**Episode 104: Morgan Banville**
Pedagogue podcast
*Transcript*

Welcome to Pedagogue, a podcast about teachers talking writing. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

If you are new to Pedagogue, thanks for tuning in. Pedagogue is dedicated to building a supportive community, committed to facilitating conversations that move across institutions and positions and designed to help celebrate the labor teachers do inside and outside the classroom. Please subscribe or follow along wherever you get your podcast. You can also find us online at You can also find us online at [pedagoguepodcast.com](pedagoguepodcast.com).

In this episode, Morgan Banville talks about technical communication, surveillance, feminist methodologies, terms of service agreements, and scientific writing.

Morgan C. Banville is a PhD Student in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication at East Carolina University. She researches the intersections of surveillance studies and technical communication, often informed by feminist methodologies. You can find her recent work in the Proceedings of the 38th and 39th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication, as well as *Programmatic Perspectives*, *The Dangling Modifier*, *The Peer Review Journal*, *IEEE Xplore*, and the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*.

Morgan, thanks so much for joining us.

*SW: Your teaching and research interests include technical communication and surveillance studies. I was hoping to give you some space to talk about this work and your approach to teaching.*

MB: Yes, absolutely. I am so excited about this question. I'm a third year PhD student and I'm currently working on my prospectus. So I've been thinking about this for a little while now, especially within the past year or so gearing up for comprehensive exams, which I passed in the fall and thinking about surveillance and technical communication. Actually started in March of 2020, I did a pilot study regarding wearable device privacy policies, in particular Fitbit. I talked to a group of undergraduate students who were taking a digital age course and kind of got their input on what they thought about the privacy policies, how they were reading them. Some of the data that was gathered from that focused on third party questions that came up. What is third party? Who does this consist of? What data is being collected and stored and disseminated?

Oftentimes we think of generally the undergraduate group between ages 18 to 22 and they're the digital consumers, and they know everything about the digital world, but when they were breaking it down, they were actually pretty concerned about their privacy and what they could do to mitigate that or even address it. So that kind of idea of addressing things, awareness, advocacy, transparency is what sort of drives my influence with surveillance. I define it, and

maybe four months down the road, this might change, I might look back at this podcast and say, you know what, that's shifted, that's different. I fully expect that when working on a prospectus, but right now I define surveillance as the collection of both invisible and visible data or information derived from those who are being observed.

It often suggests this sort of application of power over the observed audiences who are often not informed of such collection. There are different levels to me of surveillance. We often read about surveillance that's sort of panoptic, that talk down surveillance, who has power over, but I also recognize that there's lateral surveillance. So your peer to peer, who is observing and what are they observing. Then there's sort of that French surveillance. So those who are observing the observers. So observing those people are kind of at the top, the watchers, making those decisions that disproportionately affect different bodies. So that's been exciting to kind of see the move from working with wearables and Fitbit and privacy policies to then thinking about different ways that surveillance occurs.

Then more recently I've been thinking about with one of my collaborators Jason Sugg…we talked about learning management systems. So we ended up reaching out to instructors across the nation and them about their levels of informedness. So does the institution inform you about how you're being surveyed and then do you in turn inform your students about how you have the means to survey them? So whether or not you are using those capabilities, is that still something that you inform your students about? That's something that I include in the classroom too. So first day, I say, here's all of the different ways that in this learning management system, I can survey you. I don't, but here are the ways. Then I always give that clause too about when I am asked by the instant tuition to survey. So for example, at the end of the semester, when I need to submit grades. If there's a student who hasn't been in class or is going to receive a failing grade, then I would need to include the last date that they were in the learning management system.

So that's something that I have to have and I let them know that. So again, having that transparency, especially with students is really important to me when I think about surveillance. Like I said, I'm in this stage of the prospectus. So I originally was going the surveillance in the classroom route, but then realized that I'm also really interested in the future in participating in industry work. And because of that, there's so much on surveillance out there, so it's incredibly difficult to narrow down, but I'm really, really interested in biometrics. I think that technical communicators are uniquely positioned to discuss biometrics, especially because of their role with decision making and knowledge making. So when I think about biometrics, I often refer to it as any personal identifier of the body. So that can include something like iris scans or your voice even, or facial recognition or fingerprinting, like most articles talk about.

But I also think that it's really important to look back at the history and how biometric authentication started. I also look at driver's licenses and social security numbers as a means of biometric technology, just because those are also personal identifiers of the body. So because surveillance technologies, including biometrics, have become so commonplace in our society, I really want to think back on how this has become so ubiquitous and normalized and put the

breaks on for a second and say, is this something that is necessary. What's the purpose of implementing these technologies? How are biometric technologies being defined in other areas? Who are they protecting? Who are they harming? What are these ethical implications, especially if they're used within the workplace setting, like so many are. That's where I'm at right now.

SW: So your work on surveillance is also informed by feminist methodologies. Can you talk more about how you intersect feminist frameworks, practices, and methodologies with surveillance studies?

MB: Generally speaking, I feel like feminism is or can be defined as the elimination of oppression for those who are marginalized based on gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and so forth. So with that definition, some of the principles that I think are really important are focusing especially on ethics of care. I emphasize care and collaboration. Those are my two favorite "Cs" in my research and in my teaching. So part of that is looking at surveillance. Oftentimes it's spoken of the technologies, but what about the bodies that are being impacted and the people behind those technologies? Technologies can very easily be looked at as things or objects, just like bodies can be looked at as objects to just be mined and get that data collected from. I know Zuboff talks about surveillance capitalism and how we're just kind of those numbers, getting information from and not really reaping the benefits.

In fact, it's actually quite opposite. I think with those feminist ideas and methodologies of care advocacy, empowerment, even in focusing on the bodies and who are often oppressed by such technologies, both invisible and visible, that's really what's important to me. So what information is being collected? How are people being disproportionately affected, and how can we listen to those who are being impacted in order to create awareness and advocate and listen, and amplify such voices, and be more transparent about the practices that are often invisible and normalized. That's something that I try to keep front and center when I'm approaching anything surveillance related.

One of my, I think, most influential books has been *Feminist Surveillance Studies* by Dubrofsky and Magnet. They have so many authors included in that collection that have really influenced the way that I'm thinking about surveillance. Even just something like the airport security. That's a really popular one that people turn to, but when people are going through those monitors, that can also be a means for access issues also outing certain bodies, especially trans bodies. So that's kind of what I'm thinking about when I'm using feminist methodologies. Focus on people who are affected rather than just looking at it like a number or an object.

SW: Earlier you mentioned asking students to critically read terms of service agreements. I'm really interested in the conversations you have with students in your class and hearing more about how you invite them to think through these agreements.

MB: So the unfortunate thing about terms of service are that they're so easy to change. It's almost like if you were to read it one day, it's very, very possible that could change the next day. But

when I was having the group of students read it for the pilot study that I was engaging with, they were kind of going through with a fine-tooth comb and making annotations on the side and saying, well, I have a question about this. What does this mean? They were really, really hung up on the third-party area just because it was so vague. This was in regards to the Fitbit privacy policy. Fitbit was acquired by Google in I believe 2019, so it's mostly just the Google privacy policy at that point. So that got them thinking about future implications. Does this affect health insurance, was a question that came up, and that's been circulating for a while with wearables, especially thinking about the workplace.

Will I be insured by my employer if I don't breathe when my Fitbit says to breathe, or I don't go for a walk or exercise. Obviously, that is incredibly ableist to assume that everybody is going to be able to participate in some full form of exercise or even sleep. That's another thing that's tracked. So when students were making comments about that, it slowly turned into, well, what can we do about this? How can we spread this awareness? Some were like, I'm going to dedicate research to this in the future, which is really exciting because these are undergraduate students in the particular study that I was focusing on. It was actually a first-year course. This is something that was just part of a study and I haven't been able to implement in my own classroom, but I do think that it is important to at least to be aware that these terms in of services and end user license agreements are very, very vague and aren't as transparent as they need to be, and are also highly inaccessible just because of their length and ability to change and have highly technical language in them that are just very unclear. So that's kind of what the students were looking at with that study.

*SW: Morgan, you also teach a class on scientific writing. Can you talk more about your pedagogical aims and goals in teaching scientific writing?*

MB: Yes, this class is so exciting. This has been the best class that I've taught so far. Just a lot of these students are pre-med, pre-dental, pre-vet, and largely the class…I always tell them the biggest takeaway is just the nothing is objective and everything is biased. If you come to this class and take away anything, I hope that it's that. That's sometimes difficult to get some science majors there because they are largely from a science background. They're like, but no, this is fact. And I'm like, well, think about the person who is writing that and what is their positionality? We really try to dive deep with that. They work on research reports, conference proposals and poster presentations, which is really, really fun. They practice writing sort of for people in their field. So the research report, a lot more academic, and then they also practice writing for more public audiences.

So one of my favorite assignments that we start off at the beginning of the semester is a translation article where they choose a scholarly article that was published in their respective fields or interests. Then they practice taking that article sentiment and then writing it for a local newspaper. So they have two to choose from, either the school newspaper or the local newspaper that's here in eastern North Carolina. So that audience ends up being very specific. What does this audience value? What information should they know? How can you connect it to the area?

It's really, really interesting and it's one of my favorites because I have a background in journalism. So after I graduated high school, I was freelancing and the state that I'm from…so I'm from Massachusetts and I was freelancing in the area on the south coast for a while.

So in the classroom, when we talk about the translation article and they're writing the article for the newspaper, I really feel like it's one of my favorite lessons just to kind of walk through how to write a news lead and how to incorporate different quote. So that's a really fun, fun assignment that I always look forward to. Then I really value a discussion-based classroom and I really value relationships with students. That's something that always put front and center. By doing that, I constantly am requesting sort of feedback from them. I do this through check-in. So at the beginning of the semester, I always send an email prior to the start of class, but also throughout the semester and beginning, I always have these sort of wellness check-ins. It's just a chance for me to check in with the student to see how are you doing in this course? What concerns do you have?

It's private in the sense that I am the only one that's seeing it. It's not other students in the class that have access to their answers. It's just me and I tell them that. So if there are any concerns that I should be aware of and need to adjust, some students disclose some information about out like, Hey, I'm going through this. Especially now with a pandemic they're like, I'm really stressed and anxious about public speaking. What are some tips or something that I can do, or do you have resources to point to a counselor or something outside of the university. Things like that are private, but also help with their success in the classroom, which is ultimately what I want and what I value as an instructor is them succeeding.

So other than that, I always have examples for them and models of what I'm expecting from teaching. I always have them from the very beginning of the semester, put into what I call accountability groups. So, because I teach, it's capped up 25 students, there's always five groups of five who really get to know each other throughout the semester, are constantly doing peer review with one another, and are also their point of contact. If miss a course period, or you are needing some more assistance, those four other people are the people that you are going to go to first before me. Obviously, I have my office hours and I'm always available, but it creates a feeling of comradery and community in the classroom space where they know they have four other people that they can rely on. That's worked really well in the past.

*SW: What advice or practices or strategies would you give someone who wants to teach scientific writing or who is about to teach scientific writing for the very first time?*

MB: Leaning on the students and their expertise is really, really important. I have learned so much from the students, especially in the scientific writing courses, really in every course that I've taught, but especially scientific writing just because they come from so different of backgrounds and they're largely juniors and seniors. So they've gone through the university, really know what they want, know what they want to research and so forth. So creating

assignments and activities where they can have the agency to explore and discuss what they're interested in and making those connections.

So, for example, last semester was a Tuesday/Thursday course that I was teaching. So Tuesday would be more like activity, kind of introducing what we're going to chat about for the week in relation to the readings. They had readings due every week, but then Thursday, we had rotating group facilitations of discussions. So it was an opportunity for students to connect with their own interest, to the reading and have some open-ended questions that they would then facilitate within the rest of the class. So like I was saying, I had those writing accountability groups, five people. So every week it would rotate the five people would be leading the discussion.

We had key terms that they had come up with and then a class glossary that they could refer to. So then by the end of the semester, they were able to reflect over what we had covered in the semester period. That's what I would say, as far as advice goes, is really centering the class on the students and relying on them for their interests, their expertise, and giving them that agency and space to talk about and connect to the different writing that occurs within their field. That's been especially rewarding for me.

*SW: Thanks, Morgan. And thank you Pedagogue listeners and followers. Until next time.*