

This is a full transcript for KairosCast Episode 1.1

[intro music]

Courtney Danforth: Welcome to KairosCast.

Harley Ferris: Welcome to KairosCast.

Harley: Hello, and welcome to KairosCast! I'm Harley Ferris.

Courtney: And I'm Courtney Danforth. We'll be your hosts.

Harley: Your humble servants.

Courtney: Your tour guides.

Harley: Your cicerones.

Courtney: Wait. Isn't that Madonna's original last name?

Harley: I don't think so...it means "guide".

Courtney: Okay then, we'll be your cicerones too!

Harley: We are here to support the Kairos community by bringing all kinds of discussion, advice, tutorials, and ideas together in one place--of the people, by the people, for the people.

Courtney: That's right. Our goal is to pull back the curtains, lift the veil, look under the hood, and all those other metaphors that let us see makes these webtexts work.

Harley: How they are conceived.

Courtney: How they're built.

Harley: What tools authors use.

Courtney: What skills we need to learn.

Harley: How to think rhetorically about design.

Courtney: How to make accessible, sustainable compositions.

Harley: And why it all matters.

Courtney: We're going to talk with Kairos authors, past and present--

Harley: And Kairos editors, too.

Courtney: And Kairos readers, like everyone listening right now. We know you're out there!

Harley: And we're coming for you. We want to get as many people involved with this as possible.

Courtney: Definitely. We're going to crowdsource some parts of this podcast, and we hope to get a lot of interesting conversations started.

Harley: Well, there are certainly lots of interesting conversations to be had. In fact, we've had a few in the past few weeks, haven't we?

Courtney: We sure have. We'll hear a couple of them later on in this episode, but maybe now would be a good time to share just one. What do you think?

Harley: I think so. We recently sat down with Cheryl Ball and Doug Eyman, the editor and senior editor of Kairos, and we talked about this whole KairosCast project. We thought hearing from them about why a podcast, why now, and what they're hoping it will accomplish would be a good way to kick things off.

Courtney: So, without further ado...

[weak fanfare music, solo trumpet, clapping]

Harley: Oh, come on--this is Cheryl and Doug. We can do better than that!

[stadium rock, wild cheers from audience]

Courtney: Alright--so, I developed this standard questionnaire, partly with the idea that it's some sort of fun questions that would loosen up interview subjects, but also that it would be something that any of our interviewers might want to use on any subjects, so we would have, you know, some data to track over multiple interview subjects. I don't know if it's going to work, but I'm going to try some on you. OK?

Doug Eyman: OK.

Cheryl Ball: OK!

Courtney: [laughter] Alright, so, let's see... First one, let's see... If your current profession was unavailable, what other career would you like to attempt?

Doug: I would like to be a marine biologist. I think it's really cool to study, especially, the tiny little invertebrates that occupy the ballast tanks of ships that cross the ocean, and so you get these weird little critters from Greece showing up at the Baltimore harbor. What does that mean for us? You know, in terms of invasive species and ecosystems that go on. I thought that would be really cool to do.

Courtney: Wow.

[group laughter]

Cheryl: Apparently... Harley's like, can I [unintelligible]

Harley: You've thought about this! No, I love how detailed that was.

Courtney: [laughing] That was fantastic! Can we put a copy of Cheryl's face reacting to that on the Cast, because that was amazing!

[more group laughter]

Cheryl: Yes, you can. Um, there will be a lot of me reacting to Doug that way.

[laughter]

Cheryl: If I couldn't be an editor, or a professor, um, I don't know... I'm going to go with something crazy, too. I would probably want to work on the trains.

Doug: Yeah, I could see that.

Cheryl: I'd be a train conductor, or a porter, or something like that.

Courtney: In the 21st century, or do you also want to time travel for this occupation, Cheryl?

Cheryl: Amtrack still exists!

[laughter]

Harley: But it's not as romantic as it used to be, so...

Cheryl: No...

Doug: They do have that writers-in-residence thing they were doing on the trains, where they were trying to get writers to come and ride the Amtrack while they were writing.

Harley: Oh, wow.

Doug: I think they were doing creative writers, but hey, maybe we should send some Kairos authors on the train.

Cheryl: I'll send them all my YouTube blogs that I've made of riding Amtrack. There's like 180 of them.

Doug: Really? Wow.

Cheryl: Only some of the trains have WiFi. I can tell you which routes.

Doug: I'm sure you can.

[laughter]

Courtney: You sound like an excellent candidate for that program, Cheryl.

Cheryl: I really am. I think they modeled it on me.

Courtney: You should apply.

Cheryl: One day, I will. Now that I'm back in the States, I will.

Courtney: All right, let's try another one: What is your favorite word?

Doug: Hmm. My favorite word changes all the time.

Cheryl: Mine is "apropos."

Doug: Oh, that's a good word.

Courtney: Why?

Cheryl: Eleventh grade English class when I learned it... I don't know, it was just like, "Oh, apropos." It's short, and it's sweet, and it means the same things as appropriate, kind of, but it sounds more fancy, and--

Doug: Yeah.

Cheryl: --it has a nice ring to it.

Doug: I feel like my favorite words are not repeatable.

[laughter]

Cheryl: Thank you.

Doug: Uh, I kind of like "kerfuffle" these days. Right now, I'm feeling kerfuffle is my favorite word. But I get a new favorite word like every 15-20 minutes, so ask me again later.

Courtney: Excellent. Alright, well, let's move on to the specific questions that we have for you, I guess. Harley, how do you want to do this? You should ask some and I should ask some, or should we both ask both?

Harley: Yeah--let's just take turns.

Courtney: OK, you want to start?

Harley: Alrighty. Um, so, I think it'd be great to start with the discussion of how this got started, just so that everybody could hear from you all when this idea first came to you and what led to it actually happening.

Cheryl: KairosCast, yay!

Doug: Do we have an answer for that?

Cheryl: Um, we do. We didn't rehearse it beforehand, so if you have a different memory, you'll have to...

Doug: We'll each tell our stories.

Cheryl: We'll each tell our stories.

Doug: OK.

Cheryl: This is often the way things work.

Doug: Yeah.

Cheryl: [laughs] So, in my memory, KairosCast came into existence during a Skype call with a majority of the staff members--the assistant editors--in the Fall of 2013. I feel like it was something that had been rumbling around in each of our collective unconsciousnesses for awhile, and as part of the Skype call, we were trying to get all the staff together to talk about--I don't even remember what the point of the--

Doug: Skype call?

Cheryl: Skype call was. [laughs] But it's rare to get the staff all together at once. Like, we've never been able to do it physically, and virtually it's hard to do as well--so many of us. But I do remember that we

were talking about, somebody--I can't remember exactly who it was--maybe Scott or somebody mentioned the-- I was talking about getting together everybody to do a face-to-face meeting, like with an NEH grant or something, and then that turned into a discussion about KairosCamp--something that we wanted to start to do, like a DMAC-inspired institute, a face-to-face institute to help authors and editors do digital media, and out of that, we also discussed doing an accessibility workshop, and best practices. And so, from these discussions that were bubbling up, we realized, well, once a year or every other year, sort of having an educational outreach to authors was good, but it wasn't enough, that we needed something that was, ironically, more timely. And so the staff started to make all these suggestions about, well, what if we did tutorials? What if we did podcasts? What if we did things like this? And I think Doug brought up the issue of the DesignChats, so from that--and I'm pretty sure we even came up with the name during that Skype call, to call it KairosCast, and it was probably one of the staff's suggestions, so true to Kairos form, it's a ground-up, um, thing, that a bunch of great collective minds got together to brainstorm and decided that we should do this.

Doug: My story of it is a little bit different--

Cheryl: Oh, good.

Doug: --in that, um, so historically at Kairos, we've always thought about how do we negotiate this kind of tension between being called "Kairos" and only publishing twice a year, right? Like founding editor Mick Doherty used to say, "Well, maybe we should call it "Stasis," you know, because we just keep publishing these kinds of pieces, and it's not continual, it's not timely. So over the years we've tried different things. We used to have "intermoos," interviews on the MOO with authors. They were kind of like DesignChats, so an author would publish a piece, and some of the editors would have this textual interview with them. And we tried to add discussion forums onto various pieces that we published around 2000-2001 or thereabouts, and it didn't work out because there was a real disconnect between the audience's expectation of the genre of a journal, which is this stable thing where you don't have a conversation, but you have conversations around it and about it in other spaces. And that was so long ago that we've moved, we've shifted over time to a much higher expectation of interactivity for the kinds of stuff that we publish.

Cheryl: Yeah.

Doug: And we've been thinking about doing more multimedia work, more stuff that isn't purely, like, grounded in the textual, especially with response kind of work, so I've been thinking about this idea for, I don't know, a decade or so, but it really did come together at that moment that Cheryl points out. So for me it was like, "Ah, yeah." And then Jennifer Bowie's pieces that she published just a couple issues ago on podcasting were also kind of in my mind as we were thinking about that.

Cheryl: Exactly. And, ironically, that thread, for me, I think, because Jennifer used to be one of the editors of the Kairos meet-the-authors series that Kairos used to publish back in the day, and that's sort of related to the DesignChats that we're thinking about as well, so it's sort of this thread that's been there all along, and like a lot of Kairos things sort of come into focus and come back out and come back in, depending on the moment in time where it needs to happen.

Doug: Yeah.

Harley: Terrific.

Courtney: Alright, your second question is: What do you hope Kairos will accomplish with undertaking KCast?

Doug: Well, I'm really hoping that, a couple of things. One is that we can have that, kind of more continual presence, so it's not just a jump in readership once or twice a year, but that we also get the journal's presence out in front of more people over more time, and see, hopefully, that it will be more useful, right? Especially like the Tutorials. It's a real challenge; a lot of authors, especially, want to do this kind of work, and they don't know--they don't know how to do it. They're like, "I don't know how to do HTML," or "I don't know how to do design, I don't know how to connect design and the work that I want to do. So if we can have tutorials that help them do that, I think the tutorial part and the DesignChats are going to be really useful for that element. And then the other parts, the KairosChat, and the KairosChatter, and the KairosCast, and the other things that we're going to do--I think that they lend a different kind of view on the work that we want to pursue. So that's some more of the methodological and theoretical underpinnings we want to make explicit through these conversations. Or at least that's my goal, my hope.

Cheryl: Yeah, I mean, it's all in some ways about reader and author outreach. I mean, that's how I describe it, and Doug and I have been working on a lot of scholarship lately, trying to describe the social and scholarly infrastructures that need to happen in a community, in a discourse community, in order for work like webtexts and Kairos to exist and be accepted and be valued. And we've been realizing--we've known for a long time that the work that we do can have a very closed feel to people outside of the community, which is an obvious thing on one hand, but in order to expand that community, we have to reach out, and we have to provide educational and pedagogical ways to connect with new readers and new authors.

Doug: Yeah, that's a good point. We have those, kind of like the two triptychs, in a way, of infrastructure that we think about: the social, the scholarly and the technical as one kind of higher-level thinking about it, and then on the kind of methods side, rhetoric, design, code. And so those are, for me, those are those kind of, like, structures that help frame the way I'm thinking about what we do and how we do it.

Cheryl: Yeah.

Harley: Excellent. We were curious if you see a relationship between KairosCast and the other sections of Kairos--how those fit together.

Doug: Oh, definitely.

Cheryl: Yeah, yeah. There's going to be nice synergy between KairosCast and the Interviews section, so the DesignChats that we do will dovetail in some ways with Interviews--

Doug: And Inventio.

Cheryl: --and Inventio, exactly. So, where Inventio is partly meant to talk about the process of design, there'll be some shorter discussion of that within KairosCast that are more pointed and more, like, very specific around a certain technology or design--

Doug: Practice.

Cheryl: --practice, yeah. And then also with, in some ways I think there'll be a crossover with the Disputatio section, where Disputatio is this mini-manifesto letters to the editor, like here's what I think about the field right now, KairosCast might do that in brief through, um...

Doug: Through audio and video...

Cheryl: Yeah, through the podcast as well, as almost a different, longer form, so kind of a both/and.

Doug: Yeah. Well, and PraxisWiki, I think we'll see, uh, the use of it. So we've just transitioned to a new Wiki platform that allows for more social interaction in a lot of ways, and I think that there are ways we can have KairosCast do some crossover work with PraxisWiki and build on to some of, especially the tutorial work.

Cheryl: And because of KairosCast, we're also transitioning PraxisWiki from an issue-based publication model to a more timely, wiki-based publication model as well, so we'll have both of those section sort of working in tandem in some ways.

Doug: And finally we'll be implementing the new KairosNews, which we haven't renamed yet, quite, but it will be more of an aggregator of content out on the web by Kairos communities, and then pushing that out just to keep people abreast of all the neat stuff that's happening out there that's related to the kind of work that we want [unintelligible].

Cheryl: So lots of crossovers.

Doug: Yeah, there's lots of different spaces. And you know, Kairos originally intended to have a lot more crossover, and that's why when we were doing the metadata stuff earlier, like trying to look at the earlier issues, they kept the names of the different sections--some sections would have things in them that didn't appear to fit that section, so interviews would show up in other places besides Interviews... There was all sorts of messiness, and I think that's because originally it was designed or thought of as a more comprehensive and cross-linked and connected and hypertextual process, and we've kind of moved away into more distinct elements. So this is a way to kind of recapture the fun, hypertextualness of it, in a way.

Cheryl: Right.

Courtney: Sounds like there are a lot of new initiatives to be more in the moment and to be more engaged with the Kairos community, so what can that Kairos community do to be particularly involved with KairosCast?

Doug: Isn't this a question for you guys?

Courtney: Yes, we'll answer it later. This time it's your turn.

[laughter]

Doug: OK

Cheryl: You almost got me to do a spit take. [laughs]

[more laughter]

Doug: Nice.

Courtney: Rats! I'll keep trying that one.

Cheryl: Well, there's a couple of ways. One is, KairosCast will be publishing, sort of, those three genres of texts that we mentioned. There'll be DesignChats that will be not necessarily, but I think for the most part at the beginning, staff initiated, but we'll also be doing podcasts, and so we're pulling in, in some cases, podcasts that other folks are doing, but we're also producing some ourselves, but the main thing at first that I think readers and potential authors who want to get involved can do is create tech tutorials for us. And so we'll have some of those in the inaugural section that people can use as models, so they can either create them, they can nominate other tutorials that they see for us to include in the tech tutorial section part of KairosCast. But they can also--one of the things I'm thinking about KairosCast that will be useful to teacher-readers is a pedagogical project for their classes, so I'm imagining ways that, not only can we promote techno-pedagogy through KairosCast through the tutorials and the chats, but we can encourage teachers to take it on as projects so that students are building tutorials, for instance, as part of their tech writing, or editing, or even their composition classes that people are doing--instruction sets, or infographics, or things like that that they might send to us, and we might publish the best of them. Something like that.

Doug: I think also, you know--kcast@technorhetoric.net is the email to send ideas, too, so if we have readers or the Kairos community say, "You know, you guys should really do a podcast on X," then we get some more input from the community about what's important to that particular community. So it's not just us coming up with ideas. I like that idea, too, to make it an open kind of call for ideas for places to investigate, for places to go--how to stretch our boundaries, too. I'm very interesting in hopefully pulling in for a podcast and such and some of the other DesignChats people from other disciplines that we normally don't speak to as much--in Design, in Library and Information Sciences, in Technical Communication, in Art, you know, and in other places.

Harley: Yeah, I feel like it's going to help make the journal just a whole lot more responsive to the community, which I'm excited about. Um, so, the question we're going to be asking the editors and staff, we're going to ask you, as well. And it's meant to be sort of practical, I think. And it's, I think--let's see, I forget the term you used, but I've been using the term "gate widening" as sort of the project of why we're doing some of this. And so, in that spirit, what's one tip that you would have for Kairos authors or other digital scholars creating webtexts?

Cheryl: I should have thought about this before, but actually, I'm going go back to my old standard. It's something that I have said in a million workshops that we give related to Kairos and to designing multimedia stuff. If you start with Word, you'll end with Word. So if you want to build a webtext, don't start with Word. Start with the vision for what the thing should look like and how that should interact with the argument. So, maybe start with design first.

Doug: That's exactly what I was going to say.

Cheryl: Hi five!

Doug: Yeah!

[laughter]

Doug: Yeah, I think that one of the other--not only not starting with Word, but starting with a kind of blank canvas and doing some sketching and doing some thinking about different modes of invention at that point, too. Maybe not even--not starting with Word, the program, but not starting with words as text, as written. Starting with the, a kind of visual representation of the idea, or an audio representation of the idea, might be a really useful, intentional tool at the start of the process. And again, I think, to reiterate what Cheryl said, this has to start at the beginning of the process. It's not something that you, "Oh, I've got this great argument--now I can add in some design." The design has to be a part of--an integral part--of the argument itself for the work that we do. That's kind of the core principle or premise of Kairos, is that design, as a rhetorical features is absolutely critical to the argument, the scholarly argument in the work that we publish.

Courtney: Great. Those are our prepared questions, but we're always planning to end with inviting you to say anything else that you might want to have said in our first Cast. What else do you want the community to hear you say at the beginning of this project?

Doug: Well, first I think we need to give mad props to you guys, Courtney and Harley, for doing all the work of putting this together, for making our kind of crazy ideas an actual thing--

Cheryl: Seriously.

Doug: --that people can listen to and respond to, and the work that you're doing is pretty amazing, so we want to thank you for that. And we hope that people will participate, will give us ideas, will send in their tutorials, will send in ideas for podcasts, or will talk to us about podcasts that are already running that they'd like to have hosted and connected to Kairos in some way.

Cheryl: And I hope that KairosCast will function as a way to, like Harley said, "gate opening." I'll say it as a way to break down some of the apprehensive barriers that people have about publishing scholarly multimedia and webtexts. For instance, if you have a question, email us. [laughs] You know? Open the line of communication with us, because we're all--we're here to work with authors and to make the journal better. Like, we're a resource for the community, and we don't necessarily know what the community needs unless they tell us.

Doug: Yeah.

Courtney: That's super, and I want to say thank you for thanking us. I appreciate the gratitude. That's kind.

Cheryl: We gotta give back.

Doug: Well, yeah, I mean, the entirety of the journal only works and operates because of the extreme generosity of our staff, you know, because it's all donated time, donated labor, donated intellectual work. We hope that there are definitely benefits for you all, but you know, because of our kind of unique positioning, those benefits don't include any kind of financial remuneration. So yeah, and I think that because of your all's work and interest in how you're connected to the communities that we serve is the reason that Kairos is sustainable and works. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here.

Cheryl: Yeah. I mean, I have conversations with editors around the world, literally, about how we do what we do at Kairos, and that conversation is predicated on that fact that we have over 50 board members who do our peer reviews for us, and that's constantly--we're constantly adding to that group.

We have over 25 staff members, usually, at any given time, who are distributed across the U.S. and sometimes other countries who do an amazing amount of work for us. I mean, it's just ridiculous the amount of work our staff puts in of their own volition. That's why we're always hiring, too, because it's a lot of work, and we also want to train people in doing this kind of work, because that makes them also better scholars, I truly believe. So it's our way in some ways of not only managing the workload, but allowing the journal to remain flexible and innovative, and by listening to our staff, we make the journal better, which then makes it a better community resource.

[music]

Harley: So Courtney...

Courtney: Yes, Harley...

Harley: It occurs to me that we should take a few minutes to talk about what we have planned for this podcast as we move forward. You and I have had a lot of conversations about it, and we have a lot of ideas, but we don't really know exactly what shape this will take.

Courtney: That's true, but we have nailed down some specific segments that we plan to feature. Some of these will be a part of the regular podcast, and others will roll out when they're ready.

Harley: Right--we want to launch content on a more frequent basis than just with each Kairos issue, or even just monthly.

Courtney: Exactly. Gotta keep those RSS feeds employed!

Harley: For sure. So tell us about what we're planning.

Courtney: One of our segments is going to be "DesignChats". It'll be casual discussions relating to the design of webtexts. Sometimes they will address a specific topic and sometimes it will be a more type of general chat.

Harley: And who's going to be chatting?

Courtney: Many combinations are possible. Colleagues chatting to each other, students chatting to their directors, friends... just about any combination of members of the Kairos community, really.

Harley: Should listeners set these up themselves and submit or query us or...?

Courtney: Uh, both? I don't know. What do you think?

Harley: I think if someone wants to have a conversation that fits in with this section--maybe a chat with someone who designed a Kairos text, for instance, or maybe someone talking about an effective design they'd like to say more about, send us a quick email so we can plan for it. But you certainly don't need our approval to record an interesting conversation about design, so if you already have one or just want to send something along, feel free to do that, and we'll use whatever we can.

Courtney: And if you want to jump in on this, folks, but you don't have any ideas yet, go through the recent issues of Kairos, look for a design that interests you, and reach out to those authors. I bet they'd love to talk about the choices they made and the steps they took to get to the finished product.

Harley: That's a great idea.

Courtney: We can all benefit from learning more about how these webtexts came to be.

Harley: Absolutely. And speaking of learning more, we're also going to have a "Tutorials" section with help on tech and design skills that are particularly useful for digital authors.

Courtney: CSS and design for accessibility and stuff like that?

Harley: Exactly. And I know we also want to cover things like metadata, file naming, folder organization, image optimization, and all other kinds of concerns, too.

Courtney: It seems like these are more likely to be video than audio content, no?

Harley: I'm sure a lot of them will be, so we'll mention them in our podcast, but we'll also provide the full videos on our page to make sure they get into the RSS feed.

Courtney: Perfect. Who's going to do these?

Harley: Whoever wants to, I think. We'll probably solicit some of our authors and editors, but I know that so many people listening have different skills worth sharing. And it doesn't have to be super complex to be of use, either--something as simple as, let's say, making a screencast to demonstrate how to make a screencast.

Courtney: But Harley, there are loads of these videos all over the Internet... why should we bother duplicating them?

Harley: Ah, good question. So there are plenty of resources out there, but we're sort of a unique community in that we're designing these webtexts in specific ways for specific audiences and purposes.

Courtney: You mean, rhetorically?

Harley: Exactly. So if you contribute a tutorial to this section, you'll want to remember that you're talking to scholars who are composing texts for publication in journals like Kairos. We'll learn how to do things, but what's missing from many of these tutorials is why to do it this way or that way, and how we can be cognizant of rhetorical concerns while we're doing it.

Courtney: Clever. OK, so if someone wants to contribute to this section, they should look for the submissions info on the KCast show page.

Harley: Great. So what else are we doing?

Courtney: Well, I'm pretty excited about our "Chatter" segment. We'll ask a bunch of people the same question, and we'll just kinda see what we get.

Harley: I love this idea. One of the main reasons we're doing KairosCast is to widen the gate--we want everyone to get involved, and this is a really simple, low-stakes way to start.

Courtney: I have two inspirations for Chatter: One is Erasmus's De Copia and the other is the rather newer genre of the "supercut".

Harley: Uh, not the haircut place, right?

Courtney: [laughs] Yeah, no. I mean those quick compilation videos that isolate a particular element in audio or video. I'll put an example on our show page. The idea here is to crowdsource abundance.

Harley: It would be great if we can get everybody involved with this. And you know, if someone has an idea--a question they'd like answered about digital composition or multimodal design--they could probably submit it, right?

Courtney: That would be great. I think we're going to put out a call on Twitter with a prompt, and then I hope lots of people will want to make a quick contribution. Once we have enough bits, we can edit them together into a Chatter segment.

Harley: Hey--let's include CFPs too.

Courtney: That's a great idea!

Harley: So if you have a conference, collection, special issue, or symposium coming up that you'd like the Kairos community to know about, go ahead and record a 30-60 second pitch that we could use in our podcast. Make sure to include all the relevant details, and we'll make sure the word gets out.

Courtney: And there are other things we're thinking about too, so who knows what this will turn into.

Harley: I bet some of our listeners will have some ideas and want to participate.

Courtney: I hope so! If you have something you'd like to hear on Kcast or want to contribute in some way, please get in touch. We'll have contact information at the end of the show and on our show page. Or just Google us. We want to hear from you.

Harley: So, Courtney, you and I have been talking about this podcast kind of like a magazine--a bunch of little articles, some highlighted items, and a few features. But we're not going to be the only show are we? We have some more podcast-y podcasts on the horizon, don't we?

Courtney: That's right. We have a couple of cool shows already lined up for distribution on the Kcast network and we're actively looking for even more.

Harley: We're going to carry Casey Boyle's and Nathaniel Rivers's project, PeoplePlaceThings.

Computer Voice: People. Place. Things. People. Place. Things.

Casey Boyle: The ongoing mediation of Mars

Nathaniel Rivers: Well, it's analagous.

Casey: The ongoing mediation of Mars

Nathaniel: Well, it's analagous.

Casey: One of the things I find really interesting about the Western intellectual tradition is how central a role rocks play in it. For instance, in refuting George Barclay's idealism, Dr. Samuel Johnson kicked a rock and claimed, "I refute him thus," demonstrating the blunt materiality in contrast to Barclay's idealism.

Nathaniel: No one knows what that means, Casey.

Casey: What do you mean no one knows what that means?

Nathaniel: I'm saying no one knows what rocks mean.

Casey: Oh, okay. Proceed.

Nathaniel: Awhile back now (our listeners might be familiar with this story), the Opportunity rover on Mars returned to a spot where it had been previously. Although, it turns out in the ten years since the Opportunity has been on Mars it only traveled about 24 square miles--so, it doesn't get around. But anyway, travel, and a few days later it came back to a spot only to discover a mysterious rock where a rock had not previously been, and this has been, of course, declared the "mystery rock" that was spotted on Mars. And the "no one know what that means" is a line from a story about the rock itself that no one knows what the rock means because the rock itself seems to have come from nowhere and the rock itself, the composition of the rock itself is mysterious. If you look at the picture, which we'll make available, it looks very much like a jelly doughnut. So not only is the rock a mystery, in terms of how it arrived on the scene, the rock itself is, according to one of the scientists, like nothing we've ever seen before.

And what we really get with a picture of the rock is not necessarily evidence of our work on the face of Mars but the work of Opportunity's work on Mars, and independent of our own. But this is a normal story of space exploration. We're tempted to read this from our own perspective but this is a story of the human place in the universe--sort of the ultimate rhetorical situation--which, of course, is what this podcast series, essentially, is going to be about--exploring the rhetorical situation and the place of people and things in it. But what we really see from this, what really makes it mysterious, is how much is going on outside of our control, outside of our purview, and that what makes Mars alive has nothing to do with us or our expectations of what life is, it's simply that stuff happens on Mars and that's mysterious enough.

Casey: Building on that, I suppose that the situation itself, the ongoing situation of Mars, the ongoing mediation of Mars, is something I find really fascinating and interesting. Go back to Schiaparelli and his telescope. Go back to Welles and his radio cast. Go back to the rover. It's an extended elaboration on mediating Mars. There's always these suspensions of our knowledge in terms of, you know, when Schiaparelli looks through the telescope and sees Mars, but sees it through defective lenses (and who knows what "defective lenses" means) or, for the last ten days, figuring out that a rock on a rocky planet is somehow unique and different. Those moments of suspension is what makes me really interested in this situation of what I would call "mediating a Mars."

Nathaniel: Yeah, the fact that it's called a "mysterious" rock already begs a whole lot of important questions.

Casey: So, you mentioned earlier about the situation. Do we want to close today by coming back to what we envision for the podcast from here on out?

Nathaniel: It's essentially going to be about us taking a thing and placing it into a particular situation and seeing how it operates rhetorically. And what we mean by that is, how do objects produce effects? How do they get us to behave or think in particular ways? What is the rhetorical work done by things in particular situations? So, in this case, what is the work done by the mystery rock and, relatedly, what is the work done by the rover and how does that inform our understanding of current events or, more generally, our understanding of activities of human meaning-making?

Casey: I also like that we turn to the rich tradition of the rhetorical situation because it's fundamentally creative. Through the constraints offered in any given situation, we can create meaning, we can create relationships, we can create histories. We can recreate histories and, perhaps, open up adjacent possibilities that might not have been there before.

Nathaniel: And that's why the mystery rock was such a fitting opening episode for us. There's a great quote I want to share with you all. This is from a Dr. Squires, one of the lead investigators on the Opportunity project, who actually has quite a few interesting things to say if you get a chance to read some of the stories that we will post links to. Squires is quoted as saying, "That's the beauty of this mission. What I realize is that we will never be finished, that there will always be something tantalizing, something just beyond our reach, something we can't quite get to, and that's the nature of exploration."

Courtney: To hear more from Casey and Nathaniel, including this podcast in its entirety, check out their podcast Tumblr page via the link on the KairosCast website, or go to peopleplacethingspodcast.tumblr.com. We'll also be featuring a pedagogy-themed podcast by Kyle Stedman.

[Music]

Kyle Stedman: Plugs. Play. Pedagogy.

Welcome to Episode 1 of Plugs, Play, Pedagogy, a Writing Commons production produced in cooperation with KairosCast. It's August 2014, I'm Kyle Stedman from Rockford University, and I'm going to use this show to explore all the complicated aspects of teaching writing and rhetoric--especially teaching writing and rhetoric with digital technology.

That's the idea behind the title, Plugs, Play, Pedagogy: so often my teaching involves things that I plug in--I'm always plugging my laptop into power cables, projector cables, USB microphone cables, speaker cables, and so on. And all those plugs give me tools that I can use to play around in my classroom, to create a sense of play for students, along with all the connotations of achievement and excitement that goes along with the word play.

There's also a sense of play that goes into pedagogical innovation. I know I'm always trying new things in class, which never work exactly as I expect them to, even when the innovations are based on solid theory. But I play around and I keep going. As a practitioner--as a teacher at a teaching institution--I want to start a conversation with you guys about the theory and practice of what we do.

Okay, so today's episode is about setting up class. I invited people, you all, to send me success stories--one minute success stories--I mean, who can say anything in one minute, but these amazing people did. One minute success stories about what they do online to prepare for classes each semester, especially focusing on their use of digital tools.

But before we hear those successes, all nice and laminated for you, I want you to hear a couple of stories about when everything didn't work quite as well as expected. When the instructor tried to use digital tools and start conversations. So, let's start with a story from Shelley Rodrigo.

Shelley Rodrigo: I learned the hard way, the difference between an HTML link that includes the code `target=blank` can make a big difference in a student's ability to learn. As a way to make sure all online students knew where to find getting started information about their courses, Mesa Community College made it policy for all online courses to at least start in the official LMS, which at that time was Blackboard. I understood and agreed with this "taking online students through the same doorway" policy; however, I was one of the faculty who taught my classes elsewhere. Therefore, I posted one announcement in the Blackboard shell that said, this course is held at a different site and then pasted in the URL to the new site. Of course I suggested that students bookmark the site in their browser, but that didn't mean they followed my suggestion. During the first couple semesters of that rule, I always had at least a few students who really struggled with using the applications I wanted (usually WordPress, Delicious or Diigo, and Mindmeister). What I didn't realize until 3 or 4 semesters later, when a student shared his screen with me, is that some students would always go to the course by first logging into Blackboard. And then because I did not check that the link was coded as "`target=blank`", aka, open this link in a new tab or window, I had students who were trying to work within the wordpress environment while still logged into and bogged down by the Blackboard wrap-around framework. This example continues to remind how and why it is important to at least understand how to look at the actual code and to be able to manipulate it as needed.

Kyle: I think it makes sense to follow Shelley's story with another one about the failure to anticipate user experience--which I'm starting to think is a theme here, because I know I have failed to anticipate that many, many times.

Sarah Spangler: Hi, my name is Sarah Spangler. I'm a third year PhD student and sometimes instructor at Old Dominion University. My story is about a user interface semi-fail on a course website I designed a couple of years ago using Google Sites. At the time, I was working on converting a face-to-face introduction to literature course to a hybrid model and I'd decided I wanted all the things to be digital and to be contained within the course site itself. As such, I had a lot of information to be organized in a user-friendly way. After tweaking the site in ways that I thought made good sense, I was mostly pleased with my foray into using Google Sites. However, despite spending a fair amount of time walking my students through the site, some students were struggling to locate information efficiently. Naturally, I blamed my students and their inexperience as users because certainly it couldn't be the way I had designed the site. Plus, other students seemed to be trucking along just fine. But after a week or so and two or three student emails regarding the site's layout, I had no choice but to acknowledge that the navigation problems were likely a design issue and not simply my students's laziness or inability to navigate a website. After all, admittedly, I had neglected to conduct any user testing prior to the beginning of the semester.

So how did I address this? For starters, I openly acknowledged the issue in class. I said that a few students had brought to my attention that they found the site slightly difficult to navigate and locate important information. I asked if anyone else was having similar issues. To my chagrin, not all, but a number of students nodded in agreement. I proceeded to apologize for the difficulties and then proceeded to ask them to help me think through better ways of organizing the site so they could more easily find what they needed. It took all of ten minutes for us to come up with some solutions. For me, this story serves as a reminder of how important user feedback is when designing a site, particularly if you're deploying a technology that is new to you.

Kyle: So now let's hear short clips from teachers who feel a little more successful about some of the ways they set up for class. Starting with Samuel Stinson, from Ohio University, whose story is a good transition, I think, because he talks about those tricky issues of online conversations.

Samuel Stinson: I'm sure that you've noticed how students perform better in synchronous, physical classroom spaces than in asynchronous, online only classes. It's difficult to take advantage of instructor ethos and group ethos in real time online like we can in physical classrooms. Some students may stay motivated just through self-discipline, but I'm convinced that some students require group ethos and instructor ethos to do their best work. That's why when I prepare to teach, I try to first plan how we'll make the best use of physical spaces before planning online activities. For example, having students begin participating in class discussion forums while meeting in a computer lab is one way I encourage participation in the forums online while out of class. That way, students may transition to online spaces from an existing, face-to-face rhetorical situation and relationship to other students.

Elizabeth Gianfrancisco: Hi! My name is Elizabeth Gianfrancisco and I'm a teacher at Myron B. Thompson Academy in Honolulu. We're migrating from the online learning management system, Moodle, to Canvas this school year so I've spent a lot of time preparing my class files for the new format. Many of my documents are rather simple, like Word documents and PDF files, but we also use tools like Google Docs for collaborative spaces. I also find sites like VoiceThread to be particularly useful as they encourage students to include voice or video recordings rather than just written words.

One of my favorite assignments allows students to analyze a portion of Frankenstein in a style of their choosing, so I've gotten really interesting digital assignments like a YouTube video of a student-constructed Minecraft world focusing on the creature. The kids always inspire me with their skills, even though I consider myself to be fairly technologically savvy.

Kyle: So, email me at plugsplaypedagogy@writingcommons.org or you can always tweet me @kstedman. Use the #plugsplay hashtag if you want because no one can spell "pedagogy". Anyway. Right? Right.

Harley: For the rest of Kyle's podcast, check out the full episode which you can find on our webpage, kairos.technorhetoric.net/kairoscast. Any other shows we're going to host?

Courtney: Nothing is decided yet. We really want to get a show focusing on women in rhetoric or writing studies or digital composition, and I'd also like to have a kind of "seminarcast" roundtable thing maybe with a grad seminar discussing relevant scholarship. Anybody out there want to do something on

rhetoric and comedy? I have a bunch of half-baked ideas. I'm hoping our listeners will have more and better ideas and want to get involved.

Harley: I hope so, too. I'm sure there are podcasts out there that we don't know about, and there are probably a handful of listeners right now who have been toying with the idea of a podcast but don't know exactly how to get started or where to promote it. So if you know of any podcasts that seem like a good fit for this thing we're doing, or if you have an idea for starting one yourself, shoot us an email and we'll go from there.

Courtney: Right. KCast is going to be both a show and a network. We have room for more independent shows, and I'd love to get them on our schedule and in our feed. Seriously, if you have any ideas--things we've mentioned or things we haven't--we really do want to hear from you.

Harley: That's right, we do. This podcast is really meant to be your podcast--we exist to serve this community, so let us know how we can do that better. We're all ears.

Courtney: Well, I guess that's about it for episode 1.

Harley: Just about. We want to make sure everyone knows how to find us again, how to subscribe, how to email us, and how to contribute.

Courtney: OK, so go to the KairosCast page on the Kairos website at kairos.technorhetoric.net. There, you'll find this and future episodes, plus the additional content as it becomes available.

Harley: Plus links to the full episodes of Casey and Nathaniel's PeoplePlaceThings podcast and Kyle Stedman's Plugs, Play, Pedagogy podcast. We've only excerpted here, so be sure to check those out in full.

Courtney: Email us at kcast@technorhetoric.net.

Harley: Send us your comments, questions, recordings, tutorials, and ideas.

Courtney: Subscribe to the KairosCast RSS feed and pass around the link to others, too, please!

Harley: And look for us soon on iTunes.

Courtney: Anything else?

Harley: I think that's enough, don't you? I'm exhausted.

Courtney: Me too. But we did it! We pulled it off.

Harley: We did. Let's enjoy this.

[birds chirping, champagne pop and pour, quiet piano and violin music]

Courtney: OK, Harley? We should probably get started on everything we need to do for the next episode. Turn off the birds!

[needle scratching a record]

Harley: Fair enough. I'm Harley Ferris.

Courtney: I'm Courtney Danforth, and you've been listening to KairosCast.

[outro music]

Harley: KairosCast is produced by Harley Ferris and Courtney Danforth.

Courtney: It is distributed by Kairos, Doug Eyman, senior editor.

Harley: Our editor is Cheryl Ball.

Courtney: If we had interns, their names would go here.

Harley: Special thanks this week to Doug Eyman--

Doug: I feel like my favorite words are not repeatable.

Harley: Cheryl Ball--

Cheryl: Hi five!

Harley: Nathaniel Rivers--

Nathaniel: Yeah--no one knows what that means.

Harley: Casey Boyle--

Casey: What do you mean, no one knows what that means?

Harley: --and Kyle Stedman.

Kyle: ...but they were old--they needed some love anyway.

Courtney: This podcast was distributed by KairosCast.

Harley: KairosCast is made available under a Creative Commons license. For more information, please refer to our website.

Courtney: For more Kairos, see kairos.technorhetoric.net.

[music ends]