Blurring the Lines of Theory and Application: Building Digital Rhetoric and Digital Literacies in the Composition Classroom

The intersection of literacy and technology represents a vast expanse of study where many scholars address, and critique areas of concern in digital rhetoric and how these issues may or may not impact writing. Much like rhetoric, digital rhetoric has no clear and generally agreed upon definition. From the coining of the term digital rhetoric by Richard Lanham, to Elizabeth Losh’s four-part definition, and more recent contributions by James Zappen and Douglas Eyman many different definitions and approaches to digital rhetoric studies exist.

Current scholarship provides a large amount of attention to defining digital rhetoric, understanding what it means, and developing theories based on these definitions. The abundance of theories has led to a limited and limiting number of scholarly works in application. There exist numerous appeals to scholars to critically address and examine the role of technology in the classroom, its social use and the implications of both in our daily lives and writing. Digital rhetoric can no longer to afford to primarily focus on theory, and/or build upon preexisting theories.

This paper aims to identify the various definitions of digital rhetoric and the pedagogical practices linked to them by categorizing them into three separate epistemologies. The categories will provide a brief overview of only a few areas of research and interest in digital rhetoric, while looking toward the development of assignments that aim to bridge the gap between theory and application for scholars, instructors and students to use and further develop their writing skills.