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Translinguality, transmodality, and difference : exploring dispositions and change in language and learning.

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TRANSLINGUALITY TRANSMODALITY & DIFFERENCE

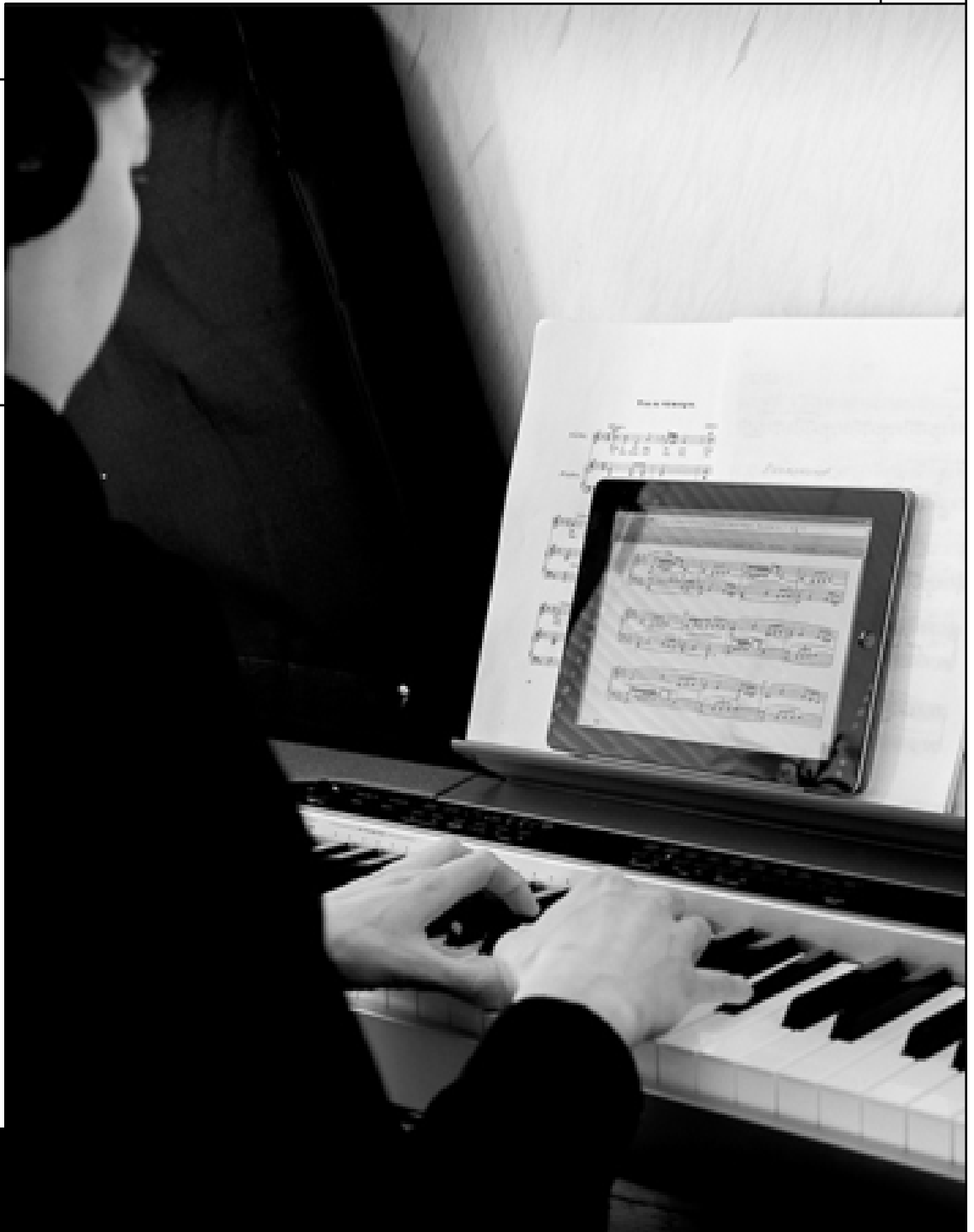
Exploring Dispositions, Change in Language,
& Learning

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enculturation
intermezzo

Bruce Horner • Cynthia Selfe • Tim Lockridge

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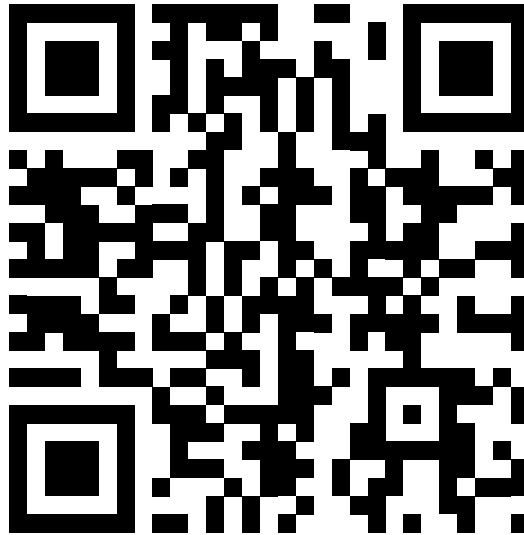
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01. Introduction

Horner // Selfe // Lockridge

This collaborative piece explores the potential synergy arising from the confluence of two growing areas of research, teaching, and practice in composition (broadly defined): multi- (or trans-)modality, and trans- (or multi-) linguality.

As we discuss ahead these areas of concern have emerged simultaneously—at least within the context of modern composition studies—in response to changes in the means and identities of people in communication practices worldwide. These changes challenge compositionists to rethink all that composition entails.

However, despite their common points of origination, discussions of modality have remained largely separate from discussions of translanguality, to the impoverishment of both. We find this situation to be most interesting and worthy of exploration.

This collaborative piece is meant to redress this impoverishment by exploring the overlaps, parallels, and points of intersection between the two areas of concern. The collaborators have each been associated primarily with one of these two areas of concern. And this fact, too, gives use pause for thought in that our own specialized focuses may help explain why our profession has written so little about these two converging sets of complex phenomena.

Bruce Horner’s work addresses the dominance of monolingualist ideology in composition and poses what is termed “translingualism” as an alternative set of beliefs to address those problematics.

Cynthia Selfe’s work has been at the forefront of efforts in composition to explore and engage responsibly with the affordances of digital literacies.

Tim Lockridge’s scholarship focuses on how texts are composed for and move through digital spaces. He works to raise awareness of, and build tools for, digitally accessible texts, resisting practices that efface differences in access. Tim’s digital compositions also resist our understandings of single authorship, demonstrating the always already collaborative nature of composing complex online texts and developing a trajectory of scholarship and service that approaches multimodal scholarship as an inclusive collaborative effort rather than the purview of those who might possess coding expertise.

Despite the different trajectories and limited perspectives of our own labors, we all sense a need for a more expansive view and practice of composition, whether in terms of modalities or languages of expression, and a sense that we can stimulate and support efforts toward that goal by identifying overlaps and parallels and work towards it from questions about both language and modality. That shared sense is what has brought us together and—with the addition of Tim Lockridge and his expertise in design and coding multimodal texts—gave us the encouragement necessary to work on this project.

This project originally began and developed as a (mostly email) dialogue between Cindy and Bruce with questions followed by responses followed by responses and questions prompted by these responses, and so on. As this dialogue developed, we started to identify several key issues, explain ways these issues manifest themselves in specific teaching, research, and composing practices, and pose questions and

SELFE

*To be more specific
from my own perspective,
I sense a confluence emerging
in composition studies with the
growing and converging interests
in multi- (or trans-) modality,
and trans- (or multi-) linguality.
As a digital media scholar,
I experience these convergences
most often in digital
environments, when
I see people communicating
across conventional linguistic
barriers using video and audio
and alphabetic texts in a range
of creative ways.*

challenges prompted by these manifestations.^{1,2}

We've organized the discussion that follows in terms of these key issues, recognizing that there is significant overlap between and among them. We refer occasionally to some of the comments and questions raised in the email process leading up to this text to help explain what prompted our statements. These

passages from the email exchange are usually signaled by extra large offset headers that feature the original author's name. Comments that occurred during the drafting of the article may be attributed to specific authors, but not necessarily signaled by offset headers. Thus, readers can differentiate, if they wish, between our early explorations of issues and our later discussions about how to be more precise and illustrative about using visual and aural modalities in conversation with the alphabetic modality.³

Our project, then, is meant to operate at two levels: on one level, it carries out a discussion of the overlaps, points of intersection, and parallels between work on translanguality and multimodality; on an-

other level, it also (and, for readers, simultaneously) engages in meta-analysis of just such discussions, leading us to conclusions about how to develop such collaborative work in the most productive ways possible.⁴

We shift, therefore, back and forth between excerpts from our dialogue and commentary on that dialogue to bring out assumptions and problematics of the terms with which we do, can, and might explore translanguality, multimodality, and their relations. We all found this to be difficult and unfamiliar work, and that itself is another notable commentary on its unfamiliarity and its relative rarity—at least within our experience.⁵

Our overarching assumption is that such back and forth movement is necessary to the responsible conduct of any such work: our goal is to resist quick and easy sloganeering and the commodification of composing practices that might otherwise have the potential to transform the work, and the understanding of the work, undertaken in composition by teachers, scholars, and students, with the aim of extending our understandings.⁶

Here, for instance, is my most recent favorite example of this confluence, these convergences: a cat video that Diana George called to my attention. This small and delightful text is captioned in both French and English; it deploys music and humor, moving images and alphabetic text; it crosses borders (species, language, culture, geopolitics) and communicates effectively. It's not a weighty or consequential academic text; it's not an argument or a research paper, a persuasive essay or a lab report, but it is an example, I think, that can serve to remind compositionists of some important truths: that millions of people every day enjoy the process of composing self-sponsored vernacular texts outside classroom walls; that such texts are motivated by a variety of purposes and aimed at a variety of audiences; and that, in such contexts, many authors often choose to mix linguistic and expressive resources in creative ways in order to accomplish their rhetorical goals. Both modality and language represent deep reservoirs of design resources available to communicators, and we can learn a great deal by discussing the intersections, overlaps, parallels, and relationships among these resources: how they are used by authors/designers, how they are taught, how they are deployed.



NOTES

1. Here, I think it might be cool to think about what it means to have a synergistic dialog—maybe some music that illustrates what happens when a dialogic exchange yields more than the sums of its two parts...

2. I'm thinking an excerpt from a Bach fugue with counterpoint which has a different meaning than the "point counterpoint" idea in common parlance: the two voices work in relation to one another to produce harmony, albeit necessarily with harmonic tension through deployment of alterations of dissonance and consonance.

3. In the fall of 2013, Cindy and Bruce asked me to join them on a collaborative project that explored the connections between transmodality and translanguality. They had developed a working paper, in MS Word & PDF format, and were interested in moving

their argument to a digital, multimodal artifact.

In preparing for this shift, Bruce and Cindy had used the Adobe Acrobat annotation tool to begin a dialogue via comments—discussing the possible elements that might go into a multimodal piece. In a typical print production workflow, these marginal comments might have any number of fates: discarded during edits, sent to the bottom of a desk drawer, marked as “resolved,” or maybe recovered many years later in a personal archive. To lose these comments, however, seemed a shame. For me, following this marginalia was a pleasure—an opportunity to hear two senior scholars work through a range of ideas and allusions, trading links and negotiating a collaboration. Could the reader, I wondered, have the same experience? Could a hypertext piece document how a project moves from a series of emails to a working paper to a larger conceptual whole?

There appeared to be an answer in the musicality of Cindy and Bruce’s original working paper. Their conversation (part “paper,” part annotation) had a weaving, harmonizing feel—two voices, like instruments, interacting and diverging and harmonizing. I searched for a matching technical metaphor: a way to place the argument on horizontal planes, echoing a musical staff. A horizontal scrolling motif, I thought, might enable the reader to see the voices intertwine, and through the use of different planes (or staves), we could perhaps show two levels of discourse: one level for the core conversation (the project’s main argument), and another level for allusions, additions, and marginal notes.

I drafted several paper prototypes and searched for an HTML horizontal scrolling mechanism or framework. This was the first complication and point of tension I encountered, and it’s one that is relevant for the development of accessible multimodal scholarship: many solutions require tremendous expertise—or the ability to build a tool from scratch.

I firmly believe that web-based scholarship should be built with standards-based and preservable technologies (HTML, CSS, PDF, ePub, etc). But when the goal is to move beyond a simple web page or HTML container, the difficulty level quickly ramps. In the case of this piece, it wasn’t feasible (based on my Javascript skills and free time to learn more) to create a tool that fit my needs. Instead, I needed to build from the open-source work of others. But even that kind of iteration requires a number of specific literacies. Producing these texts can be difficult, challenging work.

After experimenting with a few different frameworks, we decided on reveal.js—a platform for building web-based slide decks. Although it didn’t have the specific horizontal presence that I thought would be best for Bruce and Cindy’s exchanges, it did offer a two-axis system. With Reveal, a user can scroll horizontally, from slide to slide, but also vertically, allowing one to “dig” beneath each slide. Reveal isn’t perfect for a scholarly hypertext project, but it is built on basic HTML (facilitating preservation) and has a great deal of flexibility.

Reveal also introduced problems. The slide metaphor proved especially difficult. The platform requires the reader to move through the piece in a page-by-page motion, and each individual page lacks a scrolling mechanism. This meant we had to break the core piece into discrete chunks that could each fit on a single screen. Each new section—and there were many—prompted choices about where to break paragraphs, where to build new sections, and where to attach supplementary materials.

An initial vision—and something from the first prototype I sent to Cindy and Bruce—included the use of cinemagraphs and animated GIFs as backgrounds. I thought these would bring a metaphorical and artistic element to the piece, and I hoped they might also affect the overall cadence. If we were to parcel this piece into discrete units, could we use these animated images as a way of encouraging pauses? How might motion work with and against the text? This seemed like a point of exploration and interrogation—a way we might make the multimodal genre (much like the meditative nature of the piece itself) push against the norms of the academic text.

This incited several searches: I created cinemagraphs and animated GIFs for use in the text, Cindy scoured the Creative Commons for images we might use, and Bruce sent links to scores, compositions, and musical selections that might serve a similar purpose.

These searches became an extension of that initial impulse: to have the intertextual portion of the document extend beyond the “core” text of the piece. Once we opened the door to incorporating asides and marginalia, we discovered new avenues

for mediation and collaboration. We began pulling at the metaphorical threads of the piece, looking for new pieces to sew in and possible points of further weaving. In this, we found a rich moment for collaboration—but also tangible examples that showed the difficulties of collaborating on web-based texts.

4. I remember wanting to use the Bach invention and the train track image as two countering representations of relations between discussions of transmodality and translanguality: parallel but never intersecting (the train tracks) or complementing one another (the counterpoint between the two voices in the Bach, starting from different points and coming together). The Bach invention helped me think how to conceive of the potential relationship between the two discussions, vs. the train tracks. But whether readers/listeners/viewers get those specific ideas from our introduction of the train track image or the image of the Bach invention depends, of course, on their reading/viewing/listening practices (including training in these).

** One way of proceeding might be to start with two brief -- say, no more than 2000 word -- overviews of work in each, one on translanguality, one on transmodality, giving a little history of the emergence of these terms and research and teaching on them ... We could follow these up with individually authored questions and comments in response to those overviews, including questions and comments pointing to issues not raised in the overviews, then individual responses to these. Ultimately, I'm hoping we can end with a passage -- how long would be something we could decide later -- [...] identifying key terms, points of intersection, questions for research, and so on based on our conversation. So the piece would be presented as a kind of symposium.*

Of course, there's an argument for producing a representation of such a conversation in a form other than verbal written text (even one potentially including, say, images and diagrams).

5. To get a sense of just how difficult and unfamiliar we found the project to be, here is a passage from my email to Cindy to initiate the project.* Note how the notion of adding images and sounds is offered only as a kind of afterthought.

6. We might want to talk here about specific artifacts that mark/trace our own ongoing struggles to produce texts that more nearly approximate our thinking and the difficulties that involves. For instance, we might want to show examples of a range of texts that readers are disposed to read as multimodal and multilingual—in ways that extend beyond the dispositions they generally bring to the print articles we have done.

For my part, I'm thinking of three texts that illustrate a range: the last CCC piece I did where key audio files (which existed online) had to be referenced by URLs in print, the comic that Will Kurlinkus and I did in the issue of JAC that focused on the 2012 Watson Conference, and in Transnational Literate Lives, with Gail Hawisher and Patrick Berry, which exists as a born-digital book.

Our hopes in exploring this potential and confluence are that:

- we can better understand each area of inquiry by defining it in relation to the other;
- we can re-define each in terms of the other, given what we believe are the significant overlaps and alignments in the concerns of each;
- and we can better identify important questions for future research as a consequence of our efforts here to outline the current state of affairs in the research and teaching of both.



02. Defining Terms of Modality and Language

Multimodality, Transmodality, Multilinguality, Translinguality as Alternatives to Single/Standard Language and Modality (SL/MN)

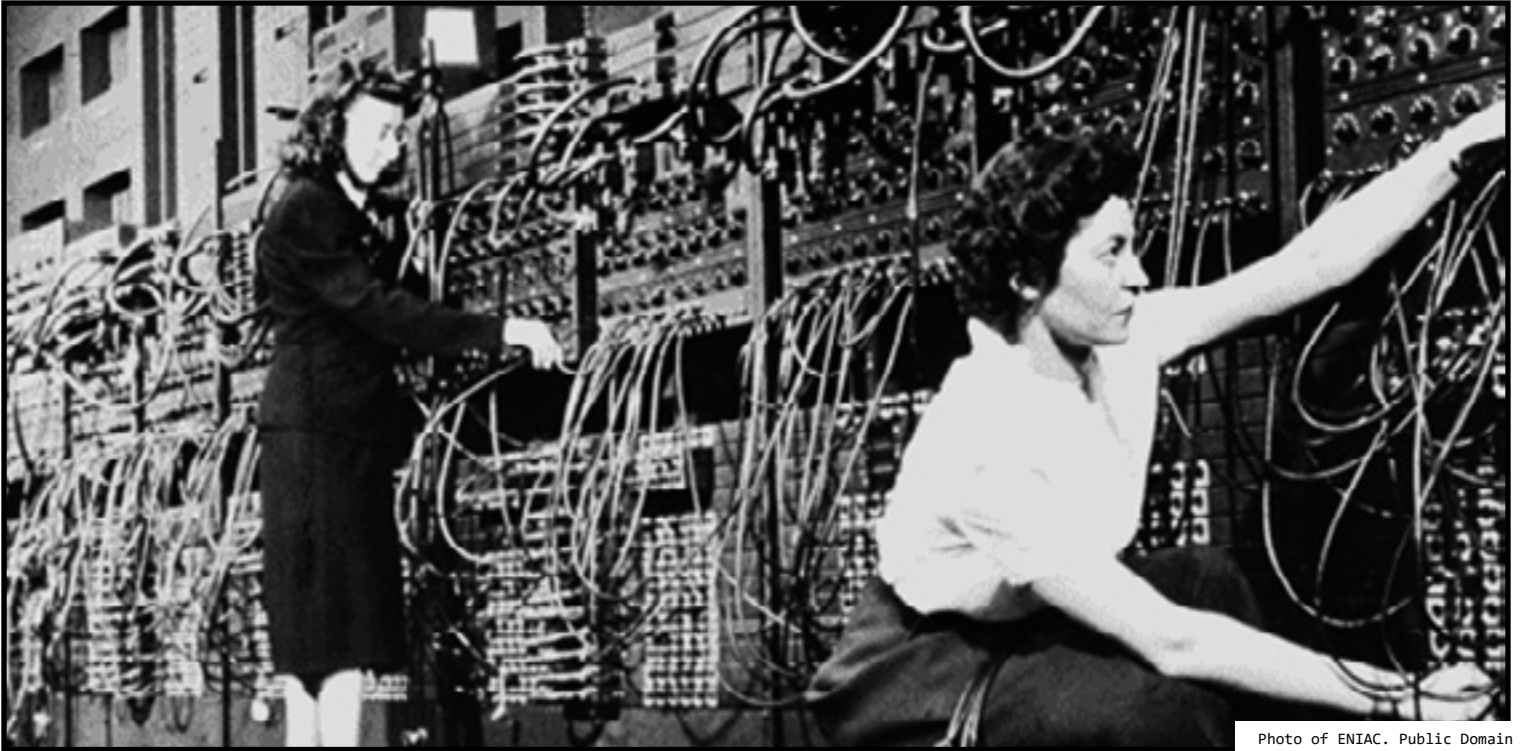


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The terms “multimodality” and, more recently, “translinguality” are now circulating in the discourse of contemporary composition teaching and scholarship. We trace the emergence of these terms in that discourse as a response to events “on the ground”: the development and increasingly global reach and use of new communication technologies and networks for these; the increasing, and increasingly undeniable, traffic among peoples and languages; and the consequent recognition by teachers and scholars of composition that the assumption of a monolingual and monomodal norm for composition—as communicative practice and terrain of study—is no longer appropriate, if indeed it ever was.⁷

What seems apparent to us both are the following: (1) these relatively recent changes bring into awareness features of all communicative practice that ideologies posing the “norm” of a single, uniform (“standard”) language or mode (hereafter referenced as “SL/MN”) elide; (2) these same changes bring to awareness the presence of communicative practices in the past that SL/MN ideology has suppressed; and (3) currently emergent communicative practices are themselves materially different from past, and other, communicative practices in ways that challenge both “SL/MN” ideologies and the practices now identified (ideologically) as “SL/MN”.

In other words, the various terms, and neologistic variants to these, listed in the title of this section represent challenges both to beliefs about the modality and language of all communicative practice [sic] and to communicative practices themselves.

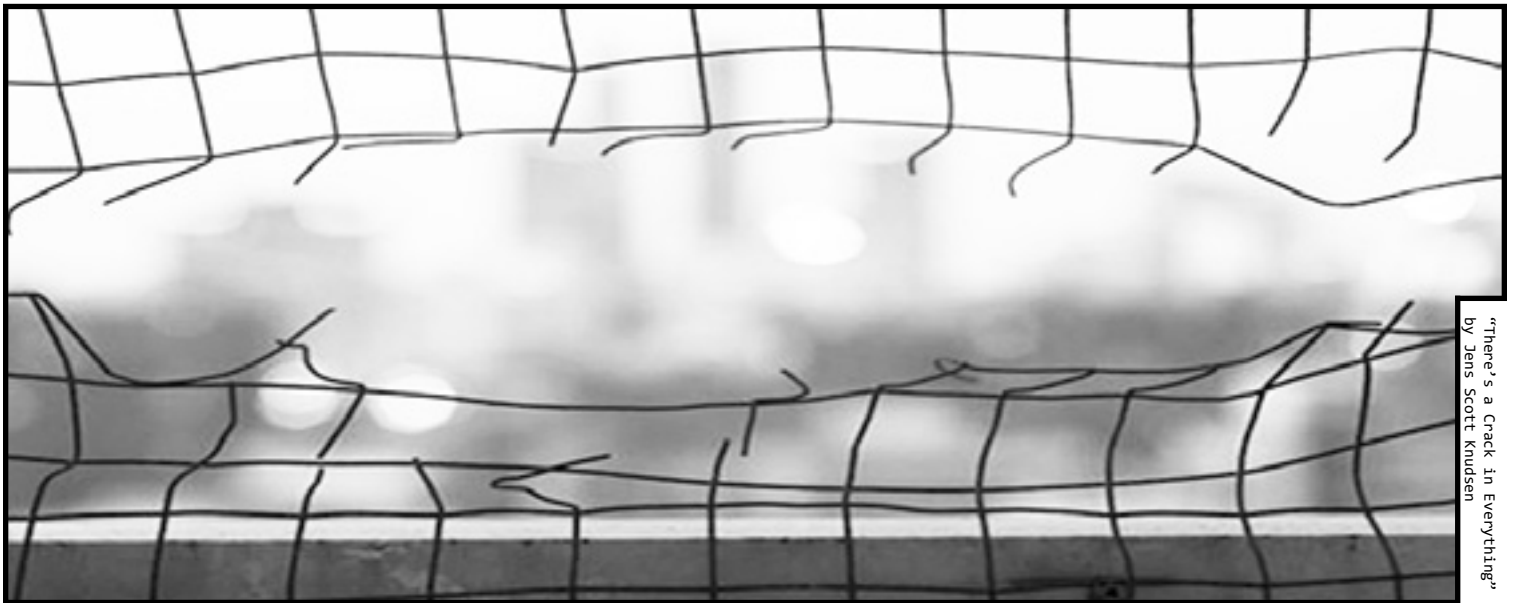
We resist, in short, any understanding that statistically standard language practices are singular either in their linguistic or modal forms, and we resist the understanding that statistically standard is the linguistic or modal equivalent of normal. This ideological formation is two sided and doubly dangerous.^{8,9}

7. {CYNTHIA} Here, I'd love to show a timeline of when these terms emerged on the web or a heat map that would illustrate when and where these terms emerged, geographically and historically. For instance, a search of CCC titles and abstracts identifies 50 instances of the term "multimodal," dating from 1991 to the present, and 34 instances of "multilingual" dating from 1990 forward.

8. {CYNTHIA} Of course, SL/MN practices—and representations of these practices—have never been limited to one modality, one medium. Consider, for example, "The Flemish School," created by Richard Brookshaw in the 18th century, reproduced by Egbert van Heemskerck, and now displayed online by the British Museum. A more contemporary example of the inadequacy of SL/MN can be found in Xuan Wang's "I am not a qualified dialect rapper."

9. {BRUCE} Yes, see John Trimbur and Karen Press's observation that "multimodality itself is not new, nor is it a break from the past. Multimodality is new as a term, a conceptual terrain that surfaced at a particular historical conjuncture, goaded by the need to understand dramatic changes in the means of communication."

10. {TIM} This hypertext piece is a response to Cindy's call, an experiment in forms and modalities and intersections.



Definitions and inflections of the terms “multimodality” and “translinguality” in composition scholarship and teaching represent different responses to changes in belief and communicative practice. To illustrate, early on in this project, Cindy cautioned about the conduct of the project itself:

SELFE My only concern [. . .] is the limitations of the alphabetic in doing this job well. [. . .] In fact, I suspect that the success of this piece—on my end, at least—will depend on my ability to focus on specific examples/situations that illustrate these limits, or, at least, that illustrate why people (other than academics!) feel so compelled to turn to multiple modalities to make meaning and why academics (especially those who specialize in semiotics) ought to blessed well pay attention to these efforts and take them seriously instead of ignoring/dismissing/diminishing them as somehow less intellectual, less effective, less... (fill in the blank).

So, this piece may well need some online accompaniment—in fact, I think it would be cool to experiment, for instance, with what each of us can—and cannot—say using the different modalities and even perhaps render parts of the argument in multiple ways and using multiple modalities.

Cindy’s caution draws on at least two definitions of multimodality: as a set of material practices to which people (especially people other than academics) turn to make meaning, and as a set of beliefs that such practices might allow composers (the authors) to break out of the limitations of SL/MN, a set of beliefs obviously at odds with dominant SL/MN ideology.

We see a concern about treating multimodality as a fixed set of practices in the following exchange. The exchange starts with a caution regarding fetishizing practices, then turns to the strategic advantages and limitations of specific terms:

How do we exploit the shift in perspectives that encounters with unfamiliar language/modal forms can produce without then fetishizing these at the cost of retaining dominant restricted understandings of the familiar? How do we learn to recognize the “strange”/“new” in the “familiar”/“old” and the “familiar”/“old” in the seemingly “new” or “strange”?

HORNER

SELFE Bingo! And not only recognize these unfamiliar forms, but try them out/experiment with them to see what they offer, tell us, show us.

The “multi-” prefix works against this in seeming to require an additive model of change: counting the number of varieties, whether of languages or modalities, and identifying how they are configured (e.g., meshed or switched between) hence the introduction of the “trans-” prefix as an alternative meant to focus on cross-language and mode work and the need for negotiation (and the difficulty people have of understanding this as anything other than a peculiar way of invoking the enumerative framework for grasping difference).

HORNER

SELFE I have no problem with “transmodal” as long as we include a discussion about how it is connected with multimodal both in terms of awareness and production practices, and the discussion is situated historically, and we specify what particular kinds of work we are hoping to suggest with “trans.”^{11,12}

I think your point about needing both awareness and production practices corresponds to my comments [. . .] about needing both a change in dispositions and practices. Which makes me wonder if we need to separate these out for analytic or pedagogical purposes: e.g., multimodality as the means toward transmodality as the goal, albeit with the usual cautions about means becoming ends? Another possible way of putting this is to consider how we keep the focus on work across boundaries of language and modality rather than seeing our task as one of selecting from a menu of languages and modalities?^{13,14}

HORNER

SELFE This is a great question. I'd rather tackle the problem head on (getting beyond the "piling up" suggested by the plurality model—linked, I suppose to what Brandt talks about with her "accumulating" model). But how, then to avoid the idea of "selecting from a menu of languages and modalities?" is harder!

Bruce, reviewing the literature (!) on translingualism, brings out a somewhat different notion of translanguality and transmodality as in fact "dispositions":

[C]hallenges to monolingual-ist ideology recognize the degree to which we are all always multilingual: that, in Pennycook's phrase, for example, English is a language "always in translation." These challenges would seem to call for a shift in dispositions rather than engagement in specific practices the dominant has trained us to recognize as multilingual/translations. But instead, the still dominant definition of multilingual resurfaces, leading to the celebration of what we've learned to recognize as multilingual and dismissing of what we've been taught to think of as monolingual.

HORNER

The parallel in discussions of multimodality seems to be a tendency to adopt a celebratory stance toward practices that dominant ideology has trained us to recognize as multimodal and to push to the background or dismiss as unduly restricted those practices that this same ideology has trained us to recognize as, well, monomodal. As in questions of language, specific practices are removed from history and treated, instead, as in themselves having specific significance and effects across contexts.

Here Bruce insists on a distinction between specific material practices, on the one hand, and, on the other, beliefs about/dispositions towards those practices, suggesting that the very notions of monomodality and monolinguality are misleading, manifestations of SL/MN ideology rather than (actual) practice, hence Bruce insists that:

[W]hat's needed [. . .] is a way to grasp how specific practices are multimodal despite the blindness to that multimodal character that dominant culture's training has led us to—and I don't think we can say that the medium in itself controls this (e.g., the alphabet) but, rather, the ways we've been trained to grasp things like the alphabet.

HORNER

(Music parallel: Western music notational practice can and has seemed to limit both what is recognized as music and the components comprising music [. . .], most obviously in restricting the pitch relations recognized to those of the 12-tone system; but this limitation is not so much the effect of the notational system itself as it is an effect of trained dispositions toward that system, leading to restricted ways of putting it to use and modifying it as needed.)



But as Cindy observes in her response, these distinctions aren't so easy to maintain:

SELFE [P]art of what is happening with multimedia / multimodality / transmedia / transmodality is tied to/situated within digital composing environments where people have access to composing tools that allow for different forms of hybrid mediation. As the engineers says, “When the only tool in your tool belt is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.” So in composing environments, if your only tool is a pen or a piece of paper, or a word processor—the common sense approach (given dominant ideology in departments of English) often includes “writing” that happens primarily with words (although it includes, as always, other modalities).

Here Cindy foregrounds the effect of material social environments on dispositions, rather than treating these as discrete from them. This same exchange and dynamic between disposition and material social environment surfaces more forcefully in the following excerpt from our exchange.



In the opening, Bruce, in cautioning against fetishizing specific language practices, insists on distinguishing between a translingual disposition and a specific language practice, positing that:

One can acknowledge the legitimacy of the “translingual” position while engaged in practices that appear monolingual (and vice versa), and one can acknowledge the legitimacy of the transmodal position while likewise being engaged in practices that appear from dominant perspectives to be monomodal (and vice versa).

HORNER

how the effort to break past limits of analytic categories—language and modality—can lead to a flattening of important distinctions: to allow a focus on continuity to obscure important differences. Bruce begins by pointing to problematic distinctions produced through categories:

Which prompts Cindy’s important demurral and qualification:

SELFE Well, yes! At the same time, I want to work within the profession to encourage more teachers not only to recognize or “acknowledge the legitimacy of the transmodal position,” but also to encourage/experiment with/try more transmodal production, to experiment with different semiotic ways of composing meaning—and to help students do so as well.

We see a similar dynamic at work in the following exchange, which is initiated with Bruce expressing concern about the power of analytic categories to “overwhelm and limit our understanding of the phenomena being studied/taught.” Here, however, the issue is

The most obvious example in language study is the categorization of languages and language varieties.

HORNER

On the one hand, it seems useful, for analytical and political purposes, to identify boundaries distinguishing one language/language variety from another. On the other hand, for other analytical and political purposes, those boundaries seem highly problematic (see Gal and Irvine; Parakrama). The equivalent is true of the category “language” itself as a demarcation of a far more complex ecology of practices. Recall here David Olson’s (1995) observations not only that there are “aspects of speech [that] are not represented in a writing system” but also that “writing systems create the categories in terms of which we become conscious of speech,” leading us to “introspect our language along lines laid down by our scripts” (p. 122, paraphrasing Whorf).¹⁵ Following Olson’s warning (cited above), it seems ultimately problematic to distinguish between language

and modality. Dominant conceptions of language offer a highly attenuated, restricted sense of all that goes on in the activity of “language acts” (a.k.a. communicative acts). Kress (2000) acknowledges this in calling language multimodal (p. 186), vs. thinking of language as itself a discrete mode. Conversely, it seems appropriate to recognize modalities as a feature of language. From this, it no longer makes sense to treat language, whether as writing or speech or both, as apart from the “multimodal” (see Calvet p. 21-22).

Cindy responds with another demurral and qualification:

Well, yes and no. I think it is quite true that all language use is multimodal. I’m not sure that all environments for linguistic exchange are created equal in regards to the modal mixing they accommodate. For instance, while print texts have always mixed some modalities of expression (words and visual information, for instance), digital environments allow for different kinds/varieties of mixing. Here, I’m thinking of the ways in which print text and video/audio texts can be juxtaposed/combined in a single composing environment. So, while multimodal/transmodal texts have always been present in our lives, I think it might be justified to say that new production tools and environments and social relations offer very different ways of accomplishing multimodality than printed works on paper-based pages.

So while all language practice is multimodal (using the terms language, practice, and multimodal as “mass” nouns), language practices are not multimodal in the same ways, and the differences among/between them are significant. A radio play is not the same as a live theater performance or a television broadcast, even though they’re all (in quite different ways) multimodal, and the differences are quite significant from the production, distribution, and reception ends.

How might we make productive sense of these exchanges in forwarding specific definitions?

Tentatively, we conclude the following. First, we see the need to remind ourselves to distinguish between analytic categories and practices to which they are applied, the latter of which, as fluid phenomena, can never be fully represented by the categories invoked. Instead, categories serve as lenses that inevitably distort as they clarify. This appears to be the thrust behind Bruce’s caution against consigning specific practices to the monolingual/monomodal dustbin: their seeming monolingual/monomodal character may be more the effect of our mode of analysis than an accurate representation of their actual status as practices.¹⁶

Here the emphasis on dispositions toward modality and linguality has force: we need to be wary of the power of monolingual-ist, monomodal-ist, dispositions to distort our sense of the practices under consideration. This danger manifests in two ways: the tendency to view practices not marked as either multimodal or multilingual as SL/MN; conversely, the tendency to conflate practices marked as either multimodal or translingual with multimodal/translingual dispositions, when their non-SL/MN character may be more apparent than real.¹⁷

Second, and paradoxically, we also need to recognize the effect of specific material social environments on dispositions toward language(s) and modalities. As we’ve already suggested, the emergence of changes to communicative practices—most obviously, the development of digital communication technologies and global communicative networks; less obviously, the increasing traffic of (exchanges and changes to) peoples and language practices, reinforced and changed as well by global communication technologies—has contributed to the increasing visibility of, and questions about, language and modality.

The “new” communicative practices, as they are often described—those that dominant dispositions lead us to recognize as different—also force a re-evaluation of and change to those communicative practices those dominant dispositions had led us to see and experience as simply natural, the norm.¹⁸

We see this articulated in the following exchange:

[We need to think] of our work less as discovery of the new and more as the recovery and recuperation of alternative dispositions toward meaning making practices, including both those our dominant training has led us to recognize as monolingual or monomodal and those that training leads us to think of as multi- or trans-lingual/modal.

HORNER

[B]ut at the same time, we can't dehistoricize/remove such discussions completely from the context of massively extended computer networks/the increase of digital tools for composing/the practices of multimedia composition online that have, in part, given rise to the contemporary interest in multimedia composing.

SELFE

So we need both to recover/recuperate and to consider significant changes/gaps between old and new. Hard to do without either fetishizing new or overlooking those gaps (yielding to the temptation to see only continuities and overlook differences).

HORNER

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11. {CYNTHIA} Maybe a link to the term "ensembles" here as a way of opening up the word "trans" and showing how it might intersect, in terms of modality, with "ensemble"?

12. {BRUCE} Bruce replies: My own sense is that there is never not an ensemble—it's just that we're trained not to recognize this. Christopher Small's (1998) concept of "musicking" might be pertinent here:

"To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. We might at times even extend its meaning to what the person is doing who takes the tickets at the door or the hefty men who shift the piano and the drums or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the sound checks or the cleaners who clean up after everyone else has gone. They, too, are all contributing to the nature of the event that is a musical performance." (Small, Christopher [1998]. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Wesleyan, Middletown, CT. 9)

13. We take the term disposition from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

Disposition, according to Bourdieu, is "the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as 'structure'; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination" (p. 214, emphasis ours).

For Bourdieu, disposition is closely linked to habitus. He notes:

[Habitus is] transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.(p. 78)

14. {CYNTHIA} A good example of a caution here is Steve Bernhardt's (1986) "Seeing the Text," an early piece which suggested the importance

of paying attention to the many visual elements (and the rhetorical information) that are present in texts that many people considered alphabetic.

15. {BRUCE} There is an analogy here from the study of music: whereas traditionally the Western music score, and system of music notation, was understood to represent nothing other than the aural, musicologists have come to recognize the ways in which the score works also as a visual entity (exploited in “augenmusik”) directed at performers enjoying the view of the score, and, likewise, the performance of music—including the most traditional performance traditions of Western classical music—cannot be categorized as purely aural, or visual, or tactile (recall Barthes here), or purely anything. Hence musicologists have had to:

- come up with the neologism “musicking” (see Small) to name the conglomeration of practices that operate in any “musical event” (analogous to the concept of the “literacy event”),
- learn to pay attention to “listening” practices to grasp differences in the experiences of different listeners/viewers/performers with (ostensibly) the “same” piece of music or performance of it (reference), and
- learn to attend to features even of “aurality” of significance that traditional Western systems of musical notation have difficulty representing: style of “attack” (e.g., staccato vs. legato), and timbre, not to mention the full spectrum of pitch relations.

Likewise, distinctions between types of music, and the legitimacy of the category “music” itself (especially to name a distinct category of cultural activity), are vulnerable to radical challenge, as studies in ethnomusicology and “popular” music have demonstrated.

16. {CYNTHIA} ...concern about conflating analytic categories and actual practices... and our cultural and historical context...

17. The distinction between traditional notions and practices of multilinguality is a case in point: use, or mixing, of different languages does not in itself signal a break with monolingualist dispositions. Rather, interjecting the occasional French or Spanish locution into a predominantly English text may in fact reinforce such dispositions by highlighting (and capitalizing on) a monolingualist notion of languages as discrete.

Likewise, predominantly alphabetic print verbal compositions that deploy the occasional image or attached audio clip may simply reinforce an “additive” or ornamental disposition toward modality. Given our own early training as written-language specialists, we have risked such a situation in this very piece although we have tried hard to avoid it by calling on our experience with other kinds of non-alphabetic texts. For discussion of a richly ambiguous example of a composition that deploys both multiple languages and images, see the discussion of student work in Canagarajah’s (2009) “Multilingual Strategies.”

For a composition that, to our minds, helps us read with an awareness of transmodal contributions (while addressing transmodality albeit not in such terms), see McCloud (1994). On the complex strategies by which writers have resisted monolingualism—including the strategy of writing the “national” language by writers not “authorized” (because of social positioning) to write that language, see Yildiz (2012).

- Yildiz, Yasemin. (2012). *Beyond the mother tongue: The postmonolingual condition*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- McCloud, Scott. (1994). *Understanding Comics*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

18. {CYNTHIA} A good reference here is Diana George's (2002) "From Analysis to Design." As George writes, "For many years, in fact, the research paper section was literally the only place in composition textbooks where we might encounter any reference to page design, layout, or font choices..." (p. 25).

- George, Diana. (2002). From analysis to design: Visual communication in the teaching of writing. *College Composition and Communication* 54(1), 11–39.

In light of all this, rather than understanding modality and linguality in terms of fixed ("defined") categories and practices, we pose the following questions of definition as more productive in bringing out the dialectical relations between dispositions and practices with language and modality:

What are the material social conditions of composing possibility for the deployment of language and modality (including available and competing dispositions toward and training with these)?

How are modality and language deployed (or might they be deployed) in this composition? To what end? Demanding, or expecting, what kinds of work? How does such deployment work on and with the conditions of its composition, distribution, and reception?

In what ways do our current analytical categories of modality and language need to be revised to accommodate differences in the ways this composition engages these?

مردی در پیش رو
 کی با عیان با کس خرد با دخت
 که ما ستاره خود حسن در غمنا
 بحسن ازین چشمه تنگ دارم
 فرسوز کف ایخ سر و کف
 همه مددکن
 از سر کسوم در پیش رو
 نوز حسنی نسبت زلف
 با سوزده کام جزئی نام
 محسن بر حشمه سر بلندم
 چشمه که فرزند آید
 ما در دستان از آید

"Here, I'd like to show examples of print texts across history that have always been multimodal: illuminated manuscripts, illustrated letters, etc."

نوروز منی عید زنده
 هواکت بر ما خیر هر روز
 نذیر نامداران برید
 زین را سیدان از ان
 کی جاء کند موعظی کند
 بر اندر جام سر زلف
 همه بوز خدای از حسی سلف

بیدار با آرام و مگر
 در اندازن سبک طایه
 بیرون اندازن سبک طایه
 دران بجز و اندر حیران

"The Four Faithful Followers of Kai-Khusraw"
 Shah-nama (Firdawsi's 'Book of Kings').
 Shiraz, 1330 Hazine 1479, folio 126a

مردی در پیش رو
 همه که بر آمدن با خود
 جویند ازین سبک طایه
 بر اندکی تنگ درت کف
 میزدند جگر کس دران
 نازد کس را از ان
 دران روی سبک طایه



چارم جویند هر روز
 چارم جویند هر روز
 حسین خدای سبک طایه
 سرفقه کشند کس سبک طایه
 کی از کم کار در سبک طایه

مردی در پیش رو
 که ما ستاره خود حسن در غمنا
 بحسن ازین چشمه تنگ دارم
 فرسوز کف ایخ سر و کف
 همه مددکن
 از سر کسوم در پیش رو
 نوز حسنی نسبت زلف
 با سوزده کام جزئی نام
 محسن بر حشمه سر بلندم
 چشمه که فرزند آید
 ما در دستان از آید

مردی در پیش رو
 همه که بر آمدن با خود
 جویند ازین سبک طایه
 بر اندکی تنگ درت کف
 میزدند جگر کس دران
 نازد کس را از ان
 دران روی سبک طایه

03. Laboring with Language/Modality

Work on both translanguality and multimodality brings on and requires friction through the resistance arising from any encounter with difference.

Work is, well, work —hard work on and with materials and culture—concrete labor. In our discussions, we identified two related forms of labor that those pursuing translanguality and multimodality must engage: (1) the labor of reception integral to the “production” of meaning, and (2) the labor, in the sense of the difficulty, of working across differences of language and modality/ies, especially when some of these appear to be unfamiliar to us.^{19, 20}

However, we recognize the tendency, in some discussions of language and modality, to elide this labor by treating languages and modalities as operating independent of practice and practitioners—in short, independent of concrete labor. The result leads to the problematics ensuing from commodity fetishism.

Sense 1: The Labor of Reception

Perhaps as a consequence of being in composition studies, the three of us tend to focus especially on production, conventionally defined: the writing/making of meaning by students and other writers/makers. This risks neglect of the important role played by those reading/listening to/viewing/touching what is produced in making meanings out of it—i.e., the role they themselves play in meaning production.²¹

We’re thinking here of Jackie Royster’s (1996) and Krista Ratcliffe’s (1999) important work on listening, and Bourdieu’s (1977) oft-cited statement on the difficulty of being heard.

To guard against this neglect, it seems that learning of production and circulation needs to be integrated with attention to the dynamics of reading/writing/composing (broadly defined), and to traditions of reception (reading/viewing/listening/interpretive practices). This more capacious understanding of production would necessarily include the dynamics of power relations,²² because people in positions of power (e.g., teachers, editors) are often positioned to assess the worth of the labor of the writers/composers.²³

One example of the effort to complicate understandings of the relationships between production and reception is John Trimbur’s “Composition and the Circulation of Writing.” In this article, Trimbur argues against the tendency to isolate “writing from the material conditions of production and delivery.” He notes:

...neglecting delivery has led writing teachers to equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates. By privileging composing as the main site of instruction, the teaching of writing has taken up what Karl Marx calls a ‘one-sided’ view of production and thereby has largely erased the cycle that links the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of writing. (pp. 189-190)

The accoutrements of being so positioned have historically included the authority to refuse to engage in such labor and to understand any engagement in such labor as not labor at all but mere glossing. Conversely, such labor in reading is historically demanded of the subordinate—the non-native, colonized, the othered by race, class, gender, ethnicity—when reading the writing of the dominant (e.g., canonical British literature, the law). Who is expected to learn and adapt to whose language, and endure the cost of such labor?^{24, 25}

CYNTHIA SELFE

H'mm, in U.S. colleges, similarly the labor of reading texts that are primarily alphabetic is often assigned by teachers/scholars to students who must read the writing of published writers and who then must in turn try and replicate that performance in the papers they produce. This is often linked to a historically sedimented fetishizing of alphabetic/print text (a fetishizing of a set of modalities?) as the modality of education/reason.²⁷

BRUCE HORNER

The notion of fetishizing a set of modalities seems crucial: we're not just teaching a format but a modality, and not just in the sense of a medium but a way of engaging with and understanding engagement with that medium, and, as you point out, the status of that medium (as the medium of education/reason, as you observe).²⁸

There is a parallel elision of the labor of reception in confections of a medium with modality, whereby use of a specific medium is thought in itself to produce specific effects, rather than a specific social practice with a medium producing certain effects (all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding). The false assumption that what is called music, or some kind of music, will in itself have specific effects (in invocations, for example, of music as the universal language, or Bach as producing ethereal effects) illustrates this false conflation and elision of labor (of listening and training in a particular listening practice, leaving aside the labor of the production of specific acoustic phenomena). When the performance does not yield the expected experience, the listeners are judged as defective.²⁶

Some extreme examples of fetishizing specific languages—French as the language of reason or diplomacy, Italian the language of love (or is it the other way around?), English as the new global lingua franca, Spanish as the language of poverty, Germany as the language of science, and so on—more clearly illustrate the occlusion of language users' labor with the language and their working/reworking of these with every utterance, whether produced or "heard."^{29, 30}

The labor necessary to producing meaning, by both the "makers" and "receivers" (readers/viewers/listeners/performers) through a working/reworking of modalities/media, is occluded through fetishizations of these concepts. Even the notion of "affordances" seems to attribute to specific media/modalities the effects of specific practices with these, overlooking the role such practices play. It's the training (in composition, performance, listening) that "affords" these effects, not the technologies of production as ordinarily defined.

This treatment of modality and language as in themselves producing specific effects is encouraged by the prefix "multi-." The term "multimodality" suggests an array of discrete modalities which

one can then choose among (viewed as resources), just as the term "multilingualism" suggests an array of discrete languages which one can then choose from among, switch between, or even "mesh." Distinctions among these various "modes" and "languages" don't hold up under scrutiny. Absent such scrutiny, there is a slippage between "modality" and "medium" (following the notion of "multimedia") that leads to restricting understanding of the experience with a particular technological medium to a particular sense (say, printed text understood as associated with the visual).

That slippage overlooks the necessary labor of readers/viewers/listeners in their encounters with a particular medium and, more broadly, traditions of reading/viewing/listening practices, and the ultimate inextricability of the senses as they work and rework (with/on) particular modes and media, whether printed alphabetic words, film, audiotape, dance, f2f speech.

In other words, dominant understandings about the traditions of engaging with specific media and modes (for instance, that one approaches speech [and music] only as an aural/acoustic phenomenon, vs. also always simultaneously as visual and tactile, say) abstract from the complex of the experience/event. They yield a highly reduced understanding of the "mode of production" (to invoke a different sense of "mode"). This limited understanding, in turn, encourages the danger of treating modes and media and languages as an array of discrete resources rather than acknowledging the plurality of interactions and relationships present in the complex production of languages/language media/modes.^{31, 32}

Sense 2: Resistance to Moving beyond SL/MN

There may be a parallel between the resistance folks have to the idea of learning new media and the resistance they have to the idea of moving beyond monolingualism. While it's tempting to dismiss this resistance as a manifestation of adherence to SL/MN ideology (and while often enough that may well be the case), we need to attend to the work necessary to such shifts in practices and perspective. These are not simply beliefs to be shucked off but shifts in material social practice that require not only access to hardware, say, but also time, effort, training, and so on.^{33,34}

However, part of the problem here may be that what seems to be demanded is more than what is actually being demanded: conventional definitions of multilingualism, for example, seem to demand that individuals develop a putative "native-like" fluency in more than one language (see Horner, Donahue, and NeCamp 2011). Dominant understandings of language competence as an individual achievement of mastery of a "target" language, and the myth of native-speaker fluency (as if all speakers of a given language have identical fluency in all aspects of that language) then lead people to feel personally defective for failing to achieve native fluency in more than one language (or even one language) and to imagine that what seems to be asked of them is far more lofty and unreachable than it actually is.

We suspect a parallel/coterminous debilitating belief about communicative competence may be operating in people's resistance when they are confronted by demands to be "fluent" in seemingly "new" modalities and communication media. So, how do we introduce and advance an alternative, and more capacious, view of competence in our work with our colleagues and students (e.g., one that locates competence as an ongoing and collaborative achievement)? This question, of course, leads us directly to matters of pedagogy.

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19. We recognize that labor is necessary not only to both of these but also to work ostensibly distinct from these—for example, work within ostensibly monolingual settings still requires translation, as does work within ostensibly monomodal environments. (Of course, there are no environments that are really monolingual or monomodal. There are situations in which the disposition to understand environments—and texts—as monolingual or monomodal is deeply sedimented and exceedingly strong in terms of its ideological functioning.)

20. Avant-garde composer Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981), influenced by John Cage's musical experimentation and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, experimented with graphical musical scores characterized by abstract lines, shapes, and symbols as well as musical notes. Cardew believed that such texts allowed performers more space for the creative interpretation of his compositions.

Similarly, Italian composer Sylvano Bussotti (1931-) experimented with the graphical notation of musical scores. A librettist, journalist, painter, film director, actor, and singer as well as a composer, Bussotti was influenced by Anton Webern's twelve-tone scale and John Cage's musical experiments. Representing music through visual symbols outside of conventional notation, artists like Bussotti consider conventional musical notation inadequate to the challenges presented by their compositions and deploy shapes and symbols to convey information to performers about how this music should be played.

21. {CYNTHIA} Here, I'm reminded of the twinned rhetorical challenges of reception (speaking/listening, writing/reading, making meaning/understanding) as having parallels in other modes of expression as well. Consider the challenges, the urgency

of twinned production/reception, signing/watching, communicating/making meaning, in the ASL video on YouTube “I Don’t Need Your Cure,” written and performed by Megg Rose. In this creative and richly dimensional text, Rose’s use of gestures, space, printed language, visual images, spoken words, music are all important components for conveying meaning in a rhetorically effective way. Because Rose composed the text by layering the meaning in a number of semiotic channels, deaf people can certainly experience and appreciate this text without hearing the music track. Similarly, hearing people who cannot read ASL can read and appreciate the text without understanding the signs.

22. {CYNTHIA} The complexity of power and its exercise is not to be underestimated—especially as it relates to the production and reception of meaning in cultural and rhetorical contexts. Theorists and scholars continue to build models for explaining these relationships, like the rendition of Activity Theory by Matt Bury (2012).

From a cultural studies perspective, Stuart Hall’s textbook *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) helps us think about some of the complex power relationships that shape the production and reception of rhetorical texts.

23. The early history of basic writing teachers is relevant here, too. Encountering students’ errors, teachers commonly condemned students as ineducable and undeserving. Researchers such as Mina Shaughnessy then had to push against these attitudes—the misunderstanding of students’ errors as a sign of their laziness, ignorance, and cognitive deficiency rather than effort. Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* was instrumental in demonstrating, through close reading of student writing, the intelligence at work in the production of that writing. It’s easy to dismiss that which we don’t understand, or even perceive, as a failure of the Other to communicate (like complaining, “Why Don’t they just speak English!” in France, China, etc.).

24. {CYNTHIA} I am reminded here of Phillis Wheatley, whose 1773 publication of *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* was considered a transgressive appropriation by a person of color—both of print as a medium and the written language of poetry as an alphabetic mode of expression. So unusual was this activity of writing and publication for a Black woman that the book necessitated this accompanying letter signed by 18 white men attesting that Wheatley was indeed the author.

Indeed, Wheatley’s publication was so remarkable that the publisher included a frontispiece image of the author, by Scipio Moorhead, to call attention to her race. Ringing the image, and adding further testimony to the visual information it contains, are the words “Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley of Boston.”



25. {CYNTHIA} In terms of a multilingual and multimodal example of this power dynamic, I would point to Xuan Wang’s 2010 paper “‘I Am Not a Qualified Dialect Rapper’: Genre Innovation as Authenticity.”

In this paper, Wang describes “features of mixed, multi-layered language use in a hip-hop artist’s rap produced in Enshi, China, which largely draws on the stigmatized fangyan/dialect local to Enshi, but breaks out of it by blending it with resources from the normative Chinese variety of Putonghua and the globally prestigious variety of English” (p. 2).

The translanguaging features in the rap that Wang describes in this article are based in historical and existing power structures and conflicting ideological systems within Chinese society and the ways these have played out in shaping both dominant discourses (“the normative Chinese variety of Putonghua and the globally prestigious variety of English”) and non-dominant dialects (“the stigmatized fangyan/dialect local to Enshi”). The authenticity of this rap is also constructed within the

historical development and circulation of hip-hop, rap, and English that are both increasingly globalized in their travel across geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic borders and increasingly localized in their appropriation and instantiations within specific politically/culturally charged contexts.

Another interesting aspect of this article is its use of/and reference to different modes of expression to tell the story about the authenticity of raps as simultaneously constructed along both global and local axes. The article, for instance, includes both Chinese ideograms and English words—contrasting two different relationships between symbol systems, referents, and meaning. It includes as well a text (Zhao C's identity card) that incorporates a number of different semiotic resources and modalities of expression (a photographic image, an official seal, a letter in the English alphabet (the letter "C," Chinese pictograms) to make a point about the ways in which this case study signifies in both globalized and localized contexts of meaning and power.

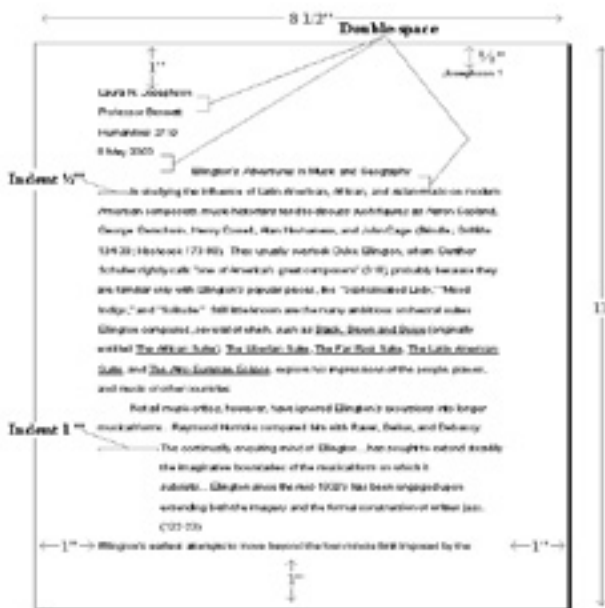
Finally, the piece calls attention to the limitations of modality and context. Within the two-dimensional pages of a print journal—which is itself nested in an ideologically freighted understanding of print and its legitimizing value in many contemporary academic contexts—the author has no choice but to render many of the sonic dimensions of the text in alphabetic, pictographic, or visual terms, which have limited amounts of success in representing a musical genre like rap.

26. {CYNTHIA} We are taught, of course, to associate certain kinds of music with certain feelings and to relate musical themes to culturally determined non-musical references. Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf symphony, for example, is commonly used to teach Western children how to listen to Western orchestral music and how to imagine—in a culturally appropriate way—the different characters (and personalities/qualities/emotions) they encounter (a bird, a duck, a wolf, Peter).

27. {CYNTHIA} No genre of text has been more fetishized in the past forty years in college English classrooms than the student-produced research paper, around which our profession has helped construct and support an entire industry of style guides, software programs that check for plagiarism, and guides to writing research papers.

One element of this industry—the MLA, APA, Chicago style guides—discipline to the minutest detail the conduct of student writers and the appearance of the alphabetic page.

In the following images, we see two examples of this disciplining force, indicating page size and margins, and headings, spacing and indentation:



28. {CYNTHIA} Well, when we go wrong with first-year composition, I believe we do fetishize modality. As Patricia Dunn (2001) notes, we fall into the mistaken belief that “writing is not simply one way of knowing; it is the way” (p. 15), and, even worse, we come to equate writing with intelligence (p. 150). Thus, when we teach only alphabetic texts in first-year composition classes, for instance, it is no surprise that the texts we prize and the texts we ask students to read often look much like the texts we ask them to write.

29. The labor involved in learning a new language is always considerable and complex, especially when individuals must acquire linguistic facility later in their lives and under circumstances not of their own choosing. When languages are fetishized by dominant cultures—as English has been during certain periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the United States (e.g., when the English-only Movement was in ascendance)—the difficulties of learning English are often ignored or dismissed by native speakers.

Consider, for instance, the case of Deqa Mahammed, who came to the United States from Somalia. In her literacy narrative, Deqa speaks of her mother’s labor to learn English, and of the discouraging attitudes of individuals whose comments diminish or ignore the considerable labor involved in this task.

30. {CYNTHIA} The current political climate of the United States, too often influenced by the combined strains of isolationism and arrogance, contributes to the fetishizing of languages—English as well as others.

Marzia Zaidi’s literacy narrative indicates a few of the consequences of such attitudes. Marzia, born in Afghanistan, speaks Farsi, Urdu, Pashto, and Arabic, as well as English. Her narrative speaks volumes about the stigmatization she feels as someone learning English and her fear of making any mistake that may cause others to think “low” of her or identify her as a “FOB, fresh off the boat.”

31. {CYNTHIA} Thinking about an opera like Gaetano Donizetti’s Roberto Devereux provides great examples of our argument here.

We can, for instance, watch and listen to the opera in person, or we can look at a video version of an opera with subtitles, or we can listen to the audio track from that same performance, or we can read the libretto in Italian or in English, or we can read or play the opera’s score or examine the score as annotated and sung by Beverly Sills, or we can look at images of the opera as it was staged in particular places (as performed at the Wales Millennium Center, or from the performance of Roberto Devereux at Opera Holland Park in London), or we can read a review.

And these are only a few of the ways we can encounter the text of Donizetti’s Roberto Devereux. Each of these presentations provides different experiences and understandings. Each of these texts requires multiple kinds of training, understandings, labor, and skill both to produce and to interpret. No one medium or modality is entirely sufficient to the task of either representing or understanding.

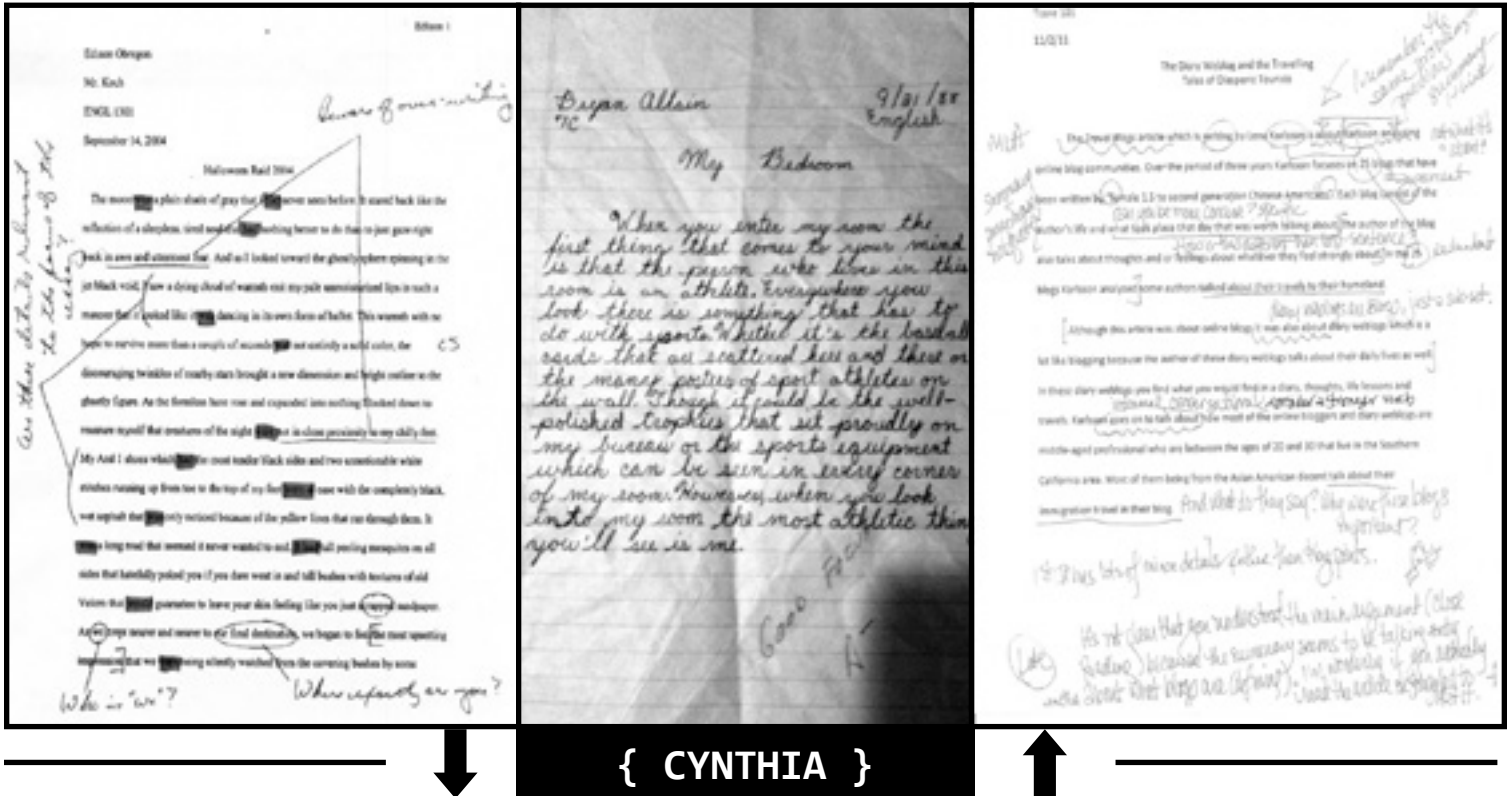
32. {BRUCE} And I’d add that even in our experience with any one of these versions, all our senses are operating in cooperation. It’s just that we tend to recognize just one or another of these as not simply the dominant but the only sense engaged in our perception/reception of that text version.

33. {CYNTHIA} I’m not at all sure people have a resistance to learning new media—people are always already learning new media. My problem is with the conservative forces that privilege certain media over others without acknowledging the power relations and reasons for doing so.

34. {BRUCE} What’s more disturbing is, I think, the uncritical embrace of pre-

designed new media, e.g., iPads. In theory these are heralded for their (user-friendly, optimum) “design.” But the design assumes a specific set of practices. I have yet to find a new gadget that seems to have my own practices and preferences in mind as “intuitive.” They are counter-intuitive, at least to me. I’m thinking here especially of the all-too-heady embrace of everything Steve Jobs has ever supposedly had a hand in.

And have you been listening in to my private, irate conversations with MY iPad?



I'd love to show a series of college research papers—the first page only—from the early 1900s until now. The first pages of these would look fairly similar, I suspect, and make the point about disposition and inertia?

Here, for instance, are photographs of three English papers from 1988 (Allain), 2004 (Koch), and 2011 (Thompson). In terms of their format, they are shaped by similar cultural dispositions and genre expectations.

CYNTHIA

And I'm not sure that the "technologies of production" don't have a role in the effects— for example, until desktop publishing software came along for the personal computer, it was possible to manipulate the visual elements on the page, but it was much, much, much harder to accomplish. Imagine for instance the various difficulties of producing concrete poetry. In some instances it is fairly easy. In others, such as in Lewis Carroll's "Mouse's Tale" (1922), it's hard. In the case of tattoo poems, really hard!

This is an important point to add to our understanding of fetishizing media and modalities. Although fetishizing can occlude the labor of making meaning with media and modalities, it never entirely eclipses human creativity in doing so.

Here, we can take a lesson from Michel de Certeau (1984), who reminds us about the secondary production activities that always transform the intention of primary production. Producers/designers, for example, create technologies to support a set of specific primary-production intentions (for instance, an email system that is meant to improve the communicative productivity of a corporation), but users engage in secondary-production techniques, too: tactics of re-fashioning, re-making, re-conceiving technologies for their own uses.



Meeting of Doctors at the University of Paris.
Public domain.

Our discussion pushes toward four forms of resistance, and tactics for making productive use of that resistance, in pedagogies addressing translinguality and trans-/multimodality.

The first form of resistance, already touched on, is that prompted by a debilitating, if false, sense that what is being demanded is a new and complete fluency with multiple languages and modalities. The failure to acknowledge the inevitable labor involved in any working with language and modality, and belief in the chimera of “native-like” fluency with these, produces an oppositional resistance to what would otherwise be a productive engagement with differences in modality and language that any work in composition entails.³⁵

We might respond in pedagogically productive ways to the first kind of resistance by demonstrating (through example and making visible our own and others’ experiences) the broad range of both linguistic and modal resources ostensibly monolingual/monomodal individuals already use in their ordinary work in and outside academic settings, and, conversely, by demonstrating the chimerical character of claims to possessing perfect native fluency in language and modality.³⁶

The always ongoing work with, on, and across languages and modalities in speech—with the seeming successes and failures encountered daily—can help reveal the myth of perfect fluency, as can the fluctuating degrees of “fluency” in speaking with others over space, time, and social settings. We can also highlight continuities across languages/modalities. In the case of languages, etymology can help us (teachers and students) learn to see the strong interrelations among languages. In the case of media and modalities, there are obvious overlaps both in the design of technologies (e.g., keyboards, the metalanguage for describing digital writing) and useful corollaries for composing in sound, words, and still/moving images (e.g., white space and silence, transitions and cuts, establishing shots and introductions).³⁷

Second and third forms of resistance emerge as two responses to the fetishizing of translingualism and multimodality as new and yet, oxymoronic, outside history (in the sense of being outside human shaping). One response to these, so fetishized, is to reject them as fads, impractical and irrelevant to the ordinary needs of ordinary students and other writers (of, presumably, alphabetic print texts). Another is to embrace and even celebrate them at the theoretical level while ignoring actual work with them in practice.³⁸

Bruce brings out a concern with this kind of fetishizing in questioning the celebration of recognizable forms of translingual practice—currently identified with “code-meshing”—which threatens to render it a species of exotica to be marveled at rather than a feature of everyday language practice.

The labor that goes on behind/before/during a text is always fascinating. In the case of this text, Bruce and I acknowledged fairly early on in the project our own incapacity for designing it into being in the way we imagined. We were simply ignorant of the tools, the techniques, the craft that is necessary for the work to speak effectively in multiple tongues, on multiple semiotic channels, in the way that we wanted it to do. We needed a different set of perspectives, a different set of tools, different expertise. And so we turned to Tim Lockridge. The following comment, written by Tim for a presentation at the 2014 Watson conference, illustrates the difference that he made to the project—just as it speaks to the need for valuing different perspective approaches, understandings.

SELFE

LOCKRIDGE

In industry contexts, there are a number of tools (“version control” systems) for collaborating on hypertext production: Git, mercurial, subversion, etc. These tools, however, were designed by developers for developers, and they require many specific literacies. Whereas one might pick up the basics of HTML in an afternoon, acquiring com-

petency with version control systems is a longer process, and one that requires several antecedent literacies. Even if collaborators understood little about HTML, they could still open a file and manipulate the text. The same is not true of committing and syncing to a service like github or bitbucket.

When working with Bruce and Cindy, I would periodically upload in-progress versions of the project to a staging server. They could then read the piece and offer suggestions using the URL of a specific node.

At points where we needed opportunities to offer more thorough feedback, I generated PDF files of the project. We added comments to the PDF files, and I aggregated the remarks and used them as a guide for changes in the HTML files. When we moved to a copyediting and more nuanced stage, we pasted text from the web site into a Microsoft Word file, and I used this as the source text for updating the HTML file. This also presented problems: text formatting, for example, was lost in this pasting process, and many special characters had to be re-coded in HTML.

Although our collaboration workflow ultimately got us to a final piece, I did feel that there were times where I simply disappeared with the files—marking up the text and dealing with some of the technical challenges. And when we compare this with the type of collaboration that occurs in Google document, we see how—despite the broad range of expression that hypertext projects offer—they seem to reveal a weaker sense of collaboration.

As I mentioned earlier, there are tools that facilitate a more rich sense of HTML collaboration. But when they require significant prerequisites and literacies, they aren't the best fit for academic publishing. And this is why, I would argue, so many multimodal projects (both classroom and scholarly) make use of tools that simplify the digital publishing and collaboration process—platforms like Wix and Wordpress. But these WYSIWYG digital tools come with significant drawbacks: they are harder to preserve, they place a much heavier load on the web server, and they often sacrifice accessibility. An embrace of simple web-based production tools too often pushes aside a larger portion of our audience and creates preservation problems for future scholars and editors.

There is a reason why, nearly twenty years after the arrival of the Web, our field still traffics in print-based artifacts such as the doc file, the pdf file, and the printed page. Although we have venues for multimodal work (Kairos, Harlot, CCDP, Enculturation) and many writing programs embrace multimodal pedagogy and projects, the pdf print article (our most monomodal approach) brings with it a particular simplicity, familiarity, and comfort. We know how to produce and circulate these artifacts.

These artifacts, however, maintain a status quo—one in which labor is often outsourced and effaced, allowing scholarly work to be sold back to libraries and institutions (facilitating what Dave Parry calls “knowledge cartels”). The process and network of the monomodal artifact is part of a larger labor and economic problem for the field.

This is a position underscored by the thesis of our collaborative work as well as the narrative of our collaborative process. But to frame it only negatively is a mistake: Our project was as much about the opportunities of transmodality and translanguality as much as it was about the problems of monomodality and monolinguality. Following Kress, Selber, and Shipka, I've asked my students to work in a range of modalities and to consider how they might challenge an SL/MN ideology. As a field, we need to also take up this call with our scholarship: to consider not just how a range of modalities might extend our work, but also to consider the technologies we need to support that work. Microsoft word—like the typewriter—didn't have a particular collaborative focus; instead, we found ways (mailing documents, sharing files) to bend the tool to our collaborative needs. Now as we work within a maturing Web, isn't it time to ask: how best can we bend our digital tools to facilitate and encourage multimodal collaboration?

HORNER

There may be a parallel in discussions of multimodality—a tendency to adopt a celebratory stance toward practices that dominant ideology has trained us to recognize as multimodal and to push to the background or dismiss as unduly restricted those practices that this same ideology has trained us to recognize as, well, monomodal.

Yes—that’s true and I often find myself doing just that! At the same time, I also see another complicating tension: on one hand, a celebratory recognition of multimodality/transmodality and, on the other hand, a push-to-the-background/resistance to teaching certain forms of/environments for multimodal/transmodal production: like some English teachers’ resistance to teaching/recognizing anything but conventional print-based word papers (which, granted, are themselves multimodal, but not in the same ways as texts created in digital environments can be).

SELFE

In this comment, we see Cindy bringing out the third form of resistance: celebration (here of multimodality/transmodality), fetishized, and therefore accompanied all too readily with a rejection of the actual labor of teaching their production. The pedagogical necessity of engaged in production activities engaging with multimodality/transmodality (and, presumably, translinguality) follows from this—what Bruce may be getting at in his response:

HORNER

I see what you mean: while there are multimodal potentialities, and even submerged features, in any writing of traditional texts, these are overlooked or denied in how they are taught. Your point is well taken: I think we need to work simultaneously on dispositions, language/semiotic practices/modalities, and media while recognizing their ultimate inextricability from one another. If we work on just one of these (say, dispositions, my bent) then we ignore the materiality of practices, making our work a mind exercise of limited or no utility; if we work just on practices and media without working on dispositions, we lose the radical transformative possibilities of the former. I tend to err in the first direction, odd for someone self-identified as a cultural materialist.

A fourth form of resistance is more directly material, in the ordinary sense of that term: the challenge of material resources (hardware, but also time, space, institutional support) for engaging in the experimentations with translingual/-modal practices that both Cindy and Bruce agree are a necessary and important part of our work going forward.³⁹ It may be true, as Bruce observes, that:

HORNER

One can acknowledge the legitimacy of the “translingual” position while engaged in practices that appear monolingual (and vice versa), and one can acknowledge the legitimacy of the transmodal position while likewise being engaged in practices that appear from dominant perspectives to be monomodal (and vice versa).⁴⁰

Nonetheless, it seems crucial to work with our students on developing strategies beyond those deploying what SL/MN recognizes as legitimate so that those strategies do not effectually become understood as the only strategies (or possibilities)—especially given the low status accorded anything that doesn’t fit with SL/MN “norms.”⁴¹ As Cindy observes:

I want to work within the profession to encourage more teachers not only to recognize or “acknowledge the legitimacy of the transmodal position,” but also to encourage/experiment with/try more transmodal production, to experiment with different semiotic ways of composing meaning—and to help students do so as well.

SELFE

HORNER I wonder if this encouragement of experimentation is an argument for a pedagogical strategy: using different modalities just to say you've used them wouldn't by itself be an end, but not experimenting with them will preclude broadening what we can attempt and perhaps achieve in our compositions (defined broadly). A possible analogy: students studying "orchestration" learn at least some of the different capabilities of different instruments and try them out so they can then choose from among them (or not) [and mix them] when composing/orchestrating.

Cindy highlights the necessity of working toward such possibilities by treating "competence" as an ongoing and collaborative achievement, what Cindy calls "truly, the hardest work from my perspective":

Getting people to try on the multi/trans perspectives—not only in thinking about making meaning and the various forms it takes, but also in producing meaning. I guess the way I generally approach such situations is to offer teachers some texts to think about from a multi/trans perspective (trying to work inductively toward a multi/trans understanding), and then to involve them in exploring such texts from a multi/trans perspective (practicing with them), and then involve them in brainstorming ways in which to practice creating/making such texts (and/or involving students in doing so).

SELFE

NOTES

35. Cindy notes that language learners who are shaped by the goal of "complete fluency" can find themselves paralyzed with the demands of language acquisition. Kristine Oliveira (2012), for instance, in a literacy narrative she contributed to the Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives, tells the story of her Spanish studies in Mexico. In Kristine's case, the pressures she put on herself as a language learner and the ways in which her struggles became embodied in a very physical sense affords a glimpse of the debilitating understandings of "fluency" when we talk about language learning.

36. One way of demonstrating the fiction of monolingualism, for example, is to examine all the loaner words that are used by speakers of English on a daily basis. Or we can think about Spanglish or other code switching phenomena. Other resources for this kind of work include Blanchard and Leven (2007), Stevens (2004), Winokur (1996). Similarly, we can demonstrate monomodal texts (and the fiction of the claim that multimodality is a recent or strictly digital phenomenon) by looking at phenomena like medieval illustrated manuscripts.

37. {Cynthia} Here, for example, might be a good place for presenting the same text in video, audio, and text transcript. For instance, we might look at MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech in print, video, and audio.

{Bruce} I was thinking more of showing strong etymological crossover among languages. An excerpt from the OED would do that. And images of both a typewriter and computer keyboard would be good illustrations. The comparison might help overcome fears.

{Cynthia} Or, we could show: the QWERTY keyboard of an early typewriter, and the keyboard of an early computer, and a keyboard projected on skin.

{Bruce} See also Raphaël Confiant's (n.d.) remarks on this, in "Créolité et francophonie: Un éloge de la diversalité."

{Cynthia} For me, young people identify some of the best ways to accomplish difficult tasks, and I think we can all pay attention to our benefit—especially in a context of

globalized language learning. Many young people, especially those who inhabit trans-national contexts and find their homes in more than one country, have grown up in rapidly changing electronic communication environments and have learned to understand changing technologies as part and parcel of a shifting global technoscape. As Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe (2012) note, many of these young people are infinitely resourceful and rhetorical in adapting to these new technologies and understand them as a regular and expected part of their lives.

feric80537. (23 March 2012). Underwood keys



byronv2. (23 March 2014). Once I was the latest thing

38. A couple of historical examples should help here to describe secondary and tertiary forms of resistance.

The first of these examples focuses on digital technologies as “oxomoronically outside history, in the sense of being outside human shaping.” In 2006, for instance, Sven Birkerts, in *The Gutenberg Elegies*, argued that the digital/virtual revolution that gathered steam in the last decades of the twentieth century represented a crisis that was having a deleterious effect on his own and others’ habits of reading. In this volume, Birkerts asked if hypertext, for example, was a “Hula-Hoop fad or the first surging of a wave that will swell until it sweeps away everything in its path” (p. 154), using a metaphor that suggested an ultimate lack of human control.

Similarly, in 2008, Nicholas Carr—in the spirit of re-occurring “literacy crisis” manifestos that have so regularly punctuated U.S. history (Varnum, 1986)—asked in the July/August issue of *The Atlantic*, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and lamented that “what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation.”

And by 2009, Mark Bauerlein described contemporary digital generations in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupifies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future*. As he writes:

The fonts of knowledge are everywhere, but the rising generation is camped in the desert, passing stories, pictures, tunes, and texts back and forth [...] Meanwhile, their intellects refuse the cultural and civic inheritance that has made us what we are up to now. (p. vi-vii)

The authors of these comments focus on the growth of digital communication environments, often specifically mentioning young people as the group most adversely

effected by an increased level of exposure to such tools. These authors ignore, however, the fact that educational institutions are often encouraging such activities, recognizing that young people must gain expertise in digital environments so they can succeed in increasingly digital and global communication workplaces.

The next example, this of a tertiary form of resistance, has to do with multilinguality. The modern English-only movement in the U.S., which emerged in the early 1980s after voters in states such as Florida and California approved antibilingual measures, generally aimed at eliminating the use of low-prestige languages (often, but not exclusively, Spanish) spoken by students in school settings (Crawford, 2000). Such efforts persist and continue, albeit in more fragmented forms, as described by Ted Greenberg in an NBC10 article about an English-only policy enacted by a substitute teacher in Philadelphia's Vineyard Public schools (2009).

•This is an English speaking school and classroom—any other language other than English will not be tolerated.

Similarly, consider a political advertisement by Tim James, then a candidate for Governor of Alabama, voicing his opposition to offering driver's license exams in multiple language (2010). As James, who lost the election, notes, "This is Alabama; we speak English. If you want to live here, learn it."

Proponents of educational measures to limit instruction to English ignore the fact that U.S. schools have continued to offer instruction in prestige languages like French and German as well as Spanish, among other languages, recognizing such classes as desirable components of curricular instruction. Proponents of English-only driver's license exams ignore the fact that such licenses are often necessary accommodations for international business personnel, recent immigrants, and tourists.

39. {CYNTHIA} I agree—teaching multimodal composition, especially when it takes place in digital environments, can be an expensive and time-consuming endeavor, even though new digital tools are coming down in price. Teachers of English and composition, further, are not always intellectually or materially prepared by their graduate studies to take on this work. Finally, composition programs that want to teach multimodal composing in digital environments are constrained by a variety of factors: among them, hiring priorities, access to computer labs and digital recording equipment, competition with other programs, expectations of administrators, state standards, and shrinking budgets.

40. {CYNTHIA} And I tend to err in the second direction (with a focus on material practices), an odd habit for someone who self identifies with radically transforming our theoretical understanding of what it means to compose.

41. {CYNTHIA} Yes, to this end, teachers of composition need to remind themselves that not all multimodal composing **needs** to be digital. Students can work with multiple expressive modalities in any number of media contexts and with a variety of material resources.

05. Institutions/Histories Traditions/Disciplinarity:

Re-Inventing (vs. Inventing) Language/Modality

Not only is there now a substantial (and growing) body of scholarship affiliated with composition studies (and, more broadly, literacy studies) addressing questions of language and modality; there also exist well-established research and teaching traditions, represented most clearly by institutional disciplines (and, often, “departments”), devoted to the study and teaching of language, media, modalities.

Here we have in mind not so much, or just, composition’s recognizable institutional bedfellows (and occasional rivals) in departments of communication, education, journalism, rhetoric, and (sometimes) media studies, but also traditions of research and teaching in linguistics (applied and theoretical), specific languages (modern and not), and specific media (music, dance, theater, film, photography, graphic design, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, etc.).⁴²

In our discussions of these traditions, at least three kinds of interrelated issues surfaced for us: issues of cross-disciplinary learning, issues of disciplinary boundaries and integrity, and issues of material resources.

SELF Institutionally, how do we engage productively with the work of established disciplinary traditions that focus (and claim expertise) on matters of modality, medium, and language (film, music, linguistics, “speech,” visual arts, graphic design, the modern languages), ...Aside from simply acknowledging work in these other disciplines, how might we operate as “sojourners” rather than “tourists” (to invoke Michael Byram’s distinction, made with respect to intercultural competence) and perhaps invite others to do the same in the territories of these other disciplines?

This is another really great question and one digital media folks in English depts. struggle with all the time—we have to talk to people in film production programs, art programs, journalism programs about what we do with composing mediated texts that is different from what they do in their own programs. And in terms of scholarship, digital media compositionists are always dealing with scholarly work in new media studies, film, audio studies—much of which may have outlier status in various English departments or composition programs.

HORNER

In the following, we take up each of these issues separately, while recognizing their ineluctable interrelations.

Cross-disciplinary Learning

Put positively, there is an almost overwhelming body of work in these “fields” that those of us in composition can and should undertake to learn from.⁴³

In addition to providing insights into areas of communication not commonly recognized by composition scholarship and teaching, these other fields (their assumptions, research, and teaching methodologies) can, at the very least, provide fresh perspectives on our own—what we understand to be (and practice as), simply, the “norm.” For example, the challenges of musical notation give a fresh perspective on the notational practices taken as the norm in [verbal] composition, just as the layout of images brings to the fore the visuality, as it were, of texts as images.⁴⁴

At the same time, and conversely, insofar as every disciplinary tradition ([verbal] composition

included), is shaped as much by exclusions as well as inclusions, we would not want to bind ourselves to the (imagined) orthodoxies of these other traditions in re-imagining the work of composing. Thus, while it would be inefficient to “reinvent the wheel” in approaching matters of linguality and modality, given the enormous corpus of scholarship and teaching on such matters in these other fields, there is the possibility of new insights to be gained from reconsidering, from the vantage point of composition’s own disciplinary concerns, the significant findings and practices of these other fields.⁴⁵

Here, as before, the notion of competence can stand in the way of productive engagement: instead of aiming for (individual) mastery of these disciplines, as traditionally conceived, we might instead aim at collaborating with those in these other fields, for the benefit of all, rather than attempting to either poach from or instruct and correct those in these other fields.

Disciplinary Boundaries and Integrity

We include both “boundaries” and “integrity” in this section to signal our recognition of both the problematics of disciplinary restrictions and the inevitability and necessity of specific disciplinary commitments and paths, and the challenge and possibility of engaging this dialectical tension within cross-disciplinary teaching and study.

In parallel with our comments in the section above, we recognize that some orthodoxies may well reign within specific disciplines that it would be counterproductive to wholly subscribe ourselves to in the interest of “interdisciplinary” collegiality, but also that there is a need for respect (recall Royster’s warning in “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own” 1996) and attention to the histories underlying such orthodoxies.

At the same time, we also recognize that disciplines, especially at first pass, can seem more monumental and intransigent—more internally uniform, stable, and homogeneous—than in practice they are.⁴⁶

So, for example, a radical debate exists (in the sense of challenges to root assumptions) in the field of applied linguistics on which Bruce has drawn (see Firth and Wagner, 1997). It seems paramount, in drawing on such scholarship and working with those in these fields, to learn to recognize the dynamics of such debates. One consequence of this work can be a productive re-cognition, in the sense of re-acquaintance, with the governing assumptions and commitments of the discipline to which one feels most aligned (i.e., for us, composition studies), despite the ongoing radical challenges to some of its key concepts (as in, what constitutes a “composition”—see Yancey (2004)—or “writing”—see George (2002), as well as Hesse and Selfe, (2010)).⁴⁷

For example, Bruce notes that, in contrast to composition, scholars in other disciplines often not only don’t ask but also see no need to ask what the pedagogical implications of their language practices might be, nor what the pedagogical scene might contribute to their own understanding of their discipline. Teaching is simply not a defining disciplinary concern of many disciplines—members may be dedicated teachers, but teaching is for many not seen as part of their discipline’s purview. Such moments of critical re-cognition can support the integrity of both one’s “own” discipline and those of others without yielding to mere submission to the restrictions such disciplinary commitments and practices might impose.

Institutional/Material Working Conditions

It’s easy enough to imagine working cross-disciplinarily in one’s research. Indeed, most institutions regularly circulate admonitions encouraging faculty to engage in just such projects. Designing courses and curricula that actually engage in cross-disciplinary work is quite another matter. Given institutional budgeting practices (e.g., departments claiming and counting FTEs generated) and the conflation of disciplinaryity with departments, work that crosses disciplinary divides can quickly run aground.⁴⁸

We can imagine two tactics by which to navigate these challenges, tactics we identify with the two

competing prefixes for the work we explore here. On the one hand, by announcing one's work as "multi," and by bringing in colleagues from other (related) disciplines, as in team-taught courses, the perceived threat of poaching (students or their FTEs, courses, funding) may be dissipated. So, just as one might tactically aim at trans-linguaging by first encouraging multilinguality, teachers might aim at transmodal (as well as translingual) courses by first encouraging coursework in a variety of media as conventionally understood.

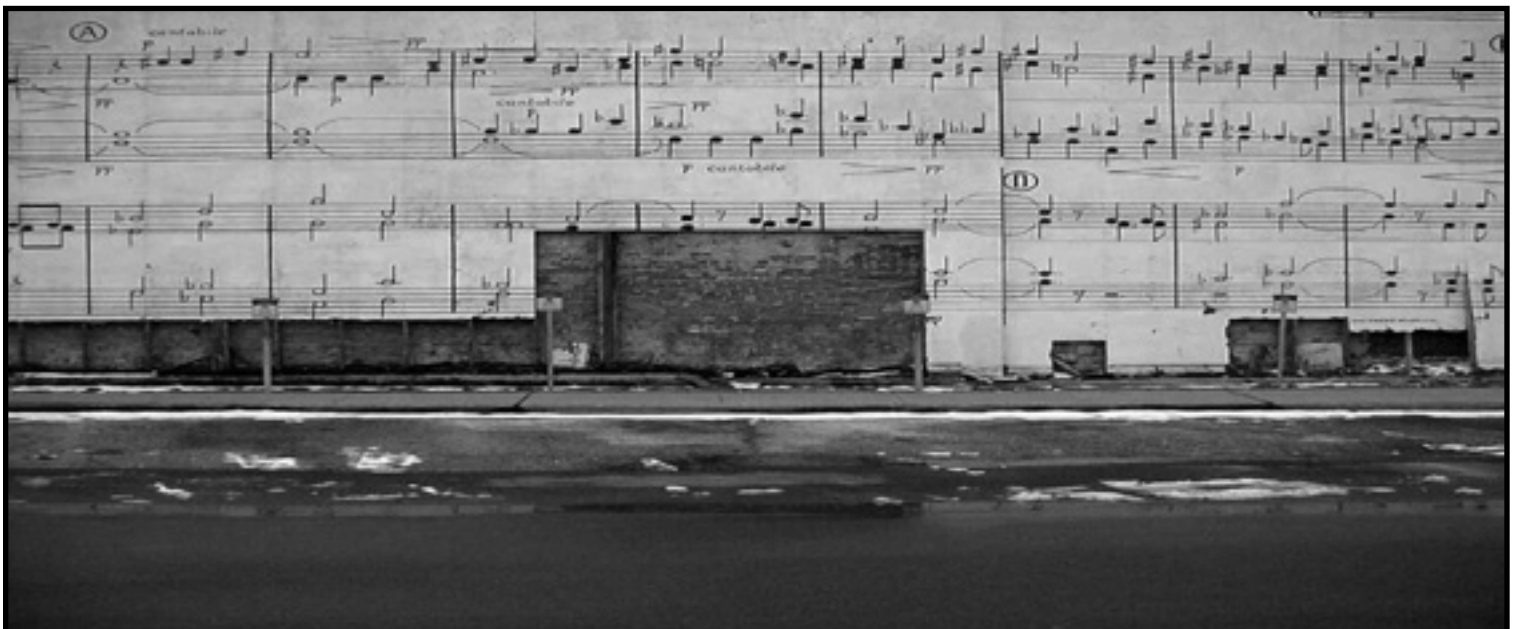
The danger here is of achieving at best a veneer: like shallow versions of multiculturalism in which culture (in the singular) is replaced by a set of cultures treated as internally uniform, stable, and discrete from others.

Likewise, work across language departments—French, Chinese, Spanish, etc., and English (in this context, understood as another "modern" language rather than something else)—might first develop through programs requiring multilinguality—an updating of, say, work in comparative literatures and languages, and/or translation studies. And again, as the updating reference suggests, the danger is that such a strategy would reinforce monolingualist ideologies teaching languages as (again) internally uniform, stable, and discrete from others.

The "trans" strategy would directly confront the ideologies responsible for the dispersal of work in language and medium into separate "departments" by insisting on the necessity of challenging the assumptions of those ideologies from the start. Here one might contest these from the "inside," drawing on a range of work from different language and medium/arts disciplines to challenge the assumption that these are not "proper"—i.e., do not belong—to one's own discipline. This would seem to be the strategy taken by compositionists like ourselves in pursuing our work.⁴⁹

At the same time, one might well find and align oneself with "fellow travelers" in other disciplines pursuing analogous tactics from within their own departments.⁵⁰ The danger here is a reinforcement, through maintenance, of existing disciplinary divides, and the parochialization of one's thought, ironically, through cutting off the benefits of working across languages/modalities/disciplines. After all, one still would be working "within" the strictures of one's own department, and academic institutions are notoriously adept at accommodating, and defanging, such ventures through "horizontal" structuring: a myriad of diverse and discrete courses, programs, and departments never engaging the work of one another.

In this sense, emerging subspecialties of composition "in" digital media studies, or multimodality, translanguaging, or multilingual composition, that are described in job advertisements and that call for candidates with specializations in these areas, might be understood as a "broadening" by the addition of new, discrete segments that do not challenge dominant teaching and research practices.



42. {CYNTHIA} Indeed it has become impossible, I think, to be a digital compositionist and focus narrowly on the fields of rhetoric and composition. One of the most recognizable scholars influencing digital media scholars, for example, is Gunther Kress. A member of the New London Group, Kress has been a Professor of English, but he notes that his experiences with different languages and cultures (and his awareness that language and culture were inextricable) led him from the study of literature to explorations of linguistics, cultural studies, visual studies, and semiotics. Kress' work on multiliteracy explores the many different ways in which and systems through which humans make meaning.

43. Some examples of composition scholarship that attempts to bring together perspectives on translingualism and trans/-multimodality include Cope and Kalantzis, Hawisher and Selfe, Lam, Wang, and the recent work of Suresh Canagarajah. For recent parallel efforts at rapprochement between work in New Literacy Studies and work on (especially) visual modalities, see Baynham and Prinsloo (2009).

44. For additional insight on the ways that matters of visual semiotics figure into the teaching of composition, readers may want to refer to Stephen Bernhardt's early and germinal article "Seeing the Text" and Diana George's important addition to the professional conversation "From Analysis to Design."

45. {CYNTHIA} Somewhere here in this section, I think we might want to talk about the danger of taking ourselves and our competencies so seriously that we eliminate the space (intellectual, physical, emotional) for experimentation, trying new things out, play. At the intersections of these different disciplinary traditions we might be able to find room for experimentation and learning from one another in playful (as well as serious) ways. Such play may well require, however, overcoming dominant cultural predispositions that privilege some languages and modalities (and genres) as more legitimately intellectual and/or academic than others. For instance, in the academy, mathematics may be the only symbolic mode that carries as great (greater than?) intellectual prestige than English alphabetic writing.

46. On this point, see Bazerman, "From Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words" (1992).

47. Doug Hesse and Cynthia L. Selfe sketch out two competing visions of what "composition" means in their 2009-2010 exchange in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*.

The conversation began with Selfe's "Movement of Air, Breath of Meaning" (2009), in which she makes the argument that the "relationship between aurality (and visual modalities) and writing has limited our understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and has, thus, deprived students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning" (p. 616).

Responding to this article in 2010, Doug Hesse asked two key questions:

[Is] the curricular space that our field inhabits "rhetoric/composing" or is it "writing/composing?" (p. 603)

Whose interests should the composition class serve? (p. 603)

In his response, Hesse argues that Selfe's article raises "large prior issues that we need to sort" (p. 603) about the curricular approaches of composition programs and notes "that there are ethical as well as rhetorical dimensions to the affordances and constraints of modes and media, and that education has long tempered 'what works' or 'what's interesting' with 'what should be'" (p. 605). Hesse also maintains, "If we're going to use it [the term composition] as the umbrella for a wider host of textual practices than academic writing or public argument, then we ought to be clear in our catalogs and to our colleagues that we're shifting the definition" (p. 603).

Responding to Hesse's caution, Selfe (2010) argues for "written words, photographs, video and audio clips, drawings, and animations as valuable cultural resources that can be combined to compose texts that communicate meaning in a variety of rhetorically effective ways for a variety of audiences" (p. 608). Selfe also claims that composition studies' "single-minded focus on the alphabetic [...] sometimes blind[s] us to other ways of knowing and making meaning" (p. 609). At the end of her response, Selfe wonders if the "overly narrow focus on the printed word isn't an artifact of our own education, our own historical worldview, our own personal investment in print and its products" (p. 609).

48. Readers who want a reminder about the complexity and the challenges of cross-disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity might refer to Professor Robert Pippin's (Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Professor, University of Chicago) keynote talk at the Interdisciplinary Futures Symposium. In this talk, Pippin traces the emergence of disciplines in the modern university and the social forces (economic, cultural, historical, administrative, professional, institutional) that encouraged (and continue to sustain) these formations in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

49. See also Min-Zhan Lu's inclusion of "Chinglish" as a legitimate area of concern for composition, breakdowns of distinctions between L2 and "normal" composition classrooms (see Harklau et al.), Diana George's work, and the broadening of the term "literacy" in New Literacy Studies, to incorporate a diverse array of practices.

50. Here we are thinking not only of work in New Literacy Studies but also the work of folks like Canagarajah, whose work defies traditional distinctions between applied linguistics and composition—as in his recent book on translingual practice.



06. Mapping Directions for Translingual/-Modal Work

The Contours represented by the two tactics described in the previous section for undertaking translingual/-modal work correlate with two tendencies we note in our own thinking and the conditions in which we work.

For example, Bruce looks to work in both translinguality and transmodality to contest SL/MN from within: to learn to recognize the degree to which existing (and past) practices are at odds with the ideology of SL/MN (e.g., the mythic English monolingual character of the U.S.) and to recuperate the full array of practices occluded by dispositions advanced by that ideology. He wants the profession to understand English, for example, as a language “always in translation” (Pennycook, 2008), and to see the monomodality of traditional alphabetic print writing as an effect of SL/MN. Bruce sees this work as aligned with Brian Street’s recent caution that “those working with different modes [in studies of multimodality] may need [...] to develop an ideological model of multimodality” (“Future,” p. 32; see also p. 33).

By contrast, Cindy works outside the established boundaries of SL/MN, collaborating on composing texts in digital composing environments (web texts, video essays), exploring genres (digital archives, long-form digital projects), and creating spaces for digital publications (Computers and Composition Digital Press) that call attention to the limiting effects of SL/MN (historical/cultural/ideological) and help expand possibilities for expression.

And Tim works—through mentoring, collaboration, and workshops—to bring more authors and readers to multimodal texts and publishing venues, focusing on access and collaboration as a means of challenging SL/MN.

Finally, there is a danger that our own discussion, and its very framework as “dialogue,” does not wholly escape: namely, that the work at which we and many others are aiming has become bifurcated: there is work on translinguality, and work on transmodality, seen as discrete areas of concern. Street refers to this danger more broadly in his recent essay on “The Future of Literacy Studies” when he observes that:

There are challenging developments as those working in the frame of multimodality question the traditional dominance of language-based approaches to communication and lay out other communicative practices that need to be taken into account—visual, kinaesthetic, and so on. The implications of this will be profound and those in the field are currently struggling to come to terms with both the theoretical shift and the issue of how we label the various modes. (“Future,” p. 32)

Street’s caution, ultimately, is directed at the likely tendency of dispersal: namely that “such a shift may take us back to earlier autonomous approaches, both with respect to the view of literacy as skill and to the notion that each communicative practice has its own ‘affordances’ or determinations” (p. 32). What is needed, then, are ways by which to keep the categories of analysis—including those operating in our discussion here—available for critique and revision. Our own difficulty naming our focus here—in a way that recognizes the distinct character of the lines of research and teaching, on the one hand, and simultaneously the many and strong points of intersection/overlap, on the other hand—points to the need for (and difficulty of) doing both trans-lingual and trans-/multi-modal work.

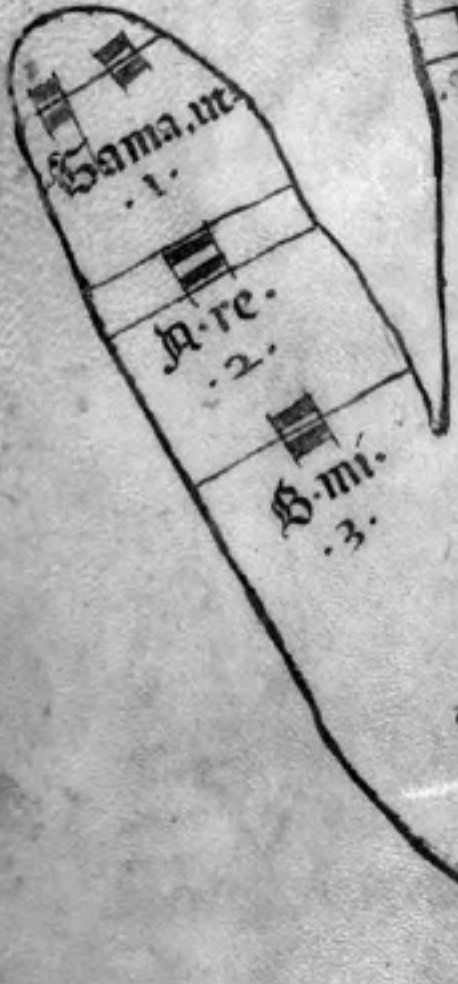
One clear direction going forward might then be for forums that directly address such points of intersection. These might take form in conference workshops addressing such points of intersection and ways of addressing them in our teaching and scholarship, but also in conferences and special journal issues and collections. We recognize that the prevailing tendency is to choose from one or the other of these—the Computers and Writing Conference vs. the International Symposium on Second Language Writing, say, or Kairos vs. the International Multilingual Research Journal.⁵¹

There are valid reasons and respect-worthy disciplinary histories and research traditions that justify the selectivity underlying the design of such forums and venues. At the same time, like our categories, the institutions and institutional practices in which these inhere can be usefully problematized and contested in the ways our dialogue here, limited as it is, has attempted. We look forward, and ask our readers to move forward, to reaching beyond the boundaries set by this dialogue to question and help provide more and better answers to the questions of language and modality we have posed here.

NOTES

51. Signs of the difficulties attendant to the exploratory task we advocate can be perceived in this communicative text. And, as authors, we definitely encountered such challenges in creating the text:

- How does such a collaboration begin among colleagues in very different areas of language/composition studies? How do we talk to scholars whose field of expertise we don't fully understand? How do we discover the right questions to ask and explore?
- What do Bruce or Tim mean when they talk about "text," or "analysis," or "composition"? How do we identify a shared vocabulary, a shared constellation of concepts, that lets us explore ideas we want to explore?
- Who/what are Bruce and Tim reading that Cindy hasn't read? What/who is Cindy watching/listening to that Tim and Bruce have not? Why?
- How do we make this text comprehensible to multiple audiences with multiple specialties but some common interests in languages, texts, multimodality?
- Where do we turn for language/images/audio that allows us to describe, explore, analyze intersections in the semiotic arenas we are trying to explore?
- How do we represent our thinking in a manner that tries to reflect the multiple semiotic arenas we are attempting to explore? How do we make our text reflect our thinking?
- How do we acknowledge the gaps and limitations of our thinking, our explorations, what we have been unable to render in this text?
- How do we decide on a genre, a form for a text that departs from those we have created in the past? That departs from those we know how to create?
- How do we circulate the text we create? Where? What arenas/venues are appropriate/available for such work that crosses traditional spaces/locations in our larger profession?



Il modo di leggere. la mano
e segnato per numero, gomin-
canto dal numero. 1. et segui-
tando. Le chiauue rosse sono
gille, che si segnano nel canto
fermo; il nome loro, et modo
di leggerle, e scritto di nanci
alle stette chiauue fo. or della
mano. come uedete al luo-
go suo. &c.

G. quadro acuto.
4. fa re mi fa
5. mi la sol fa

Naturam
graue.
fa sol re
la sol fa

1. Gama. ut.
2. A. re.
3. B. mi.
4. C. fa. ut
5. D. sol. re.
6. E. la. mi.
7. F. fa. ut
8. G. sol. re. ut
9. A. la. mi. re
10. B. fa. b. mi
11. C. sol. fa. ut
12. D. la. sol. re.
13. E. la. mi.
14. F. fa. ut
15. G. sol. re. ut
16. A. mi. re
17. B. fa. b. mi
18. C. sol. fa. ut
19. D. la. sol.

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