not something you have to think about in a print-based document. So again, thinking about the access of the readers, and I think that because Melanie Yergeau works with the board, she's been amazing in helping us think through access and issues of disability in terms of the projects that we're publishing and the kind of work that the Project Directors can do to make sure that, as much as possible, we can think about all the various kinds of readers who might encounter these texts and make the texts as open and inviting and readable as possible.

Tina: As you may recognize through this in-depth description, the editing process of a multimodal document can be quite extensive and time-consuming. Stephanie explained further.

Stephanie: And it takes a lot of time. I mean it takes weeks, months sometimes, depending on how big a project is to go through all these different levels and to just painstakingly look at the sentence level issues, the paragraph level issues, the chapter level issues, the project level issues. And depending on how much querying back and forth needs to happen with an author, this can take quite awhile. But at the end, you have a project that you can really be proud of. And I think that's what I look for then in seeing somebody else's project. Would I be proud of this if I was the editor who had worked with this? Or would I think, "Ah man, that's not good."

Advice from a Multimodal Editor

Tina: With her experience as an editor, Stephanie has learned how to interact with authors and produce multimodal projects that both she and the authors can be proud of. Elaborating upon an interaction she had with an author, she offered this advice to scholars looking to create and publish multimodal texts.

Stephanie: I was talking with this author, and I said, “Look, you know your subject so well, and because of that, of course, you’re making a lot of assumptions about what your audience is going to know. So when you say something like, ‘In this example here,’ you’re assuming that they know what you’re talking about. But let’s say I’m a reader who’s not familiar with this subject. I’m going to be lost, and then everything that comes after that I’m really going to be missing so much.” So what I said to him in this instance is, “Try to read through the lens of somebody who’s maybe coming to your subject with very little background knowledge. Maybe they’re coming to your subject for the first time, and they’re really interested and they want to know more, but they don’t know. And that’s why they’re reading your work is because you’re an expert and you’re sharing all this expertise, but if you stay at the level of talking to other people who also know as much about this subject as you, this person is not going to be able to enter that conversation.” So I think one piece of advice for potential authors and editors for the Computers and Composition Digital Press would be to think about that tension between you’re an expert or you’re gathering this expertise by getting together authors for an edited collection, for example, and everyone is sharing this wonderful knowledge, but at the same time you can’t assume that your readers are necessarily going to be as familiar with the content, understand how you want them to navigate, understand what’s going on when you have this image here. Make sure to explain in the text why that image is important or what the purpose of that image is. Don’t just let an image or a link or a navigational element sort of hang out there and assume that people are going to know what to do. Help them, invite them to understand.

Tina: As the interview continued, Stephanie explained how multimodal compositions come in all shapes and sizes, so each project offers editors a unique experience that requires full interaction with the text. To help illustrate this, Stephanie described her work with author John Scenters-Zapico on his project called *Generaciones’ Narratives*.

Stephanie: He had a lot of video and audio. What he was doing was collecting interview materials from people, and he was writing about immigrant issues and literacy, and so there were tons of pieces to that. There was all the textual material, there were the embedded videos, there were audio clips. And so when I was working with that particular project I kind of had to decide for myself as a Project Director, “How am I going to encounter this as an editor? Am I going to read everything first, and then move on to the videos and then move into the audio?” And then I thought as nice and neat and tidy as that sounds, it’s not going to work very well. I really am going to have to look at it as a reader would probably be encountering it. So read the text, oh there’s supposed to be a video embedded here, I’ll go find the video and I’ll play and listen to it. Oh, there’s some pop-up audio here, I’ll go listen to that. And I think that that, too, is part of what is so time consuming about this process. If you think about it, every single element that somebody includes—a video, a piece of audio, an image, a link—every time somebody

includes that in a project it has to be checked. So if you send 25 five-minute videos, I have to watch 25 five-minute videos, sometimes more than once, depending on what's going on. I have to listen to all the audio, and so I think this is all part of the invisibility of multimodal text production. We don't often think about all the work that goes into creating something like a 10-minute video. Of course, there's hours and hours of editing and there's listening to it and so on. I think the same thing with an edited collection for something like *Computers and Composition Digital Press*. Probably a lot of people don't realize is there's someone who has to sit there and literally open every link, watch every video, listen to every piece of audio, etc., etc. But there is, and hopefully they love that work.

Advice from a Multimodal Author

Tina: Besides working as a project director on multimodal projects, Stephanie has authored a few multimodal texts, including a chapter in Lynn Lewis's edited collection *Strategic Discourse: The Politics of (New) Literacy Crises*, which came out in March of 2015. To show how different editors approach a new project, Stephanie explained how she took her editor's advice in making chapter revisions.

Stephanie: One of the pieces of advice that we got and I totally agree with is that we should help readers understand how to navigate this webtext. And so literally, when you open up my chapter it says, "Navigating this Webtext: Each image will take you to a different section of the webtext. Beyond this first page, a small navigation bar will appear in the top right-hand corner. Or, follow the bread crumbs at the bottom." So there's multiple ways of navigating, depending on how somebody might want to go through there, and it's explicit. Because what I did at first, was I just had images, and I assumed that people would think, "Ah, I should click on that image and it will take me somewhere," and that was a poor assumption. And that's coming from me doing this kind of work. So it's something I even myself need to be aware of, to think about as I go through and I compose webtexts. To remind myself about those different steps that we go through for CCDP, and think about, "Okay, am I being accessible? Am I explaining textually what these images mean? Am I giving people multiple ways of navigating through my webtext so that I'm not forcing them into one particular path?" It's useful for me to remember the sort of the things that I want to tell to authors and editors.

Advice for Newbies and Novices

Tina: As an editor, Stephanie has also had the opportunity to work with scholars who are more inexperienced when it comes to multimodal productions. She offered this advice on how to make a multimodal project more approachable.

Stephanie: In my role over at *Kairos*, I work with a lot of people who have never done multimodal composing, and they're very trepidatious a lot of times. Like, "I don't know what I'm doing. Please help! I don't think I'm doing this very well." And then they'll look at things like the award-winning pieces in *Kairos*, the exemplars, and go "I can't do that!" And we're always like, "We don't need you to do that. We need you to do what you want to do. These are the best of the best. But you can do multimodal work. Don't set yourself up to think that it has to be this high level." So I think the same thing with *Computers and Composition Digital Press*. Obviously, we want the work coming out to be amazing, but

we also don't want people to be scared and to look at things we've published in the past and go, "Oh, gosh, I can't do that! That looks so complicated!" I mean it's like any major project. Yeah, it looks terribly complicated when you look at the whole thing as a mass, but when you break it down and say, "Oh, well, it's these chapters, and there's these pieces, and oh, once they figured out the design, they re-used the design throughout." Then it starts seeming much more like, "I can do that." And with both of these types of projects, there are mentors that are available. So if a project goes to the Computers and Composition Digital Press, we have two levels of looking at a proposal. One is just a very informal, shoot us an idea and do we like the idea, is this working well, do we want to see a full proposal? Versus looking at a full proposal with some sample chapters, to say, "Yes, this is something that we definitely want to see further." But there's mentorship available. All the people on the staff are perfectly willing to answer questions, so I think that my sort of plea to people who are interested in but maybe feeling scared of jumping into multimodal or open-access publishing with something like CCDP is to say, "You can do it! And if you feel like you need resources and help, that help is out there. Don't be afraid to ask for it."

What Computers and Composition Digital Press does for the Field of Rhetoric and Writing

Tina: Our conversation finally turned to a discussion about Computers and Composition Digital Press and the role it plays for scholars in the field. Stephanie described how the press has developed over the years and explained why scholarly, peer-reviewed, multimodal presses are important for the work of rhetoric and writing scholars in academia.

Stephanie: I think as the press has grown over the years, we've gotten people who are doing more multimodal things and who are kind of pushing the boundaries of what a book or an edited collection might look like, but we also have some that are really kind of more traditional in terms of really text-heavy, maybe relying on some images, but not so much video or audio content or things like that. So it wildly depends, and I think that's part of what interesting about this work, you just never know what's going to come in, or what kind of projects we're going to be working with. So it doesn't get boring, for sure, which is nice.

I think that we don't have enough places currently to publish multimodal work, and I know that might sound odd given that we have journals like *Kairos*, *Harlot*. That we have *Present Tense*, I'm sure there are others, like *enculturation*. There's others that I'm missing. We've got various open-access publishers that are great. Things like the WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, but I think what CCDP does that's really, really important is that it is open-access and it's multimodal, and for those people who want to do that kind of work, and have it be accessible to a broad swath of readers, that's what the CCDP offers. But there are not enough places to publish multimodal work in our field, and we need more. And I think that as people see the success of presses like CCDP, maybe more will flourish in the future, that's my hope, because we need outlets for this kind of compelling work. There are projects that can't work as a print-based book, and there are plenty of places to go to publish a print-based book. There are plenty of places to publish a mostly print-based book with a few images and things like that. But when you get to somebody wants to embed a game, or somebody wants heavily video- or audio-based work, there's not a ton of places that you can go to. So I think that the emphasis on open access is really, really important.

We need more places that are committed to publishing open-access, and as such, offering up scholarly research to as broad a group of readers as possible, and also to allow for that kind of really compelling digital multimodal work.

Tina: Considering the on-going debate about multimodal publication legitimacy, I asked Stephanie about the fears some scholars have when it comes to publishing multimodal pieces given the academic precedent for print-based publications.

Stephanie: I think there's always going to be fears about things like that, and I think that there's fears about multimodal work. And I think that's part of why Cindy [Selfe] and Gail [Hawisher] have always made sure to emphasize that this is a peer-reviewed press—that we are publishing things that have the intellectual heft of a book. Those are very careful, rhetorical choices to reassure people that might be a little wary—that, yes, this is absolutely scholarly, that these should, and have in the past, count for promotion and tenure decisions. That this is the same amount of work as a book, it's just in a slightly different modality. But, yeah, I think that people absolutely are potentially a little wary of either open-access or multimodal or the combination of the two, and it's interesting to me because I always think, “Well, what's the problem with open access? It seems to be beneficial to me that you're allowing for the circulation of scholarly ideas. So why wouldn't you want that conversation to extend as far as it could? Why wouldn't you want your work to be circulating out there and to have people respond?” I don't want to write things that two people read. I want to write things that people read and talk about and have an opportunity to talk back to me and so on.

The Future of Computers and Composition Digital Press

Tina: Our conversation finally wound down into a discussion about where Stephanie would like to see Computers and Composition Digital Press go in the next five to ten years and the kinds of projects she'd like to see more of.

Stephanie: One of the things that I think is really interesting about some of our publishing platforms like CCDP or *Kairos* and so on is a lot of times we're talking to people who are really interested in things that we're interested in. So we're almost preaching to the choir in some ways. So we talk about multimodal composing and assessment or digital writing to other people who are also interested in multimodal composing or digital writing and so on. I would be really excited to see CCDP reach out to maybe some people who don't know about us. Who are those people who are scared about multimodal publishing, who maybe want to take a chance trying a project like this for the first time? It would be fantastic if more people who worked at schools that are like, “Multimodal? Is that really going to ‘count’”? For them to be able to say, “Yes!” and “Look at this project! Here's something that I was able to produce!” So I would like to see us broaden, you know, the authors, the editors, who are working with us so that maybe we get some new people in who want to take a chance, who want to try something new, who are willing to take us up on that support. I'd also like to really see people push the limits of what's possible within this multimodal framework because it really is open. So a lot of what we get will be HTML-based. Here's a lot of print, here's maybe some video or audio elements. It would be really cool if we got more things that played with form and pushed the boundaries of what's possible with

multimodal composition. So there's two answers: I'd like people who have never done this before to take a chance, and I'd like people who really know what they're doing to take a chance with new forms and new ideas. I think we need both of those groups of people to continue shaping CCDP to being something that's continually amazing.

Final Thoughts

Tina: Throughout our interview, Stephanie provided a wealth of knowledge not only about her role as a project director at Computers and Composition Digital Press, but also about the insights one gains working in such great detail with multimodal projects. Her descriptions and discussions help illustrate how much work goes on behind the scenes to each digital collection or book we find online, and she added a necessary level of transparency for anyone who is interested in producing or reading multimodal texts. With that, I'll leave you with Stephanie's final thoughts.

Stephanie: I just wish that more people knew about CCDP and would consider it as a publishing venue. And I say this as somebody who has been working with CCDP for many years, who has had different pieces of my own, like individual chapters, published in CCDP, and also putting together a proposal for a project that I hope to be published with CCDP in the future. So I've seen these sort of different areas of entry, and I know how supportive we are of authors and how excited we are about projects, so I think that we just need more people to consider us and go, "Yeah, this is a place where my work should go." So the more word we can get out and say, "Have you heard about Computers and Composition Digital Press, and have you thought about it as a place for your work?" That would be fantastic.

Special Thanks to Stephanie Vie

Composed by Tina Arduini

Screen shots of digital texts taken from Computers and Composition Digital Press:

<http://ccdigitalpress.org/>

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