

Book Review—*Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer*
edited by Kara Poe Alexander, Matthew Davis,
Lillian W. Mina, and Ryan P. Shepherd

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M*ultimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* successfully merges two threads of scholarship to account for the transfer of content between and among various modes—visual, aural, spatial, and linguistic—in evolving contexts. Edited by Kara Poe Alexander, Matthew Davis, Lillian W. Mina, and Ryan P. Shepherd, this collection occupies an important niche in transfer studies by moving beyond a focus on linear/alphabetic texts, and in multimodal scholarship by exploring this phenomenon outside of the academy and, expressly, outside of the first-year composition classroom. Multiliteracy pedagogy, an interest of this journal's readership, is intimately connected with multimodal composition as articulated throughout *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer*, in that multimodal composition provides the space for the practical application of multiliteracy pedagogy. Moreover, both multiliteracy and multimodality share the same objectives: to recognize multiple modes of communication beyond the traditional forms of literacy in order to engage diverse students, prepare students for an increasingly multimodal world, and help students develop skills that will transfer among contexts.

Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer is organized into three diverse strands that expand in contextual size and scope as the authors analyze transfer in the first-year writing classroom, the vertical curriculum, and “across the writerly life” (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 16). The collection features seventeen different authors, whose cumulative expertise includes writing across the lifespan, digital writing, composition pedagogy and expectantly, multimodality and learning transfer. Importantly, the findings in these ten chapters are based on “data-informed research” and represent multiple methods of inquiry (i.e. case studies, surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and close analyses of digital tools) (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 15). The editors select a range of material for analysis, such as tools (digital platforms, programmatic outcomes, professional development), contexts (first-year composition, university, life), and subjects (L2 users, writing tutors, alumni, instructors, etc.). And notably, this edited collection provides a space for diverse perspectives as it considers diversity in terms of research subjects (e.g., L2 writers depicted in Wilson and Portz's chapter), features work by diverse researchers (e.g., Jiang; Knutson), and explores diverse composing practices involving multimodality throughout the book.

Despite a handful of pre-existing articles, mainly written by the editors themselves, this collection is rare in that it interweaves two separate areas of research to more fully articulate a field of study—multimodal transfer studies. Already occupying this intersection, earlier research helps

readers understand how transfer happens in multimodal composing through adaptative remediation, pedagogical interventions between non/academic writing, and new methods. Yet earlier research at this intersection does not consider multimodal composition and transfer in such a wide variety of contexts. In this collection, these contexts include the past, by drawing upon a student's prior knowledge; the future, in gauging a students' ability to transfer knowledge after graduating, and everywhere in between. The collection effectively builds upon twenty years of research at the intersection of multimodality and transfer studies to help instructors "meet students where they are" (digitally composing) and "cater to their needs" (transferring knowledge between modes in evolving contexts) (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 16). Importantly, with its focus on student transfer, the collection offers an exigence for writing studies; as Maynard explains in his chapter, "transfer research provides evidence that our writing pedagogies work" (190).

According to the collection's editors, the goals of this collection are three-fold: 1) to facilitate connections between multimodal composition and other kinds of meaning making throughout a writer's life, 2) to prompt readers to consider their writing pedagogy in relationship to their composing experiences within/outside of academia, and 3) to advance conversations around multimodal composition and transfer at our institutions (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 18). This review will consider the extent to which each of these goals is met.

Chris Anson opens by delineating transfer scholarship with some additions to account for writer/designer affect, evolving contexts, (un)predictability of audiences, and most importantly, multimodality. Given the speed of publication in this area, the editors build upon Anson's foreword by creating a primer for new scholars wherein they trace the development of transfer and multimodality as these research areas developed separately and together. In their introduction, the four editors also provide exigency for this scholarship, an outline for the collection, and previews of each chapter.

A strength of this section, aptly entitled "Multimodality and Transfer in the First-Year Writing Curriculum," is in illustrating how to move forward in multimodal transfer research and pedagogy: employing digital methods (VanKooten), selecting appropriate digital tools for an assignment (Jiang), and accounting for secondary language users' interaction with multimodal "translation" (Wilson and Portz, 66). Jialei Jiang's and Crystal VanKooten's chapters are of particular interest to *Literacy in Composition Studies*' readership, as Jiang's findings hinge upon students applying a range of digital literacies in her campaign assignment (requiring Canva, Vyond, and Wix), while VanKooten's chapter encourages researchers to develop a facility with digital methods; both chapters implicitly promote digital literacy. Since most multimodal transfer research focuses on the first-year writing classroom, this section also makes an important foray into the existing research terrain as it employs innovative research methods and close analyses of commonly used digital tools and expands understandings of "transfer." This section helps the collection effectively achieve goal #1: draw connections between examples of multimodal composition throughout a writer's life (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 18).

In line with the editors' goals, VanKooten's chapter stands out in this section by allowing the reader to visually and affectively witness multimodal transfer on film. In the chapter, she compares think alouds to in-depth interviews with the same students in which they intentionally reflect on

transfer between their compositions. Using multimodal research methods, like comparing video recordings of think-aloud protocols to in-depth student interviews, VanKooten's chapter provides future researchers a technique to help them attend more fully to multimodality and its impact on knowledge transfer. Within this chapter, VanKooten uses this innovative research method to draw conclusions about students' multimodal transfer abilities, especially understanding student affect in this context. She acknowledges that "watching and listening to different combinations of the video data allowed [her] to experience emotions made more accessible through participants' tone of voice, body language, and selected music" (33). Readers are also able to participate in this finding by experiencing student affect, as VanKooten made available videos of her research subjects through links in her chapter. In addition to students' affect, VanKooten's chapter highlights the importance of "articulated awareness" in composition and an instructor's role in helping students provoke this awareness of their own practices (38).

The second section of the collection, "Multimodality and Transfer in the Vertical Curriculum," tracks multimodal transfer beyond the first-year classroom: in the writing center (Alexander, Cassady, and DePalma), in extracurricular activities (Knutson), and in the "other curriculum" (Shepherd 126). This section moves beyond prior research to explore multimodal transfer in contexts that influence students' writing lives. Themes that run throughout this section include valuing multimodal composition and using reflection to help facilitate transfer uptake from prior knowledge. While much of this section involves contexts apart from the classroom, the findings therein help the reader consider how best to design a multimodal assignment to facilitate transfer: 1) articulate the value of multimodality (Shepherd); 2) select lengths that are similar between assignments (Knutson); and 3) require reflection using "literacy linking" throughout the writing process (Alexander, Cassady, and DePalma 67). By focusing on spaces apart from the classroom, this section helps the collection achieve the second goal previously identified: prompt the reader to consider their writing pedagogy as related to their multimodal composing experiences in various contexts (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 18). In achieving this goal, *Multimodal Composition and Transfer* is helping readers apply multiliteracies as each chapter considers how to teach and create new forms of communication that function beyond traditional literacy and are connected to real-world contexts.

From this section, Ryan P. Shepherd's chapter, "The Other Curriculum: Social Media and Its Connection to University Writing," makes some notable contributions to multimodal composition and transfer theory. Shepherd's chapter is grounded in an empirical study tracing the writing abilities of six students throughout their university education, especially following their abilities to transfer knowledge between writing assignments and social media. In designing multimodal assignments, Shepherd prompts instructors to consider the role of high road (knowledge abstraction) and low road (pattern recognition and routine) transfer. Beyond high and low road considerations, Shepherd theorizes the "other curriculum" as writing outside of school that is unintentional and contrasts with the "explicit," "hidden" and "extra curriculum" (127). By recognizing that writing occurs outside of the classroom, writing instructors help students draw connections between their myriad writing experiences, which aids in solidifying learning. Shepherd's chapter even provides intentional questions to provoke this kind of mindful abstraction—connecting past learning with current and

future experience—such as “how might you use this kind of writing in the future? And what are you learning and how might you use it?” (135). In Shepherd’s chapter, specific instructional suggestions, coupled with a broad understanding of writing contexts, provide the reader with actionable ways to implement these research findings and deepen students’ writing knowledge.

In the collection’s final section, “Multimodality and Transfer across the Writerly Life,” researchers analyze how multimodal transfer is embedded within the academy through programmatic outcomes (Bearden), instructor dispositions (Naftzinger), and re-conceptualizations of literacy as involving a range of semiotic resources (Roozen). Furthermore, this section considers student experiences with multimodal transfer by intensely exploring one student’s “literate activity” (Roozen 149) and by parsing student alumni surveys (Maynard). Kathleen Blake Yancey closes the collection with a brief afterword in which she delineates an overview of the collection as a map and as a list of key questions. A strength of this final section is that it offers guidance for any instructor interested in designing multimodal work outside of first-year composition. To this point, these researchers suggest an instructor should design assignments as explicitly “multimodal composition” (Bearden) so that these assignments are in line with common expectations for alumni writing (Maynard). Travis Maynard justifies basing curriculum on multimodal transfer as he finds “it is important that programs design assignments and experiences that reflect alumni writing lives in several multimodal contexts: composing in different genres, becoming comfortable in multiple media environments, and engaging with a variety of technologies” (204). With these findings, *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* achieves the third goal: advancing conversations around multimodal transfer by providing guidance and justification for assignment, curriculum, and professional development design (Alexander, Davis, Mina, and Shepherd 18).

Kevin Roozen’s chapter, “Drawing Worlds Together: Tracing Semiotic Practices Along Histories of Literate Activity,” fully embodies the contributions of this final section in its focus on the literate action of one subject during her lifespan. More specifically, Roozen’s chapter traces the “literate activity” of Laura Schilling (pseudonym) throughout her life; a timespan that allows him to attend more fully to the “richly embodied histories” of literate action (146). Theoretically, Roozen makes space for his chapter’s findings by providing a useful and applicable definition of “literate action” as exploring “one’s concrete engagement with semiotic resources” (149). This broad definition of literacy helps the reader understand the wide wealth of inscription practices, move beyond the alphabetic/digital-centric bias of writing, and account for literacy in spaces outside of the classroom. Such a broad understanding of literacy has instructional implications, encouraging writing teachers to explore other forms of inscriptional practices—like reading, drawing, visual designing, gesturing, and talking—as engaging with semiotic resources.

Lastly, a highlight of *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* is an explicit focus woven throughout the collection on the experiences and perspectives of diverse students. A number of contributors, including VanKooten, Shepherd, and Maynard, intentionally cultivated diverse subject pools in order to extrapolate findings to a variety of students in their chapters. These diverse pools expressly consider demographics like race, age, and gender, but also diversity in terms of writing experiences, employment, graduation year, selected majors, and educational settings. Within this

text, Joseph Anthony Wilson and Josie Portz's chapter "On the Labor of Writing Transfer" is important because it explores the translation/multimodal transfer processes of a second language writer, Zhannat. In their findings, Wilson and Portz reconfigure transfer as translation in that "translation [is] more encompassing than transfer; translation implicates rhetorical negotiations inherent but occluded in knowledge mobilization" (69). According to Wilson and Portz, this understanding of translation as transfer illuminates the writer's positionality, which is typically absent in the process of remediating prior knowledge (80). Moreover, understanding translation as transfer is important as it allows instructors and researchers to read students' use of translation/transfer as potential resistance to cultural norms, as demonstrated by Zhannat's presentation. Like Wilson and Portz's chapter, Logan Bearden's chapter is also significant in its articulation of multiliteracy pedagogy as justification for exploring multimodal composition. Bearden connects the budding "multiplicity of communication channels" with "the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity of the mid-1990s" as catalysts for multimodal composition—a pedagogy which accounts for various modes of representation (172). Tracing these subsequent developments helps the reader understand *why* and *how* this pedagogy was created; this tracing further explains how multimodality and transfer work together to help students cross contexts as they learn to couple rhetorical knowledge with multimodal experience (172). In *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer*, diversity is a central component as it influences each chapter's research design, which helps validate findings and expand implications for student learning.

To build on its multiple strengths, one area that *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* could more fully account for is multimodal composition outside of digital texts, à la the work of Jody L. Shipka (see *Towards a Composition Made Whole* and Prior and Shipka's "Chronotopic Lamination"). While Roozen's chapter cites Shipka, it is important to conceptualize multimodal composition as beyond digitally born texts; multimodal work uses multiple modes outside of the digital and that understanding should be more fully integrated into this collection. Understanding multimodality apart from the digital is important as some scholars have argued that "all writing is multimodal," meaning that even paper-based writing in black ink on white paper is multimodal (Ball and Charlton 42–43). In light of Shipka's work, I would extend this understanding of multimodality to include employing semiotic resources outside of the alphabet, say with found objects, as intermediaries in the meaning making process. Inspired by a workshop hosted by Shipka in Spring 2017 at the Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference, I invite my ENGL 491: Composition Theory students to bring in found objects and use them to create "arguments" as connected to our course content. On this class day, students are tasked with setting goals, creating a "multimodal composition," and explaining how the affordances and limitations of their found objects are considered when remediating them into a different use. This workshop helps students understand that semiotic resources exist outside of traditional and digital literacy. For this collection, not including more chapters that parse multimodality apart from the digital is an opportunity for future researchers as multimodality has existed before and continues to exist beyond the digital. As with the occlusion of other (non-digital) kinds of multimodality, the collection demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the digital despite pedagogical difficulties, for example the phasing out of certain digital platforms

(i.e. [Scrollkit being bought by Wordpress](#)) or the inability to access dated links (i.e. some video URLs included in the VanKooten chapter were no longer available). These difficulties should not be read as a warning to be wary of the pedagogical suggestions in this text; instead they should be read as an acknowledgment of the drawbacks that come with fully embracing the digital in all aspects of pedagogy.

However, considering the proliferation of multimodality in first-year composition, this collection is essential reading for graduate students and new instructors, who are likely teaching in first-year classrooms. With its focus on transfer studies, this collection is also applicable to writing program administrators, who are typically tasked with arguing for the continued efficacy of first-year composition as determining undergraduate success inside and beyond academia. And specific to this journal's readership, this edited collection is important for anyone interested in literacy studies as it reconfigures literacy through the lens of multimodality (wherein multimodality functions as the application of multiliteracies pedagogy; "literacy" is a term used on 41 of its 233 pages). This collection is also recommended reading for anyone teaching writing as it helps the reader conceptualize multimodal transfer through prior learning, within a class, within the vertical curriculum, and beyond the university.

While *Multimodal Composition and Writing Transfer* makes important contributions to this scholarly intersection, there remains more work to be done. As suggested in Alexander, Cassady and DePalma's chapter, establishing a critical vocabulary concerning multimodal composing is important in preparing writing tutors, and as well as faculty, to help students facilitate transfer between modes. Importantly, this call for future research is already being responded to; Kathleen Blake Yancey notes in her afterword that a transfer encyclopedia is in the works through the WAC Clearinghouse and the University Press of Colorado. In sum, this edited collection makes an important foray into the research terrain by providing practical advice beyond the "what" (what does multimodal transfer look like) to consider the "how" (how to write assignments, design curriculum, and train faculty to facilitate multimodal transfer). The result is a sourcebook that critically advances pedagogical and theoretical knowledge in writing studies to more fully account for transfer between modes.

Works Cited

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