BOOK REVIEW

Book Review: Eyman's *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*

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As someone interested in digital rhetoric but new to this field, I was looking for texts that would be informative yet simple to understand about digital rhetoric. Despite reading some texts related to the field of digital rhetoric, I was still unable to understand what digital rhetoric was including its theoretical groundings and implications. Douglas Eyman's *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* (2015) published by the University of Michigan Press, aims to fill the gap in digital rhetoric literature by providing an overview and synthesis of the existing work on digital rhetoric theory. The book is simple yet informative, making it engaging for novice readers and those familiar with the field of digital rhetoric. The author's goal is to situate digital rhetoric as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and to provide a framework for understanding its history, definition, and development as an academic field. The author is fairly selective in their overview, focusing first on works that explicitly use the term "digital rhetoric" before expanding to theories, methods, and practices that implicitly draw on digital rhetoric. This approach helps the readers to follow a map of digital rhetoric as an emergent field including its unique challenges and opportunities.

This book (Eyman, 2015) is divided into four chapters. The first chapter 'Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric' begins with a simple definition of digital rhetoric, "The term "digital rhetoric" is perhaps most simply defined as the application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances" (p. 13). However, Eyman also acknowledges that this approach is complicated by the question of what constitutes a digital text, and how one defines rhetoric. Therefore, before formulating a working definition of digital rhetoric which he considers necessary to establish it as a discipline, Eyman examines the core terms 'rhetoric', 'digital' and 'text' in separate subtopics in details engaging with their historical scholarship. In the historical survey of rhetoric from classical period to contemporary period, the writer sums up, "While rhetoric provides the primary theory and methods for the field of digital rhetoric, the objects of study must be digital (electronic) compositions rather than speeches or print texts" (p. 18). Likewise, in his discussion of digital as a bridge between textual production (broadly defined to include multimedia) and rhetoric, Eyman defines digital "both as a new form of production enabled by information and communication technologies and as a reference to the human history of written communication (from nonalphabetic writing to what we traditionally consider "print")" (p. 20). Similarly, he defines text as 'communicative event' with seven criteria of textuality: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informality, situationality, and intertextuality and/or of six layers: textual, contextual, cultural, temporal, intentionality, and intertextuality' (pp. 21-23). After carrying the richer understanding of the key terms- rhetoric, digital and text- Eyman finally defines digital rhetoric, "The term "digital rhetoric" is perhaps most simply defined as the application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances" (p. 44). Eyman's definition of digital rhetoric as the application of rhetorical theory to digital texts and performances effectively contextualizes the field within its historical and theoretical roots. His method of unpacking the core terms-rhetoric, digital and text- not only aids novice readers in understanding these concepts but also provides clarity on digital rhetoric as a whole.

The second chapter entitled 'Digital Rhetoric: Theory' examines theories of digital

rhetoric and their relations to classical and contemporary rhetorical theory. Eyman argues that digital rhetoric should be viewed as a field that engages multiple theories and methods rather than as a singular theory framework. He reviews approaches to classical rhetoric by revising or reframing the five canons of rhetoric and then moves to contemporary rhetorics by looking at the rhetorical situation, identity, networks, and digital ecologies, economies, and circulation. His revisit to the classical rhetoric with the intention of digitalizing classical rhetoric is interesting as he looks at the Sophistic rhetoric from the perspective of digital age suggesting how Sophistic rhetoric had the ingredients of relativism and probable knowledge and calls the Sophists 'cyborg' (pp. 62-63).

The penultimate chapter 'Digital Rhetoric: Method' looks at research methods for digital rhetoric, examining current rhetorical and writing studies methods, methods from other fields that might be applied to digital rhetoric research, and a call for the development of new, "born-digital" research methods. In this section, the writer first addresses the traditional rhetorical method of close reading and the relatively new inverse of that method, which Franco Moretti (2000) calls "distant reading", then covers the methods from fields in writing studies and finally goes on to examine methods from fields that do not take rhetoric as their theoretical or methodological foundations. The writer defines close reading as a technique that "focuses upon meaning within the text as it is evidenced in formal qualities (such as rhythm, use of imagery and metaphor) as interpreted by the reader" (p. 94). Although close reading or textual criticism is a viable approach, it is closely associated with print text. Therefore, the writer wants to ensure that it remains a valuable method for analyzing digital text. Moreover, as a method for digital rhetoric, he also wants to use distant reading that "takes a long view, examining the text as one among many and considering a much larger corpus" (p. 95). From writing studies, the writer discusses two methods appropriate for digital rhetoric: genre studies and usability considering that the former method is useful "when applied to digital environments, which engage individual and collaborative practices that take place within both digital and discursive networks" (p. 95) and the latter is beneficial for providing "a methodology for studying both writing practices and writing pedagogies—and because it takes both system and user into consideration, it provides appropriate methods for studying digital writing practices and digital pedagogies" (p. 97). Apart from them, the writer also reviews research methods from a broad range of fields and disciplines that may be profitably appropriated for digital rhetoric research such as 'C.O.D.E. and Network Administration Tools', 'Web Usage via Server Log Analysis', 'Social Network Analysis (SNA)', 'Hypertext Network Analysis (HNA)', 'Bibliometrics and Cybermetric', 'Data Visualization', (pp. 100-107).

Eyman in the last chapter 'Digital Rhetoric: Practice', focuses on three main areas of digital rhetoric as practice: pedagogy (teaching digital rhetoric), research and scholarship (publication both about and instantiating scholarship of digital rhetoric), and performance (examples of digital-rhetoric-in-action in the production of multimodal, new media, and other networked, digital texts). Eyman stresses the idea that digital rhetoricians must explore both theory and technology in pedagogy as such an approach would enhance the practical application "for understanding how technologies work within social and cultural contexts" (p. 113). He also provides the outlines of three courses- Sarah Arroyo: Seminar on Digital Rhetoric, Byron Hawk: Advanced Writing—Digital Rhetoric, and Douglas Eyman: Web Authoring and Design- as the examples of teaching digital rhetoric (p. 113-117). Similarly, in his discussion of digital research and scholarship, he highlights the publication of scholarly work that is presented as digital text, utilizing digital rhetoric to craft the research itself within the framework of new media (p. 119). He concludes this chapter discussing the third area of digital rhetoric as practice, performance as evident in parodies, government sites and games.

The major strength of this book is Eyman's ability to make complex concepts accessible to readers. He does an excellent job of explaining the theoretical underpinnings

of digital rhetoric firstly by defining it in general usage and then only moving onto technical terms. For instance, his definition of digital, "In general usage, 'digital' is roughly synonymous with 'electronic' or 'computerized' and is often used in opposition to its antonym, 'analog.' In technical terms, digital systems are made up of discrete values whereas analog systems feature a continuous range of values, often represented as a wave" (p. 18) is comprehensible to both the general and informed audience. Likewise, another strength of this book is the logical development of ideas and arguments. Eyman begins each chapter with a preview of the contents that makes it easier for the readers to anticipate what is coming next. In addition, he comes to the main concept only after explaining other related concepts which contribute to the understanding of the readers. For example, before defining 'digital rhetoric', he discusses the three key terms rhetoric, digital and text. Similarly, he first discusses the five cannons of traditional rhetoric before attempting to digitalize them.

Moreover, Eyman relies on scholarly works of others to provide additional context and to support his argument. For instance, his definition of digital rhetoric depends upon the ideas of James P. Zappen, Ian Bogost and Elizabeth Losh. The use of extensive references is also indicative of the fact that Eyam has conducted research and engaged with other scholars in the field in the formulation of his argument. Another highlight of the book is the interdisciplinary approach to digital rhetoric. Eyman projects digital rhetoric as an interdisciplinary field that is tied to the work of several disciplines: rhetoric and writing, composition, technical communication, digital game studies, literacy studies, media (and new media) studies, human-computer interaction, and other interdisciplinary fields such as Internet studies.

I found Douglas Eyman's *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* to be an excellent resource for anyone seeking a foundational understanding of digital rhetoric. Eyman with clear explanation, discussion and examples, provides a comprehensive framework of digital rhetoric that is accessible to both newcomers and experienced scholars. With its thoughtful balance of theory, method, and practice, this book serves as a vital guide for exploring the complexities of digital rhetoric in contemporary contexts. The book (Eyman, 2015) is available in both print and digital formats, with the online version including live links and multimedia content.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

References

Eyman, D. (2015). Digital rhetoric: Theory, method, practice. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/dh.13030181.0001.001