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Dave Jones
Old Dominion University

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Review of *Digital Literacy for Technical Communication: 21ˢᵗ Century Theory and Practice*. Edited by Rachel Spilka. New York: Routledge. 2010. 272 pages.

Dave Jones
Old Dominion University, USA

This collection of essays, edited by Rachel Spilka, addresses changes within the field of Technical Communication, and asks what those changes mean for scholars and practitioners. As technical (or professional) communication expands its focus in the 21ˢᵗ century to include tools, skills, and technologies beyond its traditional scope, the collection gathers together well-known technical communication specialists to ask what "literacy" might mean in this new context. Though the introduction at one point says that the anthology wishes to address "any type of literacy affected by technology of all types " (p. 7), the primary focus is clear: digital literacy. The introduction defines the term as the need to work in and with digital technology; to critically examine its impact on practice; and to consider the myriad of contexts that affect such a literacy (p. 8).

This framework creates challenges for the collection as a whole, namely that it tries to provide useful material to those "very new to the field of technical communication," as well as to those who are veterans of technical communication in both academia and the workplace (p. 11-17). The collection succeeds rather well. As the reader progresses through the book, the chapters become more specialized. Early chapters are easily accessible to those new to technical communication and provide information necessary for understanding the field's origins and its future. Later chapters can be beneficial for those already working within the field because they offer more specialized discussions of what digital literacy can (or should) mean to technical communicators.

Thus, the collection is organized into three sections that suggest *digital literacy* be understood in terms of the changes in technology, practice, and theory. The first section is labeled *Transformations of Our Work*, and includes two chapters that historicize the changes in technical

communication over the last forty years. Section two, *New Foundational Knowledge for Our Field*, contains three essays addressing new tools, disciplines, and practices that have emerged as central to technical communication in the 21st century. And section three, titled *New Directions in Cultural, Cross-Cultural, Audience, and Ethical Perspectives*, adds another four chapters discussing the influence of digital technology on longstanding professional communications problems. Throughout the book, the evolution of information spaces and the work they demand become the prism through which digital literacy is refracted. Each chapter pursues a theoretical understanding of digital literacy, often by examining what the concept means to praxis.

For instance, Saul Carliner's essay in chapter one, "Computers and Technical Communication in the 21st Century," details the immense set of changes imposed on technical communication since the mid-1970s as computers became more and more ubiquitous. He traces this evolution through five phases, from the introduction of automated document production technologies, through the introduction of desktop computers, right up to current questions about the internet's impact on textual production, categorization, and distribution. Chapter two, by R. Stanley Dicks, picks up Carliner's theme and carries it in a complimentary direction, exploring what this means for "deskilling" and "reskilling" technical communicators to be better at "symbolic-analytic work" (Johnson-Eilola, 2005). Dicks states that "technical communicators will need to find more efficient methods for creating and manipulating … information" (p. 55). Both chapters discuss the implications of these shifts for technical communication as a field, while Dicks goes further to suggest fruitful strategies for technical communicators as they try to maintain salience in the modern workplace dominated by easily used electronic communication systems.

The second section of the collection contains chapters that address specific issues of technical communications tools and practices. Dave Clark explores a "rhetoric of technology" and its impact on key questions and theories in technical communication, while Consalvo and Rosinski's chapter makes the case for expanding the reach of technical communication more forcefully into areas of information design and architecture. They're call is echoed by William Hart-Davidson's chapter on content management systems, which argues that technical communication specialists "can and should orchestrate, coordinate, and negotiate CM" (p. 130). In short, section two argues for ways that technical communication can and should expand its scope beyond its traditional boundaries, and provides useful methods for engaging new and constantly shifting modes of information production and distribution. All three essays provide the reader with context for their assertions (useful to those new to technical communication), and they also offer rich discussions that will challenge experts to re-examine their interests.

Perhaps most significance to readers concerned with communication and information in a context of globalization, the final section offers work that tries to re-imagine information work as it cuts across different cultures and audiences. Longo tries to situate technical communicators' practices within the dialogue of power that emerges between technology and culture, and what this means for the ways we produce and think about knowledge. Barry Thatcher draws from his professional and scholarly experience to provide a case study that demonstrates the problems that arise in digital spaces when communicating across cultural boundaries, while Ann M. Blakeslee writes a detailed analysis of how digital technology impacts understandings of audience in different contexts. She essentially offers a framework for incorporating principles of usability and contextual inquiry into a better understanding of audience needs as they engage with texts in

different situations. The end of her chapter includes an extensive set of appendices that present questions for contextual inquiry. The final chapter by Steven B. Katz and Vicki W. Rhodes investigates the different "ethical frames" that communicators must negotiate in organizational settings, and then discusses how to apply those frames to smooth over communicative practice.

The collection does a very good job of blending academic theory with practical application. Several chapters rely on robust case studies to extend theoretical foundations into praxis. In other cases, authors offer extensive experience drawn from professional settings as a basis for discussion, and even advice to those new to the field. Each chapter provides contexts useful for thinking about the themes of the other chapters, and about changes within technical communication as a whole. And though the collection does not address the impact of globalization specifically, many of the chapters provide useful foundations for understanding phenomenon that occur within global contexts—particularly the use of various communications tools discussed in section two, as well as problems in cross-cultural communication discussed in section three.

References
Johnson-Eilola, J. (2005). *Datacloud: Toward a new theory of online work*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.