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Making modality: transmodal composing in a digital media studio.

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MAKING MODALITY: TRANSMODAL COMPOSING IN A DIGITAL MEDIA STUDIO

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother

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ABSTRACT

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The multiple media that exist for communication have historically been theorized as possessing different available means for persuasion and meaning-making. The exigence of these means has been the object of theoretical debate that ranges from cultural studies, language studies, semiology, and philosophies of the mind. This dissertation contributes to such debates by sharing the results of an ethnographically informed study of multimedia composing in a digital media studio. Drawing from Cultural Historical Activity Theory and theories of enactive perception, I analyze the organizational and infrastructural design of a media studio as well as the activity of composer/designers working in said studio. Throughout this analysis I find that implicit in the organization and infrastructure of the media studio is an ethos of conceptualizing communication technology as a legitimizing force. Such an ethos is troubled by my analysis of composer/designers working in the studio, whose activities do not seek outside legitimization but instead contribute to the media milieu. Following these analyses, I conclude that media's means for persuasion and meaning-making emerge from local practices of communication and design. Finally, I provide a framework for studying the emergence of such means.

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INTRODUCTION

What is the nature of writing and communication, especially writing and communication education, in the shifting political and technological landscapes of the twenty first century? Is writing, an activity as old as history, fundamentally the same as it ever was despite the influx of seemingly new production and circulation technologies and practices? What new theories and approaches are necessary when writing is buttressed by video, audio, image, and other non-alphanumeric systems? This dissertation primarily takes up the last of these questions as it builds off theories of multimodality (or communication that exceeds mere alphanumeric texts).

For teachers and scholars in rhetoric and composition, a turn toward multimodality has given us tentative answers to the shifting landscapes of communication. Since at least the 1990's our field has acknowledged the value of what have since been labeled *multimodal compositions*. Scholars particularly interested in literacies, both *new* and *multi*, and influenced, undoubtedly, by educational contexts have solidified decades worth of research aimed toward literacy outside of print. The works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996; 2006), the New London Group (1996), and the subsequent collection by Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2004; 2009) are especially vested in multimodality in educational contexts. The 2005 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement on multimodal literacies reflects many of these concerns. The NCTE position statement frames multimodality as a necessity to writing education and not a mere luxury. Their understanding of multimodalism recognizes meaning-making outside of text as additional, but not necessarily subservient or lesser,

modes. In this way, documents that including visual components (e.g. graphs or illustrations) or aural or heard components (e.g. embedded interviews or sounds) are a different type of artifact by nature of engaging with more than one mode. For what it is worth, rhetoric and composition has always been, as many have pointed out, more than words.

I am far from the first to claim that we never were monomodal but instead that multimodal became a moniker for new concerns brought on with access to widespread desktop publishing. Throughout this dissertation I acknowledge the work of scholars who recognize our field's legacy outside of print even as I critique the ways we have approached the concerns of multimodalism. At the historical heart of multimodalism is the concern for learners in new context: questions that shaped early multimodalists were concerned with how learning changes when watching videos or seeing images – and how such changes might mandate updated practices of schooling. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) book *Reading Images* is largely based on explaining the tacit phenomena and skills (often called a grammar) necessary to read images rather than texts. The Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2000) *Multiliteracies* collection and Jennifer Rowsell's (2013) *Working with Multimodality*, take this further to ask: how do the learned people use a mode or literacy. Rarely stated, but regularly implied, is that there are ways of doing multimodality correctly – even as scholars like Cynthia Selfe (2009) and Glynda Hull and Mark Nelson (2005) rightfully point out that multimodality makes space for recognizing and honoring diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing that had been historically unauthorized in educational contexts.

This contradiction between multimodality, on one hand, as a new type of authorized and schooled literacy, and multimodality, on the other hand, as a bulwark for diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing is the exigence for this project. Toward this end, this dissertation focuses on the conceptual and theoretical backgrounds of modality work. In short – this dissertation critiques the well-established standard of multimodalism: that a mode is any specific semiotic channel of cultural resources for meaning-making. This dissertation aims to transcend gestures toward modality as a channel and inherited resource in favor of recognizing that in each iteration of design we stand present at the making of modality – the cultural, digital, technological, semiotic, and complicated everyday-labor of creating something that will have meaning and persuasive capabilities. I am not so myopic to say in each iteration the possibilities are endless – but rather that they exceed our ability to name them or anticipate them. Each time a student creates an infographic they are changing what it means to write, make, read, and see infographics. Each time we create a video, we change what it means to do video. Our modality work is not something that we passively accept and reinforce but is instead a contact zone for ideological tensions, body normativity, and other factors. Historically we have ceded these grounds for ideological tension by way of gesturing toward factors removed and outside of our control by naturalizing the relationships we have made with media. Under multimodalism these, often naturalized, features or aspects of a medium are referred to as affordances. But it is important to remember that affordances, in their first instance, were simple and surface level - for instance, the affordance of visual meaning-making might be that it enables representing relationships through relative space. But affordances have since, to some, become unruly.

Even the most basic of affordances are problematic when we unravel them in the context of specific practices. The binary between visual (with the affordance of spatial relationships) and textual (affordance of linear relationships) is often touted as a multimodal fact. Nevertheless, building dimensions and coordinates represent relationships in space more accurately than a picture. To ancient Greeks, the possibilities of creating a picture in the mind's eye, ekphrasis, was a key training for the rhetorician primarily because the tool of the rhetorician was language and embodied presence – this is no longer the entirety of the case. Generations of visual and sonic representation have altered our relationships to methods of meaning-making, to be sure, but it is because of this alteration that we ought to be particularly cautious on staking claims even for basic affordances.

Chapters

In the most basic sense, this dissertation is working toward theory building with modality. To build theory carefully, I look toward two different places where modality plays out – 1) the infrastructural and environmental relationships between modality, technology, and people, and 2) modality in vivo or in use. My first chapter, reading our past and rethinking our future, examines the scholarship surrounding modality work in rhetoric and composition and educational theories in order to work toward a critique of contemporary modality studies before offering a new theoretical lineage outside of semiosis by forging new paths with translanguaging, enaction, and activity.

Chapter 2, transmodality and enactive ethnography, acts as a methods chapter describing the overall methodological basis of this project. In this chapter I synthesize

theories of enaction alongside ethnographic methods. In short, I adopt an apprentice-disposition that enables learning to see, code, and edit alongside the participants.

Chapter 3, troubling and interfacing, analyzes the infrastructure and interfaces of the media studio. By approaching technology and space as agentive, I argue that the media studio acts to legitimize student design through corporate/workplace influenced relationships with technology. As an alternative to legitimization, I offer a way of thinking through modality and studio design as retrofitting. Such retrofitting is context specific and inherently make-shift. This alternative recognizes the ongoing emergence of modality (a phenomenon we participate in creating) in place of conceptualizing modality as a palette of pre-made choices.

Chapter 4, unexamined backgrounds, presents two cases of student designers. In this chapter I examine the activity of designers with special attention paid to the background contexts of their work. By engaging with these unexplored backgrounds, I offer a critique and direction toward transmodal work. In short, I articulate that modality work exceeds the affordance driven approach to multimodality and instead draws from the emergent and material practices of the designer.

Chapter 5, toward a theory of transmodality, summarizes an alternative theory of modality that recognizes modality work not as the prudent selection of categories from some mythologized past but as ongoing and active negotiation. Such a negotiation is not merely an afterthought or an empty gesture, but instead is the organizing principle to the theory of transmodality that recognizes modality as made in action. In other words, modality – whether it's the process of reading or writing a text, creating and sharing a song, or making any other communicative attempt, is an act of reinventing the ways we

reach each other. I conclude that if we want to take the agency of students and designers seriously, such reinvention is not to be taken lightly and ought to, indeed, be a site of continued examination.

CHAPTER I

READING OUR PAST & RETHINKING OUR FUTURE WITH MODALITY

The history of writing in U.S. composition instruction, as well as its contemporary legacy, functions to limit our professional understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity (Selfe, 2009, p. 617)

When we insist on print as the primary, and most formally acceptable, modality for composing knowledge, we usurp these rights and responsibilities on several intellectual and social dimensions, and, unwittingly, limit students' sense of rhetorical agency to the bandwidth of our own interests and imaginations (Selfe, 2009, p. 618)

As Cynthia Selfe (1999) claimed at the turn of the millennium, writing, technology, and the world are all changing, and to keep up we need to "pay attention" to the students in our classrooms. Of course, Selfe and others were prescient; the personal computer, the laptop, the cellphone, and more have all increasingly been used as writing devices and have undeniably shaped practices of composing. Additionally, online forums, webpages, social media, and email are increasingly more common places of composing than direct-to-paper print. The degree to which the production and consumption of information through "new media" is different than print, or traditional, media is debatable. Although, as Baron (2009), Gitelman (2008), and Palmeri (2012) suggest, the moniker of new media isn't as novel as we might like to think, the multitudes of media we compose with and across, as well as the genres we compose within, have, at the very least, served to

remind composition scholars to continually make sense of how writing is shaped by more than words.

Since at least the proliferation of new media composing that has become seemingly ubiquitous in this millennium, our scholarship has accepted and, indeed, observed many iterations of what we've called "multimodal" composing. Over the last two decades, such research has treated multimodality as a fount for putting new eyes on composing processes and has treated multimodality as equally important to print based composing.[1] Nevertheless, in the rush to pay attention to and make sense of multimodality we have abstracted and frozen practices of composing in/with modality. These abstractions often take the role of grammars or logics of a medium that are then reified as its affordances.[2]

In this chapter, I discuss the historical production of the theoretical orientations we take toward modality. In the first section, I organize an overview of contemporary multimodality scholarship around two models; one model, which I call *sensing modality,* conceptualizes modality primarily through sensory/perceptual work. In other words, the sensation or perception is the organizing principle for defining modality to these scholars. For instance, Rachael Graham Lussos (2018) argues that the sensory experience of making, receiving, and eating cake is a form of multimodal rhetoric. Although there is a

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[1] Although in our pedagogy it's rare to give equal weight to assignments that are marked as "multimodal". On the contrary, multimodal assignments are regularly reimaginations/revisions of what was already written by the student – and often for fewer points, thus implying a clear hierarchy.

[2] There are two trajectories of affordances worth mentioning here. The first is through James Gibson's (1979) work on ecological perception theory that defines affordances as what an environmental feature enables and constrains for an actor. Secondly, Donald Norman's (1988; 2014) work on the design of mundane objects take affordance to mean the actions enabled (and perceptible) of an object to an actor. In either definition, affordances are relational to objects and actors.

commonsense appeal to conceptualize multimodality as merely multisensory, the approach, generally, lacks much of a theoretical grounding and basis. The second, and more common model, that I call *immaterial modality*, abstracts modality as a semiotic, and largely internal, cognitive process. This approach assumes a plethora of cognitive structures exist and shape how we understand specific perceptions.

Following this theoretical overview, I establish a precedence for modality work in Rhetoric and Composition. Admittedly, such a precedence is difficult to locate. Multimodality is a commonplace of our scholarship so much so that we treat it as needing little to no justification and little definition. Yet, so much of our work on modality is focused on the audio-visual mediation through computers and falls victim to a soft-technological determinism. Are media, technologies, and visual and aural works even in our wheelhouse? On one hand, teachers of writing have been doing multimodal work since before the field of Rhetoric and Composition was ever institutionalized. Even further back, Rhetoric has a history of being a performative art, a kinesthetic practice, and a skilling of ears and voice. On the other hand, the abundance of possibilities beyond a static conception of mere print is daunting. But, to be clear, communicators have always been faced with inexhaustible media possibilities. New media only makes it more apparent. For this reason, I call for the study of modality-as-writing practices in their material contexts. In contrast to the two models I outline, I gesture toward an approach to modality that recognizes that meaning-making and sense-making are emergent and participatory embodied processes. In other words, I suggest a theory that grounds sensory & perceptual work as activity in its own right that coemerges with meaning-making as material.

Finally, I recognize the scholars who have been pushing back on some of the various conceptions of modality that we take for granted. I locate my work as an extension of scholars who research modality practices as social material processes. My extension to their scholarship is two-fold: first I bring a sensory anthropological backing to recognizing perception as materially situated activity. Secondly, I bring this scholarship to bear on a theory of languaging based in a philosophical tradition of emergent ontologies, enactivism. The implications and tools of this theoretical model are further outlined in the next chapter.

Two Models for Modality

In order to explicate these theories more clearly, I explore the definitions of mode that *sensing modality* and *immaterial modality* imply.[3] In a *sensing modality* approach the modes are the channels of perception (e.g. touch or smell), and in the *immaterial modality* approach modes represent enculturated channels of meaning-making potentials. From mode I reason that modal is an adjectival and that modality is a nominalization of modal. Although this etymological basis is limited--after all, modal probably only manifested in scholarship because it took the prefix "multi-"--laying out the terms in such a straightforward manner lends some insight to why I use the term modality rather than mode or modal. To put it simply, I consider modality research as the study of material social practices of communication, and the significance attached to any such practices.

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[3] An argument can be made that a hybrid approach to modality exists in rhetorical genre studies (RGS). On one hand, RGS approaches can begin with an analysis of perceptual features (e.g. using NPR broadcasts as guide for a student podcast) and ignore much of the immaterial. Additionally, RGS rests on bodily typifications (Miller, 1984; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010) that conceptualize genres through potential responses. Nevertheless, RGS approaches to modality can often ignore the question of modality and instead look toward genres manifested in media.

Nevertheless, the two models of modality I illustrate below are defined by their relation to individual or plural modes rather than the practices of composers / the materiality of any identifiable communicative act.

Sensing modality

There is a certain matter-of-factness to some scholarship on modes. For some multimodal scholars, a mode stands for any of the various systems of perception (e.g. sight, touch, sound). In this way, an object that has multiple modes would enable meaningful perception with more than one system; for instance, a music video that possesses sounds and images. Expanded further, systems of perception might include the perception of time (enabling different critiques for still images and moving images) and, perhaps, differences within seemingly singular systems (e.g. differentiating between shape and color). This approach to modes is what I call a *sensing-modality* model. This is to say, that mode is defined in terms of differences of perceivable sensation. Jay Dolmage (2012) takes this approach when using Vivian Sobchack's (2004) critique of normative bodies. Dolmage's point is that writing, and especially multimodal writing, needs to attend to the bodies that write – specifically bodies that are othered or differented. Ben McCorkle (2012), too, makes a similar claim in asking "whose body" are technologies and interfaces made for? The assumption across each of these pieces is that meaningful bodily perception is key to understanding modality. At times, however, modality is broken into specific categories of sensation.

Palmeri and McCorkle's (2018) revisiting of radio pedagogy from the 1930's demonstrates the pervasiveness of senses as a pedagogical and theoretical category. Citing pedagogical pieces that focus on the "ear-minded" audiences of radio, Palmeri and

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McCorkle interrogate aural perception such as pitch, clarity, and masculine voices as intersecting with power, ableism, and sexism.

Immaterial Modality

For what it's worth, the most common, and most in-depth, treatments of mode expands the definition much further, into a consensus that is generally agreed to by many, that a mode is any semiotic channel of communication (i.e. the common ground between encoding agent and a separate agent who receives, and subsequently decodes, the transmission). This would have us understand a mode as the magic that enables a message to travel through a material medium (e.g. text on page) and come out meaningful. In this approach, the mode is defined and bounded by the medium and the inherited traditions of meaning-making in said medium. To put it differently, a mode is a collection of culturally available resources for making meaning that are oriented within specific media. For instance, we could consider speech a mode and subsequently consider the resources of the mode as intonation, volume, pacing, and so on. Yet speech is not the same as embodied speaking. To examine embodied speaking from a stringent definition of mode would require the observation of gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and so on with each of these either fulfilling the requirements for full-mode or merely being ancillary to their adjacent mode. Although media and cultural traditions are material, the *immaterial modality* model instead, as I discuss further below, abstracts the meaning-making processes of material practices through a cognitive & representational approach.

It is important to recognize the historical context that gave rise to the study of multimodality. The New London Group's (1996) inflection of design and social semiotics is largely responsible for the shape of a theory of multimodality. Writing in response to

technological and social changes, predominantly access to computer "desktop"

publishing, globalization, and post-Fordist economics, the New London Group articulated

the importance of studying and legitimizing the "multiliteracies" of contemporary life.

Across several important essays and books, this collection of scholars powerfully argued

for new ways of framing literacy education and research that recognized language

practices outside of traditional "page-bound" and "standard" forms of text to a more

capacious view of language through multiple media and informed by the recognition that

language patterns are socially and historically received or, in other words, designed and

redesigned. In this way, as expanded upon in Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis' (2000) fuller

articulation of multiliteracies, the attention to multi/modality and literacies serves as a

system of analysis and categorization of the apparent changes in communication practices

and has a way of modeling and creating curriculum. What is important to note here is that

the apparent ease of adding multiple modes of meaning-making, in addition to

globalization and post-Fordism, was radically changing what literacy meant. Because

these additional modes of meaning-making factored so heavily and apparently in "new"

ways of composing, scholars sought out to define and theorize a model for modality.

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, perhaps more than any other scholars,

have gone to great lengths to define their methods for defining modes. Their approach to

defining a mode requires that the mode fulfill three meta-functions (ideational,

interpersonal, and textual/compositional) to count as legitimate (Kress & Van Leeuwen,

2006; Machin, 2016; Ravelli & Van Leeuwen, 2018).[4] This account of modality relies on

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[4] This is, perhaps, a more capacious view of modality than others but offers the most legible method of
identification. For instance, Forceville (2014), rather than modeling a methodology for identifying modes,
names eight modes (written, spoken, visual, music, sound, gesture, smell, touch) yet still recognizes the
issues of boundaries between, for instance, music and sound or vision and gesture.

Halliday's Systemic Function Linguistics (SFL) model of language for analytical power. In other words, a mode is only legitimate when the mode is identifiably language-like. At least two limitations arise here with the import of SFL. The SFL approach is limited by its use of the functionalist motive whereby effects are explained away as their function, that seeks to identify the inherited grammars of all communicative practice.[5] This is to say that the SFL approach jumps from the categorization and observation of phenomena to an ontological assumption about the nature of what brought the phenomena to attention. For instance, in *Reading Images* Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), drawing from Halliday's linguistic "demands," abstract angles, gaze, and foregrounding as semiotic demands to the interaction between producer and imaginary viewer; nevertheless, when using this grammar in their analysis of a picture of a prison guard for death row inmates and a horse, the authors are mystified and left asking "what can this horse 'demand' from us?" and thusly they write it off as a mysterious force of the picture (140). Secondly, assigning hard-set linguistic categories as a benchmark for practices that are inherently non-linguistic or extra-linguistic shapes the observation of these practices into arrangements that have no material bearing.

Immaterial modality limitations. The *immaterial modality* model is particularly limiting when it comes to theorizing from modality practices. The imperative of *immaterial modality* to identify grammars/logics inside modes reifies assumed norms and

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[5] It's important to note here some claim that the term "modality" is drawn from the linguistic term indicating degrees of potential or necessity and that, specifically in early work on multimodality, these particularities are never far removed from, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), assessing the *truthfulness* of a particular representation. This is to suggest that an underlying assumption for these authors of what makes a theory of meaning-making meaningful was linked with mechanisms for accessing and representing the accuracy of propositional claims. Ravelli and Van Leeuwen summarize it matter-of-factly: "Modality is a complementary interactional system which, as noted above, is concerned with the construal and evaluation of the reliability of messages" (282).

standards. In other words, entire systems of design "rules" are removed from the temporal/spatial practices that made the "rules" immediately meaningful. For instance, we can look at the uptake of "white space" (empty space on a page design) from its contemporary origins in Mid-century Modern art development (Pracejus, Olsen, O'Guinn, 2006) to more recent claims of white space as signaling opulence (Pracejus, O'Guinn, Olsen, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) cautioned about as much when they stressed that as visual production became more accessible and less specialized that formal rules and teaching would begin to socially sanction "visual literacy" (3). Yet, in acknowledging this risk of formalization they make clear that they believe it is merely experimentation and creativity on the line and that in the end "[t]eaching the rules of writing has not meant the end of creative uses of language"(3). This discussion of rules implies that grammars can be instructive (but not always too domineering) of creative and experimental uses but fails to recognize that norms and standards often police and sanction practices and that such policing co-constitutes racial, class, and gender hierarchies. Put differently, these norms and standards are less a function of how a particular culture might use a mode and more a reflection about who has traditionally dominated a particular culture. This is especially apparent in examples of whitespace. On one hand, empty space on printed materials reflects the material luxury of contemporary design. High gloss advertisements in well circulated magazines are expensive to print so the willingness to refrain from packing the space densely demonstrates an ethos of opulence. On the other hand, print materials in other contexts, for instance a battle of the bands, might relish a much denser design by either intention or necessity. Yet, it is the

design elements that find themselves in professional media that are more likely to end up becoming the standard of design.

Additionally, the *immaterial modality* model may be well-suited for pointing out various patterns of use and identifying seemingly novel and multiple "channels" of communication, yet the analytical power of merely identifying practices has come into question. For instance, we can look to the stated structures of visual communication such as "top", "bottom", and "margin" and determine that, in part of a cultural history of writing, these spaces might have specific meanings attributed to them while simultaneously suggesting that disparate cultures may take on the spatial forms differently because of different histories of writing – this is a point of *Reading Images* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, 4). Yet, "top", "bottom", and "margin" are meanings derived from printed visual communication. To suggest that these terms are useful in all visual cultures, as Kress and van Leeuwen do, demonstrates the clear bias toward print visuals. Globes and vases, for instance, have no margins and are forms of visual communication. Performance theatre, as well, might conceptualize the stage ends as margins but such boundaries are traversed so regularly as to render them doubtful. In short, like language theories that draw only from written word, modality that theorized only from printed images overdetermines the saliency of structures.

Additionally, there is a critique of *immaterial modality* that the research it produces is merely post-hoc analysis and pointing out rather than analyzing phenomena (Machin, 2016). For instance, Jeff Bezemer and Kress (2008) use the term "epistemological commitment" to indicate that some modes MUST do specific things based on the nature of what they are. For example, they imagine an illustrator is hired to

draw for a children's book. They select the subject matter of two characters on the bench. In this example, the illustrator must decide how close the subjects are seated to each other. They must decide who is to the left and who is to the right. Such spatial precision, Bezermer and Kress argue, is the commitment of the visual mode. Of course, these seem matter-of-factly true to us, who I presume to be well engrained consumers of a very particular form of print. But there are problems with their assumption. Their example seems to presuppose a representational style of art; In this way, precision, as far as it can be measured, is at the very least a product of the realist form. Additionally, we might also imagine the illustrator as unreliable narrator. The assumed precision of this image is only based on the way we've come to understand illustration. When it comes to drawing, despite what we might like to think, seeing isn't always believing. That the illustrator MUST choose is not a feature of the visual mode alone but instead part of the social and material practices that make up the baked in assumptions of illustration (e.g. that consumers expect a recognizable scene). Nothing of the apparent mode determines that we must offer precision. In fact, the subversion of precision is as commonplace as precision itself – we need only look to M.C. Escher prints or various "trick" perspective photographs.

In general, the imperative of multimodality is that by identifying the various systems of orchestration, we may recognize practices that were previously disregarded and ignored by past literacy research. In other words, a strength of the turn toward multi-literacies/modalities has been to draw our attention to apparent differences in practice. Additionally, such differences run deep to "afford not just a new way to make meaning, but a different kind of meaning" (Hull and Nelson, 2005, 225). Nevertheless, the

analytical tools used bring with them much of the theoretical baggage that had previously ignored modality work as merely technical, specialized, art, or, in other words, not in the study of everyday practices of meaning-making. Citing the *immaterial modality* model by Kress and VanLeeuwen, Machin contends that this model is "disconnect[ed] from the motivated interests of the actual sign users" and assumes a similarity across contexts and genres (326). In particular, Machin builds from other Critical Discourse Analysis scholars to suggest that multimodal research seemingly picks examples that best illustrate the various models or approaches of the scholar in question. This is to suggest that the mere development of descriptive tools falls short on articulating the meaningfulness to communication more wholly. I think we can even question the usefulness of beginning from specific cultural contexts. For instance, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) notion of "Galilean[6] reality", which contends that science visualizations are more often technical and line based drawings "without colour or texture, without light or shade, and without perspective" because such simple drawings reflect a more "real" than the "hyper-real" of full saturation and more naturalized visuals, shows these troubles particularly well (164). We need to look no further than Galileo's moon sketches in *Siderius Nunicus* to determine that visuals in science can rely on textures and shading as much as any other context. Galileo's moon, a representation of what he saw when peering through his telescope, is textured and shaded in order to challenge existing paradigms of Ptolemaic astronomy that viewed the heavens as flawlessly made materials[7]. A better orientation

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[6] So named because a quote from Galileo framed "external bodies" as merely possessing "size, shape, quantity, and motion" as real qualities rather than sounds or colors (Kress and van Leeuwen, 164). Of course, Galileo was peering through early telescopes that were unlikely to show much color or allow any listening, which is in stark contrast to contemporary astronomy which allows for sound via installments like the Very Large Array in New Mexico.

[7] For more on this challenge see Thomas Kuhn's (1957) *Copernican Revolution.*

toward science visualizations is to recognize the processes of drawing/visualizing. This is largely Janet Vertesi's (2015) approach to visualizations in astronomy. She writes that it "not a question of creating an ever truer or more singular image … it is a practical activity of drawing a natural object *as* an analytical object, inscribing value into the very composition of what the object is and what makes it interesting" (103).

In their examination of a multimodal text, Hull and Nelson demonstrate, to varying degrees, the value of taking seriously the plurality of composing choices that orchestrate the complete version. Yet, even in their careful accounting of the practices of composing, Hull and Nelson recognize that they miss crucial relationships between sound, music, and image as these, specifically, relate to the context of Jazz, African American History, and the iconography of the African diaspora. This is to suggest that even with a fine-grained approach there is always a plurality of practices and contexts that go unnoticed.

The two models I've illustrated here are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the *immaterial modality* approach often relies on the *sensing modality* model by nature of requiring that modes be perceivable, and perceivable in specific ways. For instance, vibrations of percussion in live music are undeniably perceivable yet fall outside of the purview of aurality or sound. In this way, that the *sensing modality* model fails to account for the positionality of observer/theorist and uses Western categories of sense uncritically is an additional flaw. The alternative to this is the resistance to demarcation of separate modes and a resistance to closely binding media to specific sensory categories. For instance, developments in haptic cinema (Marks, 2000) enable an ethnographer like Sarah Pink (2011) to reflect on viewing handwashing as both "tactile" and the "extra"-

sensory category of freshness. Of course, it should go without saying that different categories of the sensory, the aesthetic, and the material" would inflect different practices with modality.

Making meaning / Making sense

To move forward with our understanding of modality does not require that we abandon either concept of modes. I think that it goes without saying that some form of perception or perceivable-ness is required in any theory that aims to examine diverse practices across media. Additionally, I cannot imagine a theory of modality that does not foreground, at least to some degree, the material matters of meaning-making. Instead, I believe that both models can be bridged through a theory of transmodality that recognizes the emergent and participatory practices of meaning-making and sense-making.

The "trans-" prefix in language study has been used to denote not only practices of languaging as ad hoc moments of meaning-making involving the negotiation of other than nameable languages but also the sociohistorical, geopolitical, and material conditions of language practice. Language practices are shown to be both localized in time and space (Pennycook, 2010) and subject to mobility and the transcendence of borders (Pennycook, 2012; Blommaert, 2010). To put it differently, the "trans-" prefix calls into question the very nature of ontologically distinct, internally uniform, stable, and knowable categories of language in favor of viewing language as the emergent result of practices. Language practices, in this way, are fluid and not tied merely to the reproduction of "accepted" structures, although the enforcement of norms may weigh heavily on language users (Calvet 2006). Viewing language as an outcome of practice more accurately represents the realities of language users and can, at times, be political.

Translanguaging approaches offer an outline for addressing communicative practices outside of static views of language useful on two fronts. First, the "trans-" prefix for language theories suggests an emergent ontology of language as opposed to inherited language structures. Language, in this way, is never a static but constantly changing across difference, insofar as we might find "difference" a useful, albeit, temporary distinction. Conceptualizing language as emergent from practice offers a resistance to the urge to freeze writing, or language, in static time. In this way, language research is open to many avenues of exploration. Yet, such capaciousness can, at times, be troubling. This leads to the second benefit of adopting a "trans-" framework to communicative practice: despite claims of "trans-" utopic views (Kramsch, 2018) such scholarship has responded well by localizing and contextualizing the "trans" practices (Jordan, 2018).

Li Wei's (2018) recent articulation of translanguaging as a practical theory of language is especially beneficial to the study of modality. What is important to note here is that a practical theory is not constructed toward predictive accuracy but instead to offer adequacy of interpretation. To be fair, such interpretations offered by a practical theory are undeniably shaped by the researcher or theorist observing and analyzing. Nevertheless, this realization does not foreclose the possibility of theory-making but instead stresses the importance of fostering reflexivity and shared meaning making. In Li Wei's account, translanguaging is the co-creation of meaning not merely across various linguistic and codified structures but beyond linguistic and codified structures. Although there is always risk of fetishization when discussing language practices and bodily processes, the "trans-" prefix to language denotes to Li Wei that language practice is

inherently embodied (and beyond the body). This attention is particularly salient as our theories of language and practice increasingly move beyond representationalism (Thrift, 2007; Pennycook, 2017). Jay Jordan (2015) has recently articulated good cause for the study of translingual practices to account for the various para-linguistic, extra-linguistic, and non-linguistic materialities that co-create the practices we engage in. The transmodal approach I am outlining here is an extension of these calls in that it aims to recognize the material, sensory, and ontological diversity across all communication. To do this I draw from philosophical theories of enaction initially posited by Maturana and Varela (1980) that Li Wei and others use as reference to the complex ontologies of languaging.

Enactivism is a philosophical paradigm, and budding theory of cognition, that pushes against representationalism (i.e. how agents conceptualize the world around them). To an enactivist, the world is materially fluid. Everyday experiences are those of constant embodied action that shapes our experience. In other words, agents are "part *of* the world as well as being *in* the world" (Di Paolo, Cuffari, & De Jaegher, 2018, p. 23). To be clear, at the heart of it, enactivism is a theory of deep making-in-action. The general "rules" or patterns we possess for meaning-making are not abstracted inheritances or analogous to hereditary genes but instead might be thought of as the epigenetic engagement with a world which both constitutes action and is constituted by action.

An enactivist account dovetails with more critical approaches to sensory anthropology. Sensory anthropology, and the related sensory ethnography, are the study of and with sensuous categories. Sometimes sensory anthropology is differentiated by particular arrangements of perception (e.g. aroma ethnography or visual anthropology).

Although there is ample debate about the usefulness of such bifurcation[8] the

anthropological understanding of perception is that it is social mediated. For instance,

visual anthropology is the study of not only ethnographic film making – but the

anthropological study of many visual mediums of meaning making and communication.

Visual anthropologists do not just capture things visually (i.e. photography, video,

sketches) but also study the practices of how things are visually rendered and perceived

in situated contexts. In this way, visual anthropology takes seriously the shifting practices

and experiences of what might be rendered by multimodalists as a singular mode. To be

clear, this understanding recognizes that any particular mode is experienced, at least

partly, as a cultural-material practice.

What I am calling for here is a theory of transmodality. By recognizing that

communication is a participatory practice, transmodality offers a richer paradigm for

observing practices as they happen. The linguistic baggage of communication is not

always relevant to the study of media – Li Wei's (2018) practical theory of

translanguaging provides an orientation toward languaging/composing that doesn't aim to

predict and categorize practices. Although some degree of categorizing practices, modes,

media, etc. might provide temporary clarity to languaging/composing as a whole, such

distinctions should be treated as methodological scaffolding and inherently temporary.

Additionally, the recognition of the contexts (geopolitical, economic, etc.) of modality

practices is absent in current approaches to modality because, when we assume that

communication and the sensory capabilities are universal, we then assume that contexts

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[8] David Howes & Constance Classen's (2014) *Ways of Sensing* presents only one perspective on this –
Sarah Pink and Tim Ingold's debates in Volume 19 of *Social Anthropology* present a more clear picture.

are unimportant. Such contexts, however, are mandatory for providing a theory of transmodality.

Taking up modality

To many of us in rhetoric and composition, our attention to modality is informed by the motive to do right to more people in the world. In this way, modality has been taken up as an extension of the new literacies movement pioneered by Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street. At times, this motive has been articulated as pedagogies of preparation for participation in contemporary society, relevance to the lives of the students we teach, and the decentering of ideologies seemingly imbued in print culture. All of these represent ways that literacy manifests outside of schooled norms. This is all to say that some of our earliest and most impassioned calls for researching modality came on the heels of post-industrial restructuring of global economies, gaps in technological access, and variations of digital "redlining". Yet in our responses to this apparent increasing demand for "techno-literacies" we've not done enough to challenge the arrangements that are making these demands[9]. In fact, conceptions of modality seem to take these demands in stride as unavoidably matter-of-fact. Because our focus on modality is often centered around media production technologies (Palmeri & McCorkle, 2018) our attention has skewed toward degrees of equitable access and accessibility (Selfe, 1999; Dolmage 2012; McCorkle, 2012). This is all to say that our field has historically turned to the analysis of

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[9] Although teaching modality is often framed as meeting students where they are and connecting with a diversity of meaning-making – to what degree do particular manifestations of modality training (specifically those that aim to produce the high production value media of NPR or Hollywood) contribute to legitimizing privileged practices? Put differently, can we have our cake and eat it too – can we privilege diversity of meaning-making without turning new practices into newer and newer commodities? There is a certain irony to conceptualizing modality as inherently "non-schooled" and simultaneously industry ready.

technologies rather than analysis of meaning-making with technologies when we examine modality.

Although our field has never been entirely consumed with "monomodal" concerns, the influx of multiple genres and technologies has often resulted in identifiable shifts in our pedagogy and scholarship. Jason Palmeri (2012), in particular, explores these shifts in our scholarship through his analysis of matters such as Composition's attention to radio plays and television that predate the turn toward the digital and "multimodal". Additionally, Palmeri contends that moments in our discipline's history, such as the process movement, laid roots for multimodality by considering, and encouraging students to explore, the multitude of ways into expression of thought. For instance, Palmeri identifies an artistic and experimental undertow to Janet Emig's (1971) *Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* and Ann Berthhoff's (1982) *Forming, Thinking, Writing*. Although process theories deployed recognizable trends toward multimodality, a process theory of modality has never been articulated. In fact, in manners of modality we have historically spent much more of our research focusing on the technology.

It has historically been through a linkage with new media that concerns with modality are raised. Kathleen Blake Yancy's (2004) keynote address takes the changing of one medium to another medium to be a definitive factor in our turn toward composing "not only in words". For what it's worth, Palmeri and Ben McCorkle (2018), contend that over 100 years of publications in *English Journal* demonstrate various multimodal pedagogies with radio plays, silent films, and the personal computer and that the mere introduction of new media is no panacea for engagement and transformation.

Palmeri and McCorkle's caution about media introduction serves as a gentle rebuff to the commonplaces of technology and writing instruction. For instance, although we're motivated to recognize multimodal ways of making meaning as part and parcel to rhetorical sovereignty[10], we often ask students to produce multimodality through the use of new technologies and in places replete with neoliberal logics and values of friction-free communication (i.e. contemporary higher education). For instance, Nathan Elam's (2018) review of *Adobe Spark* may well represent many of our thoughts on publishing tools: we value ease of use, "professional" quality, and flexibility. To be clear, despite critiques of technologies' influence on how interfacing or writing happens, our pedagogies too often fail to interrogate such issues (Haas, 1996; McCorkle, 2012). Yet, digital publishing tools are far removed from the manual tools from which design trades began and reproduce, uncritically, particular logics and assumptions of design[11]. This is to say that as design practices became more dispersed and technologized the availability of the features for critiquing them became increasingly blackboxed. Nevertheless, we've also worked to claim a precedence for modality outside of digital and technological means and in doing so have reoriented toward different materialization of power dynamics.

It is this other history of our field that I find most capable of delivering on a theory of modality. By refusing the myth of "monomodality" and instead historicizing the rise of "multi" in material contexts we arrive at a more generative avenue of thought. For

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[10] I'm using Selfe's (2009) articulation of Lyons' term

[11] The design of publishing software history warrants further exploration. But, briefly, we can trace initial software interface as digitally analogous to the physical material tools. Nevertheless, as generations of designers are trained only on digital interfaces their user experience shapes the next iterations of design software.

instance, John Trimbur and Karen Press (2005?) have suggested that "multimodality" has emerged as a conceptual tool for understanding the changes in communicative practice brought about by, at the very least, technology, as well as globalization and social change. Jody Shipka (2011), too, citing the field's tendency to freeze writing as a noun, echoes the precedence for all communicative practices to be multimodal. Diane George and Trimbur (1999) articulate the risks of overlooking the always-already multimodality of writing:

> Writing itself is a form of visible language and a practice of visual design. Keeping composition and communication separate reproduces the deeply engrained logocentric allegiances to the verbal over the visual by holding the intellectual authority of written text over the presumably derivative and immature character of visual communication… Such a polarization, moreover, abstracts writing from the systems of distribution and exchange through which written texts circulate and acquire precisely the worldly force with which Miller, correctly in our view, is so concerned." (George and Trimbur, 1999, 697)

Occluding the ideologies of print, and what Wysocki and Johnson-Eiola (1999) call the "neutral, context-less" (p. 352) myth of literacy, hides the processes that empower and marginalize particular manifestations of communication and the writers who are authorized and unauthorized to participate in these practices. What is important to consider in rethinking modality for Rhetoric and Composition is not to link modality merely to additional media, although the presence of multiple media might make modality more manifest, but to recognize that modality is engrained with the making of

meaning and that meaning-making is deeply imbricated in various contexts of power dynamics.

Rhetoric and Composition can claim two precedents for examining modality. The most obvious approach is by linking modality to the technologies used to produce "new media" discourse. The most generous reading of this approach is that, in general, because we are concerned with how communication and composition happen, we have an imperative to study the multiple media across which people compose. In this way, we may take such technology inflected studies as an important backdrop to analyzing the contexts of composing. A more critical reading, however, suggests that this approach puts the onus too firmly in the hands of technology and often divorces the development of technology from the practices of people using such technology. Secondly, we claim a precedent for attending to modality through the study of meaning-making more broadly. This means that we view practices of composing as acts of meaning-making. Such practices are certainly prevalent across media but not necessarily always across media. I find the attention to meaning-making most useful in articulating a way forward. Nevertheless, our attention to the visual, auditory, and other modes of articulating and making meaning has not coalesced into theories that accurately capture the social materiality of modality practices and contexts. This is to suggest that we begin with how modality is salient (or perhaps unannounced) in composing activities, as well as recognizing the sociocultural, material, geopolitical, and other factors that influence practices.

Pushing against the norm

Let me be clear, our current research in modality, both close and distant interpretations of Kress, is well suited to identifying some material constraints, primarily access to technology and the cultural capital of text, but, with few exceptions (see, in particular, Arola, 2017; Cedillo, 2017; A. Haas, 2007; C.Haas, 1996; Wysocki, 2005), fails to account for how modality operates, constrains, and exerts power socially as well as the ways in which modality is shaped/constrained materially and socially.

One way in which such awareness of power and ideology currently plays out in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship is the overlap between multimodality and disability scholarship. Melanie Yergeau et al.'s webtext *Multimodality in Motion* pays close attention to the ways multimodality assumes an "inhospitality" through disability scholarship. Yergeau et al., McCorkle (2012), and Dolmage (2012), materialize conceptions of modality through bodily action and ability. In particular, Kerschbaum locates multimodality through senses (e.g. sight or hearing) and McCorkle argues that even the techno-influences that often attempt to naturalize practice through objects is ideologically loaded with assumptions about users. The work happening in intersections between modality and disability is promising as it continues to reexamine the various assumptions about bodies and technology in meaning-making interfaces, but it has yet to largely coalesce into theories about meaning-making across various unmarked encounters. With a similar critique, Kevin Leander and Gail Boldt's (2012) rereading of the NLG's work generatively asks us to begin with the bodies that read and write. Tracing the dress-up and play in manga reading practices, Leander and Boldt observe literacy playing out in physical and affectual dimensions that lead them to "question

limits on understanding human practices as an object of knowledge or a commodity in the system of research and education" (44).

Similarly, Paul Prior's (2005) critique of the binaries of gains and losses *afforded* across modality argues for an alternative framing of modality work that begins by examining the assumptions and dynamics of practices. In this way, Prior asks us to resist uncritically reproducing values in modality and instead to focus on the cultural material practices for how these values become embedded within modes. Wysocki (2005), too, has asked the field to identify and teach the processes through which values go unnoticed and are lurking through everyday practices that we are often complicit in:

> by focusing on the human shaping of material, and on the ties of material to
> human practices, we might be in better positions to ask after the consequences …
> of how we use paper, ink, and pixels to shape – for better or worse – the actions of
> others. (Wysocki, p.59)

The work of these scholars, and others, represents an increasing trend to view modality practices as social material processes. Lucy Johnson (2018) recently has suggested that we might be better able to recognize materiality by focusing on "not only the products we create, but also the process we ask ourselves and our students to enact. Otherwise, to not do so renders the material bodies, aesthetics, and objects that composers engage with invisible". This is what I hope to bring to this project.

Sensory anthropology offers theories of modality two specific benefits. First, sensory anthropology begins with the realization that sensory categories (i.e. what are

often considered channels of modality) are culturally situated. This is to suggest that both the way we conceptualize sensations (e.g. sound as ear-based or body based) and what perceptual categories are available to us are culturally shaped. Secondly, sensory anthropology offers us a history of recognizing how sensory practices are often the site of complex, if generally tacit, regimes of training and enskillment. For instance, Charles Goodwin's (1994) analysis of the use of video in the Rodney King Trial suggests that professional visions are not matter-of-factly and purely physiological but instead are "social situated activity accomplished through the deployment of a range of historically constituted discursive practices" (p. 606). In other words, communicative practices, which are never monomodal, rely, in part, on processes that theories of modality have historically ignored. For these reasons, Sara Pink (2011) argues:

> If ethnography is to become a useful – and by useful I also mean active and *critical* – tool for multimodality scholars, then it has a dual role to play. First, ethnographic research can indeed enable a greater understanding of practices, experiences, and more. Second a sensory ethnography that challenges the pre-set categories of multimodal analysis and breaks down the binaries between image and text can surely also create a self-critical and reflexive strand within multimodal analysis." (274).

It's important for Rhetoric and Composition to follow-up on the processes and assumptions taken for granted in video, audio, textual, and other compositions. It's equally important to intervene in the reproduction of unethical and dangerous values sedimented in the multimodal work we perform ourselves and ask students to do.

An Alternative

What I am claiming here is that theorizing modality as contextual meaning-making practices (e.g. practices of seeing, hearing, etc. or the affective choices of media selection.)[12] offers a richer account of the realities of composing. Of course, such meaning-making is often bound in affectual dimensions that manifest in the selection of media (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Williams, 2017). Additionally, such a perspective pays more attention to the assumptions and constraints of available designs and the possibilities of "unavailable designs" (Wysocki, 2006). Failing to speak toward the socio-material realities significantly limits the scope of our research and, more broadly, our pedagogical pursuits.

I am largely calling for a research agenda of transmodality. Such research should begin with the embodied and material practices of seeing, listening, writing, and more. Historically, ethnographies of sense-making practices (specifically Goodwin; Grasseni; Ingold) have resulted in conceptions of meaning-making as always-already contingent. In this way, I articulate a view of modality that begins with the arrangements of people, materials, and social practices. To be fair, recent work across many fields has begun to make similar moves (see for instance, *Applied Linguistics* v.39 i.1). Canagarajah (2018), in particular argues for an embodied & emplaced trans/perspective on language use. Furthermore, transmodality should serve as a rebuff to the normalization of

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[12] The line between production and consumption of modality is fine. Practices of seeing, for instance, would seemingly be located in consumption. Yet, composers certainly draw from the assumed practices and their past practices in order to produce in modality.

Single/Standard Language and Modality (SL/MN) ideologies (Horner, Selfe, Lockridge, 2015).

A theory of transmodality offers, at least, two benefits over multimodality. First, the move from "multi" to "trans" calls into question the naturalization of separate and identifiable modes. Importantly, this suggests that modes are the outcome of social-material practice and that the semiotic power ascribed to these modes is imbricated within social-material dimensions. This is what Li Wei (2018) describes as a way of moving beyond and transcending named communicative systems. Secondly, framing modality as "trans" suggests movement across sense-making capabilities (e.g. practices of hearing music involve more than ears, practices of painting involves more than eyes, etc.). In this way, "trans" recognizes the orchestration and transduction into perception involves the entirety of the body and, perhaps, more[13].

Two theoretical orientations inform the approach I'll take to modality practices in this project. First, I will approach modality through perceptual and sensory anthropological theories. Sensory anthropology, and the related sensory ethnography, offer an approach and provide a language for interrogating activities such as viewing, seeing, hearing, etc. as cultural material practices. More specifically, these two sensory approaches resist the naturalization of discrete perceptual categories in favor of sensoriality as interconnected and enactive. To be clear, beginning with interconnectivity and enaction turns the common-sense approach of sensation on its head by suggesting that what are identified as culturally relevant and separate senses are merely the ways in

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[13] Research in enaction and perception suggest that standard approaches to "sense-making" fall short in describing perception as it happens in the world due to an inherited binary bias of mind/body separation (Di Paolo, Cuffari, De Jaegher, 2018).

which we describe whatever experience was had. This is to suggest that sense categories are about as natural as any given language. Furthermore, these discursive tools then shape our interpretation of sensory experience (e.g. talking about images only in the domain of vision/eyes). Additionally, sensory anthropology is well equipped for examining various training of senses: for instance, the ways doctors learn to listen through stethoscopes (Rice, 2010), the skill of seeing cattle for breeding selection (Grasseni, 2007), or "seeing like a rover" on the surface of Mars (Vertesi, 2015). Each of these examples begins by recognizing situated-actions as the production of knowledge or sense-making that are both socially and materially situated and continuous (Pink, 2009).

Secondly, I will use translingualism and translanguaging theories of language as posing an alternative method of conceptualizing modality. The "trans-" prefix for language practice is particularly helpful for illustrating language use as always ad hoc and involving more directly the fluid interactions of agents in meaning-making rather than particular namable language and language structures (Hawkins & Mori, 2018). In other words, these conceptions of language practices suggest that practices are enactive and interconnected to sociohistorical, technological, and geographical contexts.

the historical counterpoint of a modern popular newspaper, in its informing function, is

not an earlier minority newspaper, but that complex of rumor and travelers' tales which

then served the majority with news of a kind. (Williams, p.309)

The idea of the masses, and the technique of observing certain aspects of mass behavior

… formed the natural ideology of those who sought to control the new systems and to

profit by it … we reject this kind of exploitation, we shall reject its ideology, and seek a

new definition of communication. (Williams, p.312)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the history of multimodality scholarship and argued

for theorizing the inherent fluidity of modes. This is to say that what are recognized (and

legitimized) as singular modes in specific contexts are the result of interactions and

(intra)actions between cultural, technological, and sensorial [14] regimes and the people

who practice with and within such constraints. Nevertheless, such regimes are not

deterministic – it is, after all, the operations of individuals that turn the wheel of history.

This isn't to suggest that modes are radically relative and somehow immune to

explanatory and analytical lenses. Instead, exploring modes as social systems that are

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[14] This list isn't definitive and, of course, one could attempt to add granularity here. Additionally, these categories are not closed or entirely distinct and, instead, can be said to act upon each other. Nevertheless, they enact possibly the largest constraints on modality action. In short, these are the cultural/social expectations, the limits of human bodily perception, and expressive manners of technology.

reproduced through a "constituting process, accomplished by, and consisting in, the doings of active subjects" broadens the role of researchers and theorists (Giddens, 1976, p.128).

To be fair, few scholars would deny that modes are fluid to at least some degree. Indeed, some form of fluidity has been the rallying cry behind the social semiotic account of modality. Yet, the social semiotic approach often uses or invokes large-scale lurches of radical change to make observations of mode fluidity. For instance, the invention of the printing press, with its streamlined alphanumeric reproduction as opposed to the labor intensive reproduction of images, is cited as initiating the radical move from "image culture to the word culture of western modernity" (Cope & Kalanizis, 2004, p. 206). Although at first glance this account has explanatory power, it glosses over the importance of social practice: for instance, the role of religious dissemination, a motivation toward profit and efficiency, and the exertion of fledgling nation-state identity that cannot be ignored in their contributions to the use of the printing press and the subsequent changes to mode expectations and legitimization. This account conflates words with print – certainly no one would say that a pre-printing world was devoid of a culture of words and simultaneously ignores cultural developments in other media[15]. In other words, although points of any remarkable shift of modes might be recognized in technological developments, the technology itself is an inadequate explanation of fluidity.

Inadequate, too, is any strong sense of cultural determination. Raymond William's critique of homogenized mass culture is useful here. Stabilizing groups of

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[15] The printing press didn't prevent people from listening to music, viewing images, watching performances – or any folk versions of such. The printing press was undeniably important but this might also be attributed to institutional and organizational means that already preferred print for a plethora of reasons.

people into some form of cultural replicants that merely re-act culture, as inherited, implies culture as inert tradition rather than a lived "whole way of life". Although academics can observer various symbolic productions that seemingly replicate cultural traditions and expectations, such observations rely on isolating these productions as inert objects rather than seeing them as the results of everyday practice. This is to say, for a cultural deterministic approach to have any analytic teeth requires that a researcher adopt a mythological understanding of culture that is simultaneously independent of historical material practices yet capable of steering activity toward a specific end. This project attempts to circumvent such technological and cultural determinism by approaching modality as emergent.

A more promising orientation toward modality is one that recognizes modes as always emergent from practices and an inherent characteristic of any and all people doing communication. By beginning with the actual doing of modality practices researchers can start to "close the gap" between "language and culture, text and context" that is present in traditional ethnographic architecture, allowing for an ethnography as deep theorizing (Lillis, 2008). This chapter lays out an approach to how we can study modality practices while simultaneously recognizing that fluidity is an always present condition rather than an oddity.

Gestures toward a fluid account of modality have been called transmodal, and I will continue to use that term here (Horner, Selfe, & Lockridge, 2015; Shipka, 2016; Artz, Hashem, & Mooney, 2017). Adopting a transmodal paradigm enriches our scholarship in ways similar to what Wei (2017) claims for translanguaging's enrichment to linguistic study which, in brief, is through the *transcendence* of singularly defined

modality systems, the *transformation* of modality by individuals and the world, and an engagement with *transdisciplinary* approaches. Additionally, a transmodal approach shields itself from cultural and technological determinism by recognizing that what appears new today (e.g. the rural newspapers that Raymond Williams cites) is part of a larger system of practices. It's just as important to recognize that such a system of practices is not homologous to a mass culture. Instead, as Williams (1958) observed earlier, "there are no masses, only ways of seeing people as masses" (p. 289). Finally, the transmodal approach I am calling for in this project shields itself from sensorial determination (i.e. that the limits of our world are the limits of our perceptual capabilities) by adopting an enactive approach to perception that, to be brief, recognizes that perception is mediated by bodily practices.

Enaction should not be conflated with an approach that is merely sensory. Nevertheless, enaction usefully redresses the lack of approaches to embodied multimodality. Historically, the composer's body in multimodality has suffered limited treatment. General approaches to multimodality imagine composers that create by gesturing toward antecedent genres and/or adapting to the ostensible affordances of specific media. Overlooked in many of these accounts are the affective relationships with multimedia and the habituated or skilled practices of watching, hearing, making, etc. Although such practices may very well be genre specific, the individual manifestations are uniquely personal and offer different insights into the relationships between contexts and texts. In the following section I describe theories of enaction in order to contextualize the importance of embodied knowing and doing.

Enaction

To put it simply, enaction is knowing by doing. To be clear, I use "knowing" broadly to point toward the relationship between skillful bodily activity and knowledge/sense-making. Knowing is not merely "knowing how" but also "knowing is"[16]. In other words, when I use "knowing" I mean both knowing skills, such as how to drink a cup of coffee (i.e. sensorimotor skills of grasping, expectation to use the mug's handle), and knowing through perception (i.e. this coffee is bitter, the mug phthalo blue, and the cup has a volume). There are scores of examples to draw from to illustrate how our bodily actions shape perceptual capabilities. I will give two examples. The first example illustrates the historical contingencies of bodily perception (i.e. how our environment shapes how we perceive) and the second example illustrates the immediate contingencies of bodily perceptions (i.e. how our perceptual capabilities rely on activity).

The first example is the Muller-Lyer illusion. This illusion is where two equal length lines, one with inward and one with outward facing arrows, appear to be different
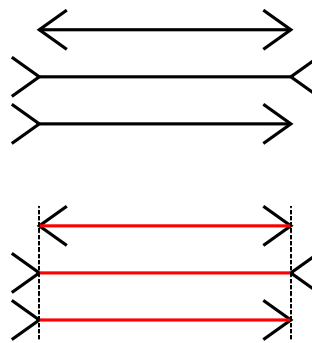
Figure 1: Mueller-Lyer illusion

lengths (see figure 1). People who view this image estimate various degrees of difference between the lines, the largest estimated length in American and European participants.

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[16] This is not to be confused with "knowing-that" or propositional knowledge from logic.

Cross-cultural psychology theorizes that this illusion is strongest for participants who have grown accustomed to the hard corners of Western and Industrialized built-environments. The illusion, however, does not manifest in south-central foraging populations where such built-environments are rare (Segall et al. 1966; Henrich 2008; Henrich et al. 2010a). In other words, bodies form expectations or habits-of-mind based on their interaction with the world around them.

The second example is of experiential blindness. Alva Noe (2004) writes about the famous Erismann and Kohler inversion and distortion spectacles. In experiments with spectacles that invert eyesight (i.e. left eye and right eye displacing or up-down displacing) subjects are experientially blind. As they move, or objects around them move, they become disoriented. There is seemingly no logic in the upside-down – roads bend out of sight, objects jump from one place to another, and movement is difficult. It is, as Noe suggests not "*seeing differently,* but failing to see" (p.8). This disorientation slowly begins to cease as the experience of perception begins to correct itself through bodily adaption. This is to say that a practical knowledge of the new stimulation is developed. In this way, even though a ball coming from the left will appear to be coming from your right while wearing distortion spectacles – you would turn toward the left to see it. Other senses eventually keep up. For instance, watching a sound-producing phenomenon (e.g. snapping fingers) on the left would no longer cause distortion. In other words, at least some perceptual capabilities are dependent on our body's activities in space.

What I hope to make clear through these two examples is that perceiving is not merely a thing that happens to us. Perceiving is a bodily skill that is, at times, tacitly trained by our surroundings while simultaneously a result of our own proclivities and

actions. One skill of perception that is clearly documented is what Christina Grassini

(2009) calls "practices of vision". Framing vision as a situated practice, she says, "is a

deliberate theoretical move, which allows … a more encompassing analysis, regarding

the roles of *local contexts* and *community* in constituting knowledge" (p.9). Several case

studies demonstrate the various particularities of communities of practice's skilled

visions (Goodwin, 1994; Fountain, 2014). Professions have ways of seeing that at times

involve routine movements, connections with past experience, and artificial (or machine

assisted) perception; additionally, such perceptual capabilities are often linked with

situational enactments. For instance, learning how to hear through a stethoscope includes

not only the ability to contextualize the polyphony of bodily sounds or identify and

diagnose sonically but also the embodied experience of listening through a stethoscope.

The importance of bodily experience has resulted in stethoscope practices that involve

listening to low volume records with stethoscope in ear (Harris & Van Drie, 2015).

I should stress here that despite the similarities between enaction and situated

and/or embodied cognition (Lave, 1988; Suchman, 1987), enaction is a theoretical

extension in that it rejects internal representations or simulations as explanatory (Di

Paolo, Cuffari, De Jaegher, 2018). To be clear, this is a material-based conception of

knowledge, "not as static or given, but as a capability produced and reproduced in

recurrent social practices" (Orlikowski, 2006). The rejection of internal representations is

primarily important to fields of study far removed from Rhetoric and Composition;

however, there are implications worth mentioning for this project. The move away from

internal representations implies that doing is not the translation of internal and abstracted

knowledge into action but that knowledge is, in and of itself, a thing we do – a labor of

our bodies. Expanding from this, if categories of knowledge that are meaningful to our field (e.g. languaging practices) are manifest as action, then studies that look to expand those categories of knowledge ought to examine such actions. Furthermore, a hands-off observation of practices relies on the gaze of the researcher to abstract from participant actions. This is to say, asking a participant to describe the way they use a particular medium is several steps removed as opposed to observing or, better yet, participating in their use of media. For this reason, I identify the methods of this project as enactive ethnography.

Enactive Ethnography

Enactive ethnography is an approach to participant observation that relies on the participation of the researcher in the practices under observation. This is what Loïic Wacquant (2011) calls "observant participation". Wacquant (2014) describes enactive ethnography as an extension of using Bourdieu's *habitus* as an "object and means of investigation" (p.119). As much as possible, the researcher of enactive ethnography is encouraged to adopt the *habitus* of practitioners by acting alongside as an apprentice to their skill. The implications of an enactive ethnography are that it:

> enables us to swim in the stream of action and filter out its composition, rather than scope it from the bank. It propels us to traverse the multiple layers that mesh into the fabric of the everyday lifeworld – the forte of phenomenology as instigated by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty – and to net the carnality of action that ordinary social science … steadfastly erases from its accounts. (Waquant, 2014, 123)

In other words, rather than implying that cultural dispositions, traditions, and habitus are autonomous things that happen to people, an enactive ethnography begins with the everyday lived aspects of a life. The takeaway here is akin to Williams' Marxist view of culture that the observation of material practices, as opposed to symbolic artifacts, can more readily grasp the processes of cultural accretion. Reflecting on his time spent in a boxing club, Wacquant suggests that this approach "relies on the most intimate experience, that of the desiring and suffering body, to grasp in vivo the collective manufacturing of the schemata of pugilistic perception, appreciation, and action that are shared, to varying degrees, by all boxers, whatever their origins, their trajectory, and their standing in the sporting hierarchy" (2011, p. 88).

Although enactive ethnography, at first glance, might bear a resemblance to various forms of auto/self-ethnography, it is important to differentiate between the two. Autoethnography has taken many definitions. David Hayano (1979) used the term as denoting the anthropology of the anthropologist's own people. To put this differently, it is thick description of a locale written by a local. Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) definition pushes it further as a sort of response. She defines autoethnographic texts as self-descriptions of a group that are engaging with representations others have made of them. Finally, Deborah Reed-Danahay's (1997) definition focuses on autoethnography as the narrative of self. In each of these variations of autoethnography the purported expertise of the researcher's self is used as the primary tool. These autoethnographies rely on the already habituated and situated self in context in order to analyze behavior. Enactive ethnography flips this relationship around. Enactive ethnography relies on the habituating and situating effects of situated practices in order to analyze the processes of forming a

fledgling habitus. Both enactive ethnography and variations of autoethnography rely on the researcher as observer but differ in the subject of their observation. The traditional autoethnographic approach analyzes behavior and activity with an implied sincerity based off the prerequisite already-habituated self-subject. In an enactive ethnographic approach, the practices themselves are important points of observation but the analysis is beyond the instantiation of practice and, instead, focused toward how the agent changes activity and is, in turn, changed by the activity.

Wacquant's enactive articulation of Bourdieu is an ethnography of the processes of habituation. In other words, through participation or, more aptly, apprenticeship participation on the part of the researcher, we can come to better understand the underlying assumptions, traditions, and norms that inform the lived practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 2014; 2015; 2018). In other words, ethnographers should not only watch to know but also *do* in order to know. Such doing and knowing should not be limited toward the specific research goals or generalizable aims of the ethnographer but should, as accurately as possible, enable the researcher to share the *emic* of the participant. Just as important, the enactive ethnographer orients not only towards the ways they are changed in this participation but also how their participation shapes and changes the activity beyond a singular instance. This is to say that a general openness is needed in participation. For example, if an ethnographer wants to better understand the practices of doing laundry it would not be enough to merely observe the movement of dirty laundry to machine. Instead we would need to touch the stains, smell for freshness, and share in the stories for what the greater role of laundering means (Laundrylives.com). And, of course, the activity of laundry is changed in this process – not only performed in

a new time and at a new space but also categories of "freshness" and "heavily soiled" are reconstituted, not to mention the wear on the machines and the fabrics themselves.

While the enactive ethnographic approach certainly has lofty ideals, such a radical openness to practices is difficult to follow and presents many moving loose ends for a researcher, and undeniably, the ethnographer's body has always been present in studies. Through an enactive account of ethnography the researcher comes to accept such challenges and present loose ends not only as future potentials. Additionally, enactive ethnography requires that researcher reflects on their enacted and bodily presence in research to uses the body in action as a legitimate fount of knowledge despite cultural and institutional shortcomings. Wacquant describes this approach as a rethinking of how knowledge is acquired and used:

> The social sciences work with an excessively cerebral and passive notion of knowledge. We grant the dignity of knowledge to propositional information carried by language and located in the mind. We overlook procedural or practical knowledge acquired and manifested in concrete deeds (pragmaticos in ancient Greek means active, adroit in affairs or public business). We must eschew this top-down conception to overcome what Elizabeth Anscombe (1957) rightly diagnosed as the incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge (Adloff and Wacquant, 2015)

Yet, it is not enough to merely enter the fray of everyday activity unprepared. There is a certain presumptuous quality to the researcher that shows up believing in their own capabilities to observe and reflect without at least some prerequisite knowledge. Because this project is an examination of transmodality which inherently draws upon the interplay

between perception, culture, and technology a necessary rejoinder to enactive ethnography is an understanding of sensuous culture: theorizing and observing *from*[17] the senses. This approach parallels Sarah Pink's (2015) that the body is always present in ethnography, but so too are the cultural and institutional assumptions on what bodily experiences are meaningful. Such tensions are useful to engage with but historically ignored in traditional approaches to ethnography. This is why Pink and others are often at pains to repeat: it is not an anthropology or ethnography of the senses but a sensory anthropology or ethnography.

Doing Ethnography

In practice, an enactive ethnography can look like a traditional ethnographic approach. In one part of this project, I shared a media lab space with self-described designers, activists, students, teachers, learners, and more. I worked with media lab staff who called themselves coaches and trainers. I watched the various forms of writing and designing they practiced (e.g. activist posters, oral history podcasts, photoshop tutorials, short film expositions) and I also participated in their modes of designing. It is during my own observant participation that I began to appreciate the various fledgling "ways of being" that designing and writing called upon.

Study Specifics

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[17] It is useful to notice the prepositional change that "from" rather than "of" the senses enables. Specifically, this is parallel to Wacquant's point about habitus being a tool of observation and object of observation – that senses are both a tool and object of ethnography.

This study was primarily conducted in a multimedia lab located in the main undergrad library at a midsized urban university in the southern Midwest US. Over the course of 4 months I observed approximately 100 hours of lab time. In addition to these observations, my participation continued while I embedded myself in the creation of six projects, videotaping the collaborative and individual work conducted while adopting an apprentice disposition. Finally, I conducted three post-hoc semi-structured interviews.

Participation

I introduced myself to the director of an on campus digital media lab and asked to meet the staff and hold observation hours in the lab. I held approximately 100 hours of open observation in the lab that included: special sections of undergraduate and graduate courses[18], open "drop-in" studio hours, and student group organizational meetings. This lab was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the lab is centrally located in the library commons – it is frequented by students often although, by design, is tied to engagement with teachers through a university sponsored "excellence in teaching" center. This is to suggest that the lab served as an important nexus in the culture of digital writing on campus. Secondly, the importance of the lab's technology cannot be understated. The lab had access to the entire range of Adobe products, powerful Mac computers, and professional sound and video equipment. The access to powerful contemporary tools attracted people who were specifically interested in the creation of digital mixed media projects. In other words, for many of the people in the lab, this wasn't their first time making digital things. This, I had assumed (wrongly) would mean that technological

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[18] Courses observed included Composition, Oral History, and Professional Communication.

know-how would largely prevent technology from "getting in the way". A full narrative of the lab is further discussed in the next chapter.

Initially, I began by my participation by asking to sit in and watch design practices. Because I had built a rapport with the staff, my earliest participants ending up being their friends, peers, or themselves. In these sessions my participation began in the form of asking questions (e.g. can you tell me what you're doing here?; why are you doing this?; etc.) while they worked. This questioning while doing follows Leander and Prior's (2004) practices of observing interaction in situated practices. As they continued to work I tended to increase the curiosity and took a more active role in their participation by asking for instructions. For instance, when isolating a subject in Photoshop I might ask: "what does that tool do?", "why didn't you use this tool", or "can you show me how you did that again?". Additionally, I would ask to recreate their work. For example, I would ask if they could save their work and let me try to cutout the subject. While doing this I would ask for specific instructions and feedback. Adopting an apprentice disposition served to decenter whatever expertise they might think I have. Additionally, it allowed me suffer with and through the practices for observing and understanding the tacit process knowledge and techniques of the participant.

Much of the work, however, was done in singular drafts. This constrained my full enaction of designing with. For this reason, I began to focus more on frequent visitors of the space and embedded myself in various group projects and activist organizations. By doing this I was able to more easily become a participant. I was able to share in the communal goals of the group which, in turn, drove much of the action. Additionally, I was able to flounder in bad drafts and poorly collected source materials.

Activity & Analysis

What does becoming an oral historian entail? How does the social activist see poster design differently? And what implications will this have for teaching broad concepts of modality in general writing courses?

Because discourse and the creation of media are instantiations of social practice that cannot be abstracted from local context, the situated activities of composing and designing are the primary place of analysis for this project. It is important to note here that this study is not attempting to categorize or legitimize any particular forms of practice and call it a day. For instance, I am not creating a study that says: here is what social activists do when designing. To do so is merely additive to the concept of autonomous practices and literacies (Street, 2006; Horner, 2013). Instead, this study draws from activity to observe that seemingly ephemeral sense of enculturation, habituation, and disposition – or, what has been called habitus.

Activity can simultaneously be fleeting and perpetual. To usefully bracket activity for analysis in this study I deploy Cultural Historical Activity Theory or CHAT (Vygotsky, Wolffe, Engstrom, Prior & Shipka). Engstrom's second-generation of CHAT (see figure 2) in which rules, community, and division of labor; subject and object; and instruments all interact across production, consumption, exchange, and distribution in order to arrive at an outcome is particularly well suited for analyzing the enactive technical know-how of becoming a media composer.
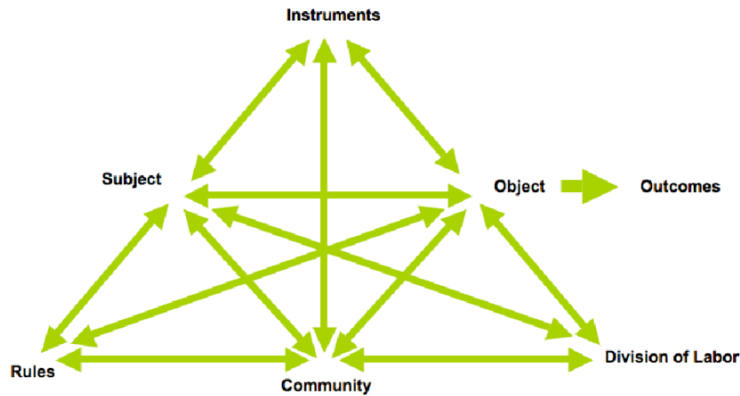
Figure 2 Engstrom's CHAT

The interactions across CHAT categories are a useful place to begin teasing out practices, but they aren't entirely set. For example, I observed Kate, a journalism student enrolled in a publications and design class, working on an assignment involving the combination of two pictures. Kate used Photoshop's selection, cut, and transform tools in order to isolate a subject from a picture she had taken on her iPhone and place it into another picture she found online. While discussing and experimenting in her designing, we played around with multiple color and light correction tools in order to make the combined image "look natural". Putting this into CHAT renders this activity like this:
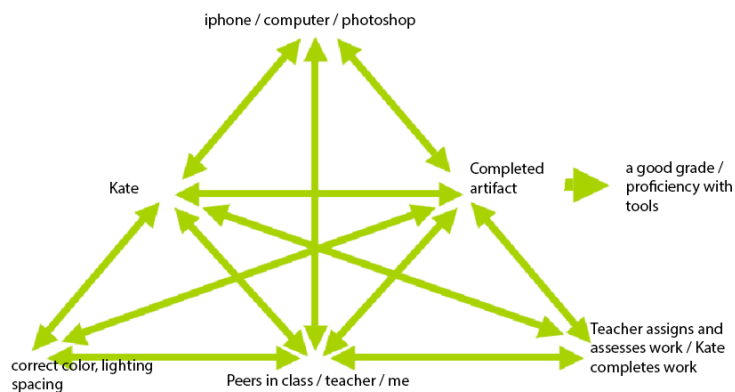
Figure 1 KT's Photoshop

But this doesn't capture the degree to which each of these categories were blurred in practice. In order to accommodate CHAT to an enactive framework I adopt a flattened

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ontology of becoming most recently articulated as flat CHAT (Prior, 2008; Smith & Prior, 2019). This orientation to CHAT conceptualizes activity as conducted "*across* semiotic resources; *across* time, space, and settings; and *across* people and things" (Smith & Prior, 2019, np [forthcoming in *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*]). My inflection of flat CHAT recognizes that activity happens across many boundaries but that such boundaries are illusory and tentative. A visual representation might look something like:
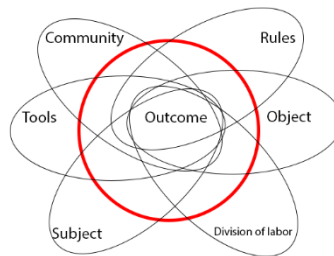
Figure 4 Flat CHAT example

Here, a red circle gives a rough (and tentative) boundary of where and when an activity happens. The traditional CHAT categories are not wholly contained in this activity and overlap before, during, and, importantly, after an outcome. It's important to show these overlaps beyond the outcome because the inevitable outcome of activities always reshapes and lays foundations for future activities. The general location of the outer categories is irrelevant as long as all are overlapping. I purposefully separated subject from rules in this example because in Kate's case – rules came to be a point of disagreement in the traditional CHAT approach. For instance, the rules of Kate's activity relied on her trained eye to identify "correct color" or "appropriate lighting" but also

relied on her ability to read the photoshop color curves[19] in a similar way to her teacher. This "reading the curves" resulted in a disagreement between her eyes on the image and her eyes on the chart (i.e. "this one looks more natural, but the curves don't match as well"). This is also why a flat CHAT doesn't route the outcome immediately through the object. In Kate's case, the outcome was, among other things, learning to "read the curves" but the resulting object looked "less natural" and less completed. In the end, the rules of Kate's image involved the algorithmic machine, a version of "reading the curves", and a personal sense of discerning "natural looking". In a subsequent chapter I discuss a potential reason why Kate chose to keep the "less natural" image.

Politics and Theory building

To some degree, research and theory building in the humanities is a political process. I do not intend to shy away from that. Qualitative research, at the broadest level, has always examined "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, [and] what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). Additionally, ethnography as a tool has always been turned toward "the norms that are constructed for ways of perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting within a social group" (Green & Bloome, 2004, p.186). These are all unavoidably political.

An enactive ethnographic method is a response to the direct erasure of bodies in knowledge making. In this sense, I echo bell hooks (year) in recognizing that "erasure of the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information" (p. 139). This approach takes seriously the charge that knowing is a labor of bodies. It is to suggest that merely

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[19] Color curves is a visual editing tool in photoshop that graphs visual information (e.g. Lumosity, hue, etc.) for reference and quick editing across the entire photo.

categorizing knowledge making and lived realities is not enough but, instead, there is a

need to focus on the processes through which these two constitute each other. Such

distinctions are important to the study of transmodality. As hooks observers, erasing the

body as a fount of knowledge results in that gap between theory and practice. Such

erasure results in the legitimization of the neutrality of theories and dispositions – a

seemingly always untrue proposal. The durable and efficient nature of the printing press

itself didn't hurl western civilization into a "culture of print" – it was in conjunction with

the already present motivation to profit, the organization of human labor, and the

powerful arm of religious imperialism.

In the next chapter I analyze the practices and observations of becoming a writer

for a labor activist zine, a designer for climate change protests, a student of photoshop,

and more in order to begin unpacking a theory of transmodality that begins with the

situated person.

CHAPTER III

TROUBLING AND INTERFACING: TRANSMODAL POSSIBILITIES IN THE

DIGITAL MEDIA STUDIO

Introduction

I organize my observations in the digital media studio along three separate focal points:

1) technology & space, 2) practices & activity, 3) identity formation. The purpose of this

chapter is to contextualize and analyze the first of these focal points, technology & space.

The distinctions I make in selecting these focal points serve analytical purpose rather than

reflection of ontological status. In other words, technology and space are not separately

"real" from practices – which are not separate from identities. Although the composing

activity takes place within the overlaps of these points, each focal point offers separate

but related analyses. I begin with technology and space because our narratives of digital

multimodal composing are often directed through technologies and because, in the

context of this research, the technologies and space arrangements pre-date the designers

who use the lab.

In this chapter, I conduct two separate analyses of the technologies and spaces of

the multimedia studio at a large research university. The first analysis serves to illustrate

the idea of a multimedia studio. Based on observations and discussions with staff and the

director and using a CHAT approach, this analysis centers on the hypothetical and often

invoked designer coming to the studio in order to use technologies to compose

multimedia projects. My analysis shows that the interactions made possible in the lab are

designed toward the possibility of creating professional digital media. The second

analysis centers on the technologies and the arrangements and relations made within the space, a library commons area in a major research university. Based on observations with designers and using a post-humanist flat CHAT approach, this analysis orients toward how tools act as legitimizations of studio practices and arrangements. Following this second analysis, I bring both together to demonstrate that operating underneath our contemporary understandings of a multimedia studio are the politics of legitimization. In other words, how we have come to understand and organize this space is based less around new potentials for modality practices in the contexts of student or teacher and more around industry standards for corporate and professional design – the nexus through which studio practices are legitimized.

Finally, in my critique of legitimization I offer an alternative of modality retrofitting. The idea of modality retrofitting serves to realize the potentials, especially that of redesigning social futures, of multimodality gestured toward in the New London Group's (1996) groundbreaking article and the Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2000) edited collection, while simultaneously pointing out the shortcomings of existing infrastructures and approaches to modality. Retrofitting can serve as an organizational and theoretical stopgap toward a more fully realized orientation toward transmodality that is articulated in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

About the Studio

The studio itself is located on the first floor of a student commons wing of a university library. This library wing contains meeting rooms, common space, a writing center, and the digital media studio of this study. The studio is open to faculty and students on a drop-in basis. Although there are times when the studio is booked for class sessions and

special events, the studio remains, for the most part, accessible throughout the workday. The studio is arranged across three adjacent rooms, with multiple ancillary rooms (one for the director's office and three as "one button studios"). The three core rooms are directly attached – the main room serves as a foyer and general lab space. In the lab space there are 6 "pods" of Mac computers, a table in the center of the room, a check-in desk and computer, and a wireless smart tv on the back wall. A second room, toward the entrance and off from the main room is a podcasting studio with a mac computer and hanging boom microphones. Finally, a third room serves as a greenscreen studio – with camera, monitor, lights, teleprompter, and a greenscreen.[20]

Although students or faculty can come and go as they please, they are directed to sign in (digitally) as they enter. This digital sign-in affords the director quantitative metrics for analyzing technology use and better predicting up-time and down-time. After sign-in, designers are left mostly to their own devices. They are informed to let one of the staff know if they need assistance with the technology, but no singular staff member is assigned to each pod or platform. The director informed me of what might be called "lore" or his own understanding on how to predict if a designer will need assistance or not. Generally, he said, the closer they sit to the check-in desk the more likely they are to need some form of assistance. The arrangement of the space, in this way, offered some heuristic for staff in anticipating how to assist designers – although I could not confirm these practices in observation.

The arrangement of the studio space also suggests collaboration – pods of macs are lined against the wall with screens that face toward the center of the room. The

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[20] For what it's worth, the screen is actually white. This is a bit misleading but it should be pointed out that "greenscreen" indexes a particular media practice that is afforded by any single color screen.

wireless smart tv allows for people at computers or at the center table to collaborate as one computer designs and redesigns in real-time while projecting to the main screen. Nevertheless, during my observations I did not see collaboration occurring in this way. Instead, the main table often served as a meeting space and occasional lunch space for a revolving group of student activists.

The Adobe Suite

Each computer is equipped with the latest Adobe suite platforms. Adobe is used because it represents the powerful and professional equipment of contemporary multimedia composing. Although iMovie is available on the Mac computers, the unofficial policy of the media studio is to put people into Adobe because of the supposed strength of the software. The studio is focused on digital media and the Adobe platforms, although powerful, do not encapsulate the entirety of what can be created on powerful computers. For instance, 3-d rendering and designing is limited through the Adobe software. Complex animation, development of digital applications and software, and usability tools are not considered part of the digital media studio's repertoire. Instead, as assumed by the technological affordances of the space – the studio conceptualizes digital media as: mostly static artifacts organized around the use of image, sound, digital "space", and text – rather than interactive or more fluid artifacts.

<div align="center">

The Idea of a Digital Media Studio

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The following analysis is based on my conversations with the workers of the studio and my observations of the space. Here, I recreate the often-invoked hypothetical student coming to the lab. Following discussions with staff and my own walking-with experiences of using the studio space, I peel back the layers of activity presupposed in the

arrangement of the studio. Finally, I demonstrate how the construction of the studio itself reflects a contemporary understanding of what a digital media studio is and, especially, how a digital media studio offers an ethos of replication in a mono/multi-modal sense.

CHAT Analysis

The graphic below is a CHAT representation of the activity of the invoked designer. In the following subsections I describe each CHAT node in more detail. I stick to a traditional and hierarchical representation of CHAT in this section because the understanding of the media studio presumes the rigidness of these structures.

Actor: The student designer

In the invoked use of the media space – a student walks into the lab and signs up to use a specific pod. The students using the lab have varying degrees of experience with the digital tools of the lab. At the sign-in desk they are prompted to sign-in for a particular computer. The computers are nearly identical – the most significant differences are that they are located in different proximity to the sign-in desk and they each have individual names (their names are based on super heroes). The student designer makes their way to their desk and begins to work. Perhaps they have files on a thumb drive – but more often than not, they have already emailed themselves the work they're completing or they're starting fresh with only an assignment sheet or a vague idea of what they want to complete.

Rules: Accessing technology

The lab has its own set of rules for accessing. For starters, the studio is open only to students and other "citizens" of the University. I use the phrase citizen here because a university ID is not enough – in order to sign-in the designer needs to have a fully

realized and in good standing university account that logs into the sign-in page. There are ways that this rule can be circumvented by circumventing the sign-in. Additionally, designers need to be signed-in for a specific computer or for specific technologies. A person cannot sign-in for multiple stations – once they've picked their computer station that is where they stay until they're ready to sign out. The computers themselves are already on and require no log-in – they give the illusion of openness but each person is essentially checked at the door. The hours are generous (students can, with a few exceptions, spend the entire working day in the lab) and extend into regular evening hours. Technologies, of course, impose a different set of rules. For instance, Adobe is a subscription service, so the studio pays the fee for access. Of course, this means that without an at-home subscription any work done behind the Adobe paywall can only be done in the lab. Perhaps as a small complication to this, designer work can't be saved on the computers, so email or personal drives are required. As the space is filled with expensive equipment, the official policy of the studio is that no food or drink are allowed at the computer stations.
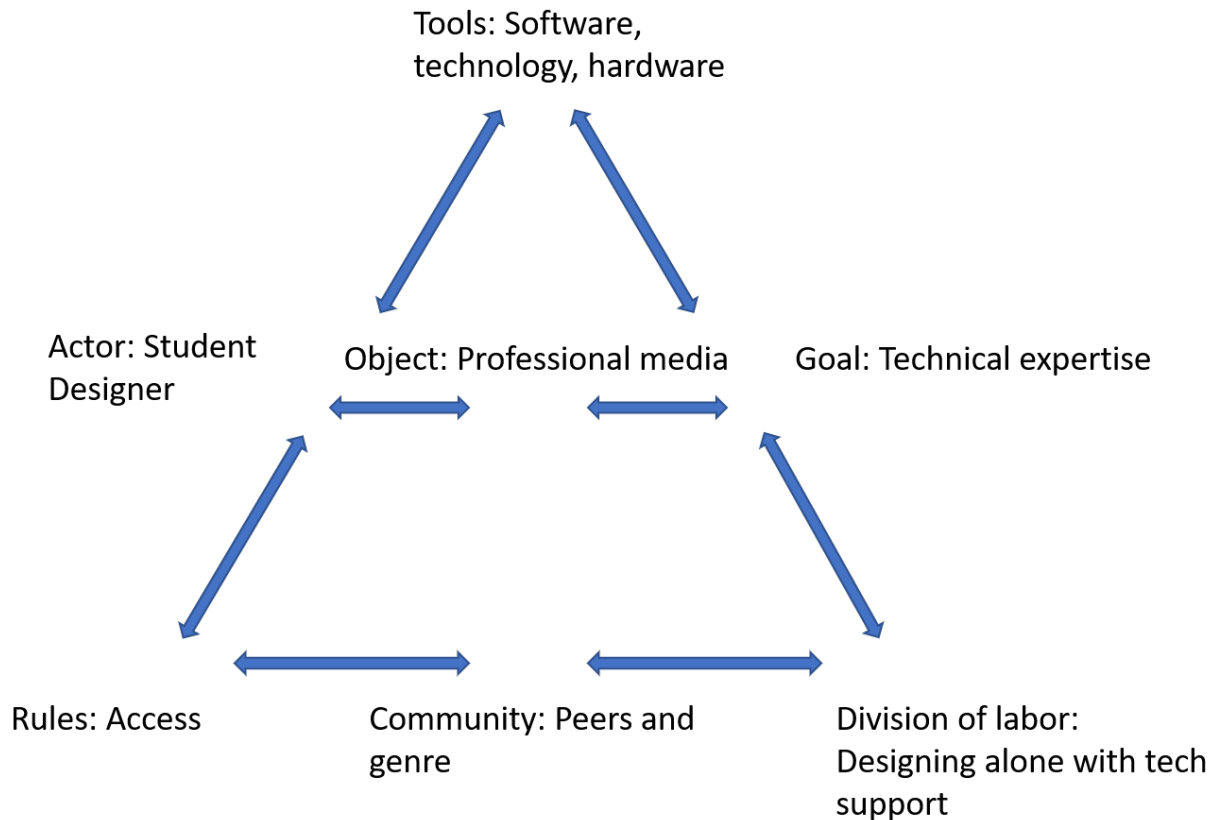
Figure 5 Digital media studio CHAT

Tools: Lights, camera, action

Technology abounds in the digital media studio. Cameras, microphones, powerful computers, and subscriptions to professional software are all free to use for university affiliated personnel. Many of the "capture technologies" (i.e. technologies that record sound or image) are available for checkout – thus, enabling the designer to conduct offsite recording. However, little guidance exists for these technologies. Additionally, the majority of the activity in the media studio is based around the editing and digital creation of media on the powerful computers - which lack mobility for offsite use.

Community: Peers and genre

The invoked designer brings their own community with them. Sometimes this community is invoked through having an assignment to work on. This assignment isn't necessarily based in class (film or graphic design competitions are common) but generally is initially understood through "the people who will participate in the reception of my project". Additionally, tutorials and online design inspiration are available communities for designers and, theoretically, every designer has consumed the media they're replicating and have based their own vision off these. Of course, the studio has tutors to help create the project too. Although there is no official policy for how tutors offer support they can point toward similar projects.

Division of labor: Designing alone

The designers are responsible for their own work, and this work is primarily done on the computers in the main studio space. This is not to say that work doesn't happen outside of the studio. The digital artifacts that make up the film, images, and sound work that is composed in the studio are often generated away from the space. In any case, most instances of design are imagined to revolve around the singular designer. Nevertheless, the studio is always staffed with more than one person available to help; however, the primary role of the staff is to ease the technological issue - to help the student realize their "vision" for a project, at least in the idealized sense. The staff are not there to help designers realize new avenues for expression and instead are framed as having the technical competency to ease designing work – which is assumed to be technical. Oftentimes, this means that tutors help with the more technical aspects (e.g. exporting the media or importing digital artifacts) although in some cases a tutor might act as interface

for the designer (e.g. a designer narrates what they want done as the tutor creates it in real-time).

Object: Professional media

Professional media are the primary objects that this activity triangle moves toward. These are podcasts, videos, infographics, posters, and more. In this idea of a studio, the media are high quality and legible to current cultural norms. For instance, the green screen room is set up complete with lights and a bright white background not because it makes replicating the addition of a inserted background possible (think of a weatherperson talking over a map), but because it replicates a well known genre of online testimonial & talking-head shot. Cooked into the production of professional media is a set of standards and norms to measure against. This is apparent when professors mandate that media projects be "run-through" or "made-in" the studio as if access to technology is a single arbiter of quality media or, perhaps, to signal the importance of the stylistic degrees of the assigned media. The cooked in norms are also apparent in the selection of professional software in favor of software that might be easier to use, freely available, or open-source.

Outcome: Technical expertise

There are several outcomes to this activity triangle, but the most salient outcome revolves around the development of technical expertise. At the most basic level, it must be recognized that the media studio is in a library space and funded as part of student educational services. In this sense, the studio purports to help craft the technical expertise that students will take into the world. Yet, the expertise here is not a deep knowledge of the tools and a reflection on the affordances but is instead the technical competencies to

recreate or replicate within the current-traditional norms and standards of already popular mass-media outlets. I use replication here to acknowledge that analysis and reflection are divorced from the instruction and experience of using the tools, thereby creating an experience that is one of replication rather than an experience that internalizes and repeats, albeit changed, in new contexts.

This isn't to say that transformative practices are entirely precluded – but that in the idea of the media studio, transformation is a distant afterthought to the technical skills to replicate. In the context of an educational media studio, replication is transformative by virtue of the newness of who is now creating the media (e.g. students) and now has access to professional tools to reinforce the replicated standards. Yet the inherent model of replication is focused on the already determined outcomes of media practice through standards and genres that determine the technical skills required to repeat these standards back rather than question the applicability or justification for what are taken as standards.

Analysis of the Idea of a Media Studio

In this idea of a media studio, the actor (usually a student) enters the scene with some sense of what they hope to create. What they hope to create is drawn from their histories with past genres – they consider the podcasts and videos they've watched – as well as from the constraints imposed by outside forces (e.g. class assignments or competitions). The tools of the lab and the assistance from the staff enable the designer to create something that otherwise might not have been possible. The entirety of activity in the media studio is through the varied interactions I've outlined here. I further explore these interactions below.

Interactions Tools / Environment / Division of Labor

The lab itself is shaped by interpretations of genres that designers will primarily be working across. The pods of computers each rest alongside the walls, arranged so computer screens are "back to back", though at an offset angle. The majority of the screens are visible from the center of the room, which afforded me the opportunity to observe much of the work from a single place but also creates a sense of surveillance for the workers.

The human body itself is imagined as analogous to an office work body. There are no standing desks, no places to kneel, and the tables themselves are not adjustable - the seats have limited adjustments. The room is lit by fluorescent lights - a window to a hallway into offices is on one wall. There is a logic in the design that recreates the cognitive laborer of the 21st century. The studio desks replicate the environment of the office workers who, themselves, act as machines of replication. Despite the long hours necessary in replicating professional media, the keyboards are standard issue and the mice are standard issue with little regard to the ergonomic complexities of sitting still for extended periods of time.

Tools / Community

The tools themselves are built toward specific genre expectations and requirements, but a degree of flexibility and experimentation is possible within the complex tools. For instance, countless layers, filters, and effects can be added with a degree of openness that is nearly unimaginable. For the most part - the tools themselves allow complete open transformation of the medium. This means that almost the entire range of an audio-recording, given enough time and computing power, can be altered, separated, recomposed, and otherwise changed. Nevertheless, in the current arrangement

it is the medium that defines which software a designer will use. I do not mean to be sly here and suggest that video be edited in a sound editing software, but it is worth pointing out that in the instance of a video interview that is going to be broadcast for the radio, the video is quickly disposed of during the editing process because it, presumably, offers no additional meaning-making capabilities to the receiving community. Nevertheless, the video can serve a useful heuristic in editing the sounds of the interview and can serve multiple purposes to the designer (e.g. elicit a recollection from the interviewer).

The capabilities of the software allow for an almost "if you can dream it, you can make it" approach. However, what, and how, ideas are dreamed up falls outside of the purview of the studio. Adobe offers some versions of design inspiration, but they are largely tutorial based. Additionally, there is a humanist bias present in the software that remains unaddressed in traditional conceptions of media studios. Within the software, the smallest unit of modality data is almost completely fluid; however, to my knowledge you cannot edit in ultraviolet or have the entire spectrum of light available. Such limitations foreclose the possibility of a great range of more-than-human or other-than-human communication. For instance, in astronomy non-visible light can often tell a scientist more information than visible light, and in Zoology non-visible light and non-heard frequencies are important to understanding animal behavior. Opensource software (though not installed on these machines) allows more flexibility and control - but that is a different case altogether.

Summary of Analysis: Replicating

Although the idea of a media studio centers the designer as the primary actor, this analysis shows that the activity potentials for these designers are limited by the

relationships made in the media studio. The studio space exists for a specific imagined designer but leaves little room for reimaging design. Specifically, this analysis shows that the primary ethos across the activity is that of replication. The tools are a replication of professional design tools that, to be fair, are powerful enough for most envisioned projects but given their cost are subject to access and control measures.

In many ways, these access issues replicate the entry-level or mid-career positions that we might imagine students taking outside of formal schooling. What I mean here is that students are not envisioned as working independently on their own versions of software or with their own tools but must be present and accounted for in a communal space. These access rules allow the studio staff to be present and to offer support in the technical environments – however, this support is primarily limited to technical help and direction. In this sense, the division of labor replicates a divide between the technical and the creative.

The studio space itself is geared toward technical instruction – just as a mid-career or entry-level worker might be expected to realize the vision of a creative team, the relationship with the tools in this studio are oriented toward gaining the competencies to complete these envisioned tasks. The designers are responsible for the creative direction, while the staff are there to help execute their ideas. In over 100 hours of observation, I have never seen staff contribute to designer brainstorming and invention – all the work took place on the screen and was orientated toward the execution of a pre-existing idea. This stands in stark contrast to my own experiences in a writing center.

When I asked the director about how staff are instructed to help, he confirmed that their primary role is navigating the technical complexity of the software. Let me be

clear, this is not a slight on the director or the staff of the media center. Technical instruction remains an important pedagogical task, even though we may often balk at this fact. But, I point out this impetus for technical instruction because underlying the idea of multimodalism is that these additional means of communication are inherently critical and transformative.

It is worth nothing that replication does not foreclose designer agency. Even as the studio replicates the tool selection and general idea of professional studios, that these technologies exist for free to students and university personnel is a relatively new phenomenon. To be sure, the increasing ease of using these tools has afforded independent and student designers access to techniques and tools that only 10 years ago would be cloistered behind larger paywalls and obstacles. Additionally, considering the presumed ease and accessibility to tools – course work on campus has, to some extent, been reimagined to take advantage of digital media, and such reimagining is a continued aim of the studio.

Yet, our larger relationship with these tools remains mostly unchanged. The technical aspect and knowledge are separated from the ideological and creative components of design. And the envisioned projects aim not to push the boundaries of what is possible in new environments but to replicate past genres in current contexts. In other words, this character of replication primarily assumes that technology allows for participation in multimedia culture and that the technical knowledge is the appropriate avenue for realizing our potential for participating in such cultures.

I want to offer a brief caveat here before I offer a secondary analysis focused on the techno-infrastructure. The media studio of this study is a general population studio. It

does not exist to serve a residential college or a singular department and, for this reason, it is constrained by the organization. In a more integrated studio it is likely that the analysis would differ, but the overarching theme of replication would still hold true. Finally, I do not purport to show inadequacy at the personal level but rather to show how the cultural capital of professional design technology intervenes in unanticipated ways.

Technology as Legitimizing

Traditionally, Cultural Historical Activity Theory is organized around activity by human actors. However, in the contexts of this study, activity can also be thought of as both pre-dating the composing activity (e.g. the arrangements of technology in the space, the selection of which technologies the space will focus on) as well as activity outside of immediate human interaction (e.g. the computers automatically updating, software prompting new tutorials). One way of recognizing as much is by challenging the human account of Activity Theory. This section offers a direction for how we might recognize action that is motivated via the technologies in spaces. This is not an erasure of the human but a new focus on the more-than-human[21] and an attempt to take seriously the multitudes of influences in any activity. Although the following section is framed around technologies in spaces as actors, people and the knowledges they represent are meaningfully present.

To focus on the more-than-human aspects of digital composing, I adopt a flat CHAT that breaks from implied hierarchies and linearity. This representation is circular and recursive rather than teleological and linear. In other words, although the multitudes

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[21] I use more-than-human here rather than other-than-human for the distinction that technological apparatuses are programmed, designed, and built by humans but that to grasp the entirety of technology activity we must unbound the activity from individual human interaction and recognize the plurality of humans and others in interaction.

of layers interact within an object, the actor is not necessarily the starting locus of activity and the outcome is not necessarily the final stop of the activity. Instead, the many interactions coalesce around the object from which an outcome is extracted at a singular point during ongoing activity that remains open to multiple interpretations in future and past contexts even as the activity continues to change. Additionally, this circular representation of CHAT more readily recognizes epigenetic activity (that is, activity that unfolds and changes in media res via interaction) by changing the positioning of each circle and expanding and contracting boundaries when making "agential cuts". In other words, activity itself shapes how each node takes form and its proximity and implied relationship with other factors. Finally, this alternative version of CHAT is particularly useful for unearthing new nodes and insights from the bottom-up.

CHAT Analysis

An analysis of the technology and space along the axis of legitimizing allows for an arrangement of data as such:
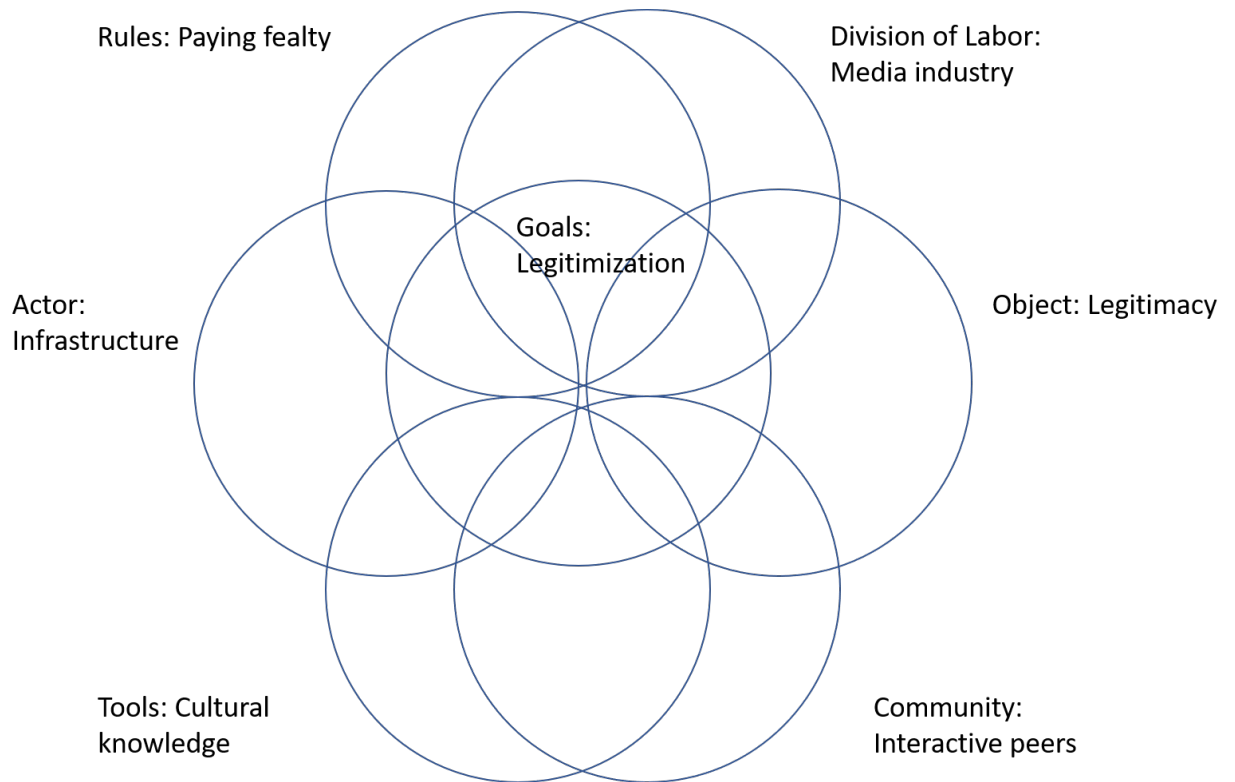
Figure 6 Digital media studio flat CHAT

Actor: Amalgamated infrastructure

The computers, microphone, desks, and screens in the studio space create a sense of professionality. Although these items have been ordered and arranged by the director, items like the iMacs have been the torchbearer for professional design work for decades. The presence of iMacs, with their recognizable polished aluminum aesthetic, acts to create a visible culture of the room. The software itself was selected by the director but again, like the iMacs, has been selected as benchmarks for professional design.

Rules: Paying fealty

The technology actors interact with multiple rules within the legitimizing activity. For starters, many of the software packages require subscription service to use, meaning that for the technology to continue to act legitimate, something must pay the bill. The structure of funding exists within a larger university and library commons budget that

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contains many of its own interacting activity systems that are not addressed here. Additionally, software and technology require updating and must communicate back to the subscription service to stay in working order. Finally, the conceptions of professional software and technology, access gatekeeping, architecture, and financial cost all bring to mind a system of fealty.

Tools: Cultural knowledge

The major tool that technology uses in legitimizing activity is that of cultural knowledge that the software and technology indexes as professionality combined with a contemporary understanding of professional digital media work. In other words, by virtue of a long cultural influence by Apple and Adobe, software and technology stand-in themselves for the assumed performance strength of professional designers. This knowledge is made manifest every day by the staff, director, and designers who enter the studio.

Additionally, teachers assign workshops and projects that require time spent in the studio – often citing the access to professional technologies required to complete projects ranging from video, infographic, or oral history. During an observed class taught in the media lab, one professor cited her experience without mandating studio use and her disappointment when she received poorly recorded sound files. From that point forward she began making studio time a requirement for all her multimedia projects.

Finally, the studio is designed with surrounding windows so that the technology and space can be seen from the outside – allowing public visibility to help circulate the possibilities for designing on campus.

Division of Labor: Industry (extractive, cultural, administrative)

Multiple labor divisions interact within the activity of legitimizing the studio space. Software and material technology are designed and often built from dispersed geographic regions. The iMacs themselves have "designed by Apple in California" etched into their frames despite the rare earth materials being sourced from across the globe, the components being built in primarily Asian locales, and the whole computer assembled in the United States. This is to say, the production of the artifact carries with it a long lineage of labor divisions that carry their own lineages of activity. Nevertheless, the cultural production of professional ethos remains more local to this case study. Media industries have largely normalized the software as benchmarks, and such normalization is picked up and carried on by the staff of the studio. In other words, experience in or adjacent to media industries allows the staff to share the script for discussing the software and technologies as legitimate, up-to-date, professional quality. Additionally, Library tech support teams, the architects/building services that created the room, and the departmental budgets that fund the studio all contribute to the mechanism of legitimization. Importantly, each of these ancillary and local activity channels coalesce through the technology. Staff are selected for their competencies in using the technology. The budgets continue to fund subscription services, and the IT support continues to provide access to the necessary broadband connection.

Community: Interactive Peers

In the context of legitimizing the studio space, students, administration, the director, staff, the university professors make up the immediate community. The technology acts with and on these communities as they legitimize their continued existence as the professional media studio. In other words, the community's knowledge

of technology's cultural capital contributes to the legitimizing of studio space. A more

central community to this analysis are the peers of the technology – specifically, the

microphones, cameras, computers, and software that continue to be used in professional

settings and the people who make those uses possible. In other words, it's worthwhile to

consider the cultural assemblages outside of this local network. These peer networks

provide useful leverage for the local studio to legitimize their space.

Object: Legitimization

The technology acts to legitimize itself to the community, stakeholders, and

decisions makers within these educational contexts. Such legitimization can be

understood as part of the profit-driven corporate design of technology[22] and as an

inherent functionalist characteristic of our relationship with technology. This functionalist

characteristic is that technology exists to be used toward particular ends – often, we

imagine these ends as human centered-ends. In the context of the media studio,

technology is legitimate to the degree that it can be used to replicate media that fits the

norms and standards of contemporary media. This is not entirely divorced from the

profit-drive – to be sure, Adobe and Apple market their technologies alongside the

cultural knowledge of the professional use of the technologies[23].

Outcome

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[22] Technology has little to gain under capitalism. Increased profit margins do not necessarily improve the conditions under which technology exists and do not guarantee technological innovation. That technologies will continue to develop and change is a given – that these changes are marketed and sold to consumers is a truly human characteristic.

[23] However, understanding technology not through singularity but through individuality (Simondon) gives new life to this critique of legitimization. When we recognize that technological development can be oriented toward the needs of the device itself rather than the human needs (e.g. engine fans that cool the engine but also provide stability) leaves us asking why any particular purpose takes precedence. In other words, what assumptions are operating on our relationship with these technologies that demand we view the professional function as most important?

Creating an ethos of legitimacy is the primary goal-oriented activity of the technology. Specifically, the technology acts towards creating legitimacy for the studio space. The technology continues to exist – however – the contexts of the continued existence is in purely capitalistic terms. In other words, the technology writes its own demise by being tied to cutting-edge of professional media. I can say that already the software and hardware capabilities are behind the times – they lack abilities to create interactive media such as phone apps or software and the space of the studio prohibits prototyping or user experience work.

Analysis of Technology as Legitimizing

This object-first lens of examining the media studio enables a critique of how the infrastructure acts on the people who use it. In this analysis, the techno-infrastructure is an omnipresent factor of the media studio. As staff, administrators, and designers pass through the space, the techno-infrastructure acts on them to legitimize itself. In this way, the techno-infrastructure makes use of the cultural knowledge that people bring with them regarding digital composing. Such knowledge does not need to be complete, correct, or even particularly deep but instead needs to only exist in some limited capacity that connects professional software tools to professional designing. Below I draw out connections between the categories of this thing-forward activity.

Actor / Tools: Infrastructure and Cultural Knowledge

This thing-forward rendering of the studio space demonstrates how the material artifacts of technology, specifically digital multimedia composing technologies, shape a lab toward the mechanics of a mythological *professional space* – or, at the very least, a space that is legitimate by its adjacency to professionality. The technology itself benefits

from this by its continued existence in the space – but let's be clear – as the professional norms shift and the availability for new, changed, and different technologies becomes more available, the studio space will change and the technology will be replaced. In this way, the outcomes of the activity are at odds with the goal of the actor. A larger, networked sense of technology – especially the software – allows for a more generous anticipated outcome where the software speaks back to the developers and continues to grow, update, and change. Such growth and update are nearly a given but is less likely if the growth is influenced by the specifics of this educational space's studio.

Community / Division of Labor: Interactive Peers and Industry

The adherence to an industry standard warrants a critique. Will Adobe subscription[24] services become one of the new necessities of a 21st century education in the way that access to email and computer publishing has? If so, should we resist this trend, and how might we write assignments that better reflect our positions? Yes – students might be expected to know these tools for a professional setting, but the skills we hope to endow students with ought to exceed the merely technical work of professions. Nevertheless, technical knowledge is the primacy through which the very idea of the media studio exists.

Even if we allow that professional and technical standards are the crux of a 21st century education, then we still must wrestle with which technological and professional standards we support. For instance, a whole bevy of software exists that is not accounted for in the media studio. Such software might create interactive Human Resource protocols, involve the creation and revision of databases for online shopping or

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[24] All students of enrolled in public Higher Education in the state of Utah are given Adobe Subscriptions.

comments on a digital video, or populate and assess marketing tools for online

campaigns.

Summary of Analysis: Legitimizing This analysis affords us a view of how

technologies and spaces operate as legitimizing activity. Let me pause to explain here: in

the context of institutional logic, the digital media studio is made legitimate by the

presence of the tools themselves. It is certainly true that the studio is operated by people

and serves the primary function of people, at least to the degree that we can understand it.

Yet, as scholars in rhetoric and composition we are prepared to accept that multimedia

composing is possible in even the most analog environments, as evidenced by the

creative designs of Shipka's students in *Toward a Composition Made Whole* (2011).

Nonetheless, the space, with all its many tools, itself operates on an institutional

level to legitimize that digital composing happens here. The necessity of having media

composing in educational contexts operates at various disciplinary levels as well as

contemporary corporate educational levels that serve to prepare graduates for work in the

21st century.

This dovetails, also, with the very idea of a studio – in popular imagination. For instance,

when someone says they're "in the studio" or "need studio time," what is imagined is

likely to harken back to a recording studio and creating a tape to put elsewhere or the

images of digital media made popular in our cultural understanding.[25] In this imagined

scenario, however, the technology is unruly and requires engineering.

In the current context, the technology is self-explanatory and the assumed avenue

for doing media work. This is especially true in my discussions with staff members and

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[25] Andrew Ross' (2004) *No Collar* critiques the fantasy settings of high-tech jobs against the reality of worker exploitation.

the director of the studio. When I first met with the director of the studio I asked if he kept pencils or "analog" tools in the space – he paused and told me that he did not because the purpose of this space, was to funnel the students onto the computers and the digital tools. It's worth mentioning here that this funneling into technology exists in other contexts as well – especially in a recent campaign to prepare Metrocity for 21ˢᵗ century jobs (LouTechWorks).

Juxtaposition: Interfacing and Legitimizing

Legitimization is not an apolitical goal from any direction. On one hand, legitimacy is often wielded as a method of gatekeeping (e.g. in language practices). Carrying this example forward we can examine humanistic and well-intentioned approaches to legitimization. For instance, when we speak of legitimate languages or legitimizing linguistic practice we might do so out of an ethic of care. Perhaps we call for the legitimization of all language practice. Or perhaps, more troubling, we attempt to provide some "legitimate" practices for languages in the hopes that the students will be better prepared for an unfair world. Both seemingly innocuous approaches continue to allow legitimization to exert power rather than rendering any move toward legitimization as illegitimate.

In the context of the digital media studio, we should be careful to recognize how our imagined student-designer interfaces with legitimization and how the infrastructure of the studio is built with layers of legitimization in mind. In the current rendering, student made media is legitimized by technologies that are legitimate because of their functional proximity to professionality. At the institutional level, this proximity to professionality is a selling point – there is no need to question if students are getting the skills of the 21ˢᵗ

century, as long as they're using tools of the 21st century. To put it differently, the studio

space becomes the interface where design practices are made legitimate by virtue of

using professional software but also gatekeeps digital media as entirely computer

mediated.

Legitimacy carries power and permission. It is a nexus through which mobilities

are constrained and controlled. Legitimacy is real – in the sense that the real effects of it

can be felt but it is artificial – in the sense that it is made by people-based arrangements.

Let me explain a bit here through example. There are technological reasons why when

you open up PowerPoint and try to open a different file format, for instance, PDF, that

the program will glitch and produce a mostly illegible PowerPoint. The data, by this

process, is fundamentally changed. The PowerPoint can never again become the PDF that

it was. In this instance, PowerPoint is an illegitimate tool for opening PDFs. Yet, there is

nothing inherent in the design of presentation software that prevents PDFs from also

being opened and designed from within. In fact, in my own practice of public

presentations, I've occasionally exported slides into PDFs[26] or have created stand-alone

PDF pages that function as presentation slides.

The Role of the Designer

The person sitting behind the computer in each of these activity analyses plays critical but

different roles. In the instance of an imagined student using the lab, the designer uses the

technological resources to create a professional media text. This gives the student

experience in using the tools – experience that they might someday take to jobs. It also

gives the student the necessary tools to complete class assignments that are then judged,

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[26] For instance, when creating a flyer for a local community made movie project – I created the flyer using PowerPoint and exported it as a PDF to a professional printer.

by some teachers, to be higher quality. The student, nevertheless, must abide by the access rules set by the studio and, because so much of the software is subscription based, ends up completing the majority of their work on site.

In the second analysis, the student sits behind the computer, but it is the amalgamation of computer, software, and infrastructure that act upon and with the student. This amalgamation changes the student – it acts to legitimize their creations as recognizably "professional" or "high quality." These acts are not automatic but are the results of feedback when using the technology. For instance, in the case of podcasting – Audacity visualizes the sound data allowing for students to easily identify and cut erroneous noises. The logic of plugging into the updated version in order to be recognizable in industry settings remains a key organizing logic. The amalgamated techno-infrastructure uses the student's cultural bank of "professional design" experience to justify its own existence. It's not that our technological demands in the space have exceeded what was capable with simple software 10 years ago. But rather, the same software that professional studios use has an obviously more attractive quality than free versions, trial software, and out-of-date technology.

Visibility of Labor

In each of the two analyses, particular labors of designing are made visible while others are occluded. Both analyses show that the activity of composing digital media tends to focus on the digital technology. To be fair, in a digital media studio, that much is to be expected. Unexpected, however, are the conceptions of technology and its relationships with the rest of the activity. The creative and ideological labors are left off the table – in

the creation of media this work is outsourced to the individual designer (Chapter 4 takes this up).

Surprisingly, the studio has very few artifacts for invention techniques. There were no resources devoted to video invention: the resources that do exist on the studio website are entirely technical. Resources for scriptwriting for audio work are included – borrowed from the Center for Disease Control website and from National Public Radio website. These resources, too, err on the side of technical rather than inventive or ideological questions. Surprisingly, too, in my observations the staff rarely engaged designers about these matters. The lack of ideological and inventive labor is particularly interesting given the cultural proximity to professional media.

It is in this context of a hyper focus toward the technical creation that a need for critique is most apparent. If a media studio exists to help students gain the experience of a 21st century education – especially as it pertains to designing multimedia – but this experience manifests entirely in the technical knowledge of replication, then what does this say about the educational ends we presume for these students?

To be clear, the idea of a media studio and the techno-infrastructure of a media studio all point toward the training of technical processes that realize the unaddressed visions and creative directions. This technical knowledge and technical training is not necessarily the replication of styles or features but is, instead, training in the specific input interfaces. A, perhaps vulgar, analogy here is that while writing teachers might help someone learn to write, studio staff help students learn to input their words into Microsoft Word. In this conception, there exists no contemporary analogous university service. The studio is not by any imagination like a writing center. What I mean here is that the role of

the studio is not to help designers navigate the complex genres, constraints, and possibilities of digital media – nor is it, to envision what some colleagues imagine writing center work to be, to correct the stylistic features of a digital media composition. The studio exists as a nexus for access and technical support.

Although these services are helpful to many, the problem arises in the work the techno-infrastructure does to legitimize this as not merely a technical stopgap but a fully-fledged and legitimate experience with digital media composing. In other words, the studio, rather than exercising a purposeful role in the culture of digital writing, acts only to enforce and legitimize the culture of digital writing already here. Moreover, the techno-infrastructure is positioned as the sole interface for design rather than design as a process outside of technical creation. In other words, we as compositionists know that using Microsoft Word is not the only skill in knowing how to write. In fact, expert knowledge of Microsoft Word is largely inconsequential to writing. We also know that merely playing around with and learning Microsoft Word doesn't teach writing. I think it's safe to suggest that the majority of people if surveyed would agree – writing is more than the knowledge of Microsoft Word. Yet, a bias exists that knowledge of the technical is inherently knowledge of design. Occluded are the creative and ideological labors of design.

The Multi/Monomodal Norm

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have often pointed out that multimodalism is regularly inflected as a transformative realization of many ways of meaning-making (Yancy, 2004; Hull and Nelson, 2005; Selfe, 2009; Rowsell, 2013). Such a recognition might provide us, as people concerned with meaning-making, a way of decentering the

power structures that have impacted so much of literacy education in the pre-20c world. Yet, if we take to heart that we have never been monomodal and don't radically change our engagement with literacy practices, we quickly realize that the transformative potential of multimodality is only a productive fiction.

What multimodalism has largely done is to make apparent the material labor of communicating more broadly. Yet, our approach to such labor under multimodality is to enact a monomodal norm. That is to say, we approach the creation as replicating genre norms and expectations. Our approaches, especially in the media studio, have not been to turn on and figure out what is possible but to have a prepacked idea and to tutorial our way into it. Our focus on the technical aspects is analogous to focusing on the technical skills of typesetting. What differences are possible to the typesetter who, despite all their skills and knowledge, is made to enact the editor's vision?

Transmodal	Multi/monomodal
Experimentation Retrofitting Changes/difference focus	Tutorial Replicating Difference adverse

Transmodal Possibilities in the Media Studio

I want to start this section with a bit of an extended thought experiment in order to demonstrate the possibility for transmodality to exist within the most constrained and monomodal contexts.

Morse Code

Imagine a person locked in a room. Through some innovation of science, the person doesn't require food, water, or sleep – so the room is entirely closed off. Only one small telecommunications cable leaves the room and it is connected to a telegraph key (a single paddle that sends an electronic on/off message) for their communication to the outside world. Given a legend for the alphabet, we can imagine this person as having a singular monomodal communication capability. By pressing the paddle at varying rates, they produce dots and dashes that are meaningful to a receiver on the other side. The receiver can then reply to the sender who can use their legend to "decode" the message. This relationship is perhaps the purest version of monomodal communication – only a singular avenue exists for meaning-making. But is it the channel of communication that defines the monomodal characteristic? Or is it the singular activity of pressing the paddle that defines the monomodality? In a multimodal definition, the channel of transmission is how modality is characterized. Therefore, under multimodalism, there is no possibility for more than one mode here because the hardwired room only affords one channel with which to communicate out.

Now say that we give the person in the room a new telegraph key – an iambic telegraph key (two paddles: one producing dots and the other dashes). Now in this example, the transmitted code itself remains the same but the sender utilizes a different embodied experience. Because transmodality begins with the activity, I would argue that this is a new modality experience and is a possibility outside of the monomodal imagination. The message remains relatively unchanged and perhaps the receiver doesn't recognize any difference (although the person would eventually develop the expertise to send quicker messages), nevertheless, the experience of meaning-making has changed for

the sender. Strict multimodalism, however, would be forced to concede that this is still a monomodal communicative environment because the channel remains unchanged – the cable still sends the same message and the received collects it as a series of dots and dashes. Now say, for instance, that the person in the room is given a crude keyboard – each key represents the Morse code for an individual letter. The channel of communication remains unchanged, but now the person in the room can likely produce words at a rate approaching 100 per minute – at this rate it would be impossible for the receiver not to notice the difference. The activity is inherently altered on both sides. A transmodal approach recognizes the affordance of this new speed and respects the difference that such speed can make in the process of meaning-making but multimodalism is left grasping at definitions based on the channel of communication. To the multimodalist the increased speed maybe renders the message illegible and outside of the modal norms dictated by the first instance of the channel. But let me be clear, it is not only that the speed of composing has changed; speed is important, to be sure, and perhaps helps to enact new power differences in this experience. More importantly, it is the experience of composing that has changed. It now requires more than one finger. It now requires less manual labor. The embodied activity is different enough in the final example that one might be able to do it as more of an afterthought or background experience – no longer will the person in the room need to internalize each series of dots and dashes for each letter.

You can extend this thought experiment out further – for instance, you might imagine that the person in the room is given a speech tablet (commonly used for non-verbal autistic people) that transmits the words for the images selected into Morse Code.

Or you might extend this example to reflect binary code of computers which would then render all digital communication into a complex series of ones and zeros.

It is worth nothing that you can also contract this example. What if, for instance, no new technological devices were added to the room – surely that would keep the activity monomodal, right? Not necessarily. Given that the telegraph works by the production of what can boil down to on/off values in time, our person in the room maintains the ability to alter their speed of composing and newly change the experience of sending and receiving the message. To the multimodalist, the relationship to time might be perceived as an affordance or grammar of the mode or, to put it differently, an inherent characteristic/resource of the mode. Yet, we can also consider time a resource or modality channel in its own right.

At each level, however, attention to a material or abstract channel (or in-betweenness) does not allow for recognition of the changed experience. It is apparent that a definition of modality as channels of communication falls short of describing the changed experiences and activities of meaning-making. It is also telling that concepts of multimodalism arose from a sudden onset of new technological channels for communication rather than through song, dance, street art, or otherwise already existing ways of communicating. If multimodality had been based in embodied activities of meaning-making rather the identification of semiotic channels, our pedagogical and research approaches might well be radically different. The next section addresses the possibilities for claiming these radical differences in the multimodal world we've built and inherited.

Possibilities

Given the multitudes of tools in a digital media studio, transmodal possibilities are in abundance. In most instances, a simple reorientation toward activity and experience (both embodied and enactive) suffices to generate new insights toward digital composing. To a degree, the studio has already done as much but has oriented toward an idea of professional space that reflects a multimodal / multichannel approach.

The design and infrastructure of the lab reflects the experience of professional or "office" composing. The computers are isolated from each other, making each designer an island, and the studio experience of over-the-ear headphones remains. The experience for designers is analogous to the cultural idea of the lone creative working in the studio. The desks that the computers sit on are small and force the designer to keep oriented toward the computer rather than designing and brainstorming on paper while seated at the computer desk. To some degree, I hold onto the possibility that such infrastructure choices are the product of space constraints. Nevertheless, they have real implications for the designers sitting at the computer. For instance, the limited desk space means that designers are only working on one device at a time. This prevents doing small on the fly editing on a more mobile device – say a tablet. Additionally, analog devices are few and far between. For example, during my observations I saw very few folders, papers, and no analog storyboarding – despite the availability of a storyboard handout. In other words, the activity of digital composing in the studio is, in many ways, forced toward a singular experience interface: the computer.

New relationships with technologies are not a forgone possibility. Daniel Miller and Mirca Madianou's (2012) work in polymedia is particularly helpful here. Over their long ethnography on media tools, Miller and Madianou observed that selection of media

is not merely based on the technological affordances or access issues of the tool but instead based on a multitude of cultural practices. In this way, each designer sitting down at the computer has the opportunity to remake their relationship with the design experience. The transmodal possibility here is the recognition of the novelty in these moments and encouragement of reflection on these moments. Such reflection should not be aimed toward the abstracted practices of genre, conventions, or discourses but instead reflection that begins with the material practices of composing and extends into the larger critique of genre, convention, and discourses. This is what I call modality retrofitting. In the next section I expand on the potentials for retrofitting to more fully realize the social implications precociously predicted by the New London Group's (1996) and other calls toward "multiliteracies".

Modality retrofitting

My approach to modality is summarized as a cultural materialist approach as opposed to an approach that abstracts or immaterializes modality. Some researchers opt to recognize a third way between materiality and immateriality that points toward a challenged binary between the two. Cathy Burnett et al. (2014) have used "(im)materiality" to such an effect, but for the purpose of this project this third way obscures more than clarifies. Instead, through a materialist approach I argue that the most useful orientation toward modality is to recognize the salient practices and arrangements that make any mode recognizable. This reorients our research paradigm in two ways. First, we do not start with the given modes of a multimodal framework. In this way, work that is done in the visual domain is made new as photo editing, graphic design, illustration, and so on. This does not mean that each new observation has to start from a crude naivety but that instead

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we bring our focus to the actual work of composing and designing. This brings me to the second point: a materialist approach to modality focus on the actual practices being enacted. These practices have a historical provenance that can also be interrogated but gone are the abstractions into immaterial channels.

Given the materiality of modality I have opted for a physical metaphor for rethinking our practices – i.e. retrofitting. In general, retrofitting means to make something new fit into an already existing structure. Both the new thing and the past thing are changed in the process of retrofitting; usually these changes are in the interest of pragmatics and usability but are occasionally altered for personal or ideological reasons. In many ways, how we've come to understand digital media and multimodality has largely been through our own retrofitting (e.g., "scrolling"), but we've ignored how our recognition and application of the new has been based in already existing structures of literacy and language. I also contrast this with remediation – which has at times taken on multiple meanings in our field because remediation is particularly focused on changes in media that require more distant technological advances. For instance, in Bolter and Grusin's (1998) formulation of remediation, photography is influenced by histories of painting. In this context, remediation is a long cultural process of taking the standards of one medium and bringing them to bear on a new medium. This is useful as we critique the way media are but it gives us little direction on how and why we might call for changes to media. By bringing retrofitting to the forefront we're unable to ignore our relationship with existing structures and we are more capable of recognizing and critiquing what we hope is changed by the new addition. This is important if we hope to

realize the possibilities of new composing technologies in the classrooms to challenge the historical inequitable practices of education.

In other words, to retrofit modality means to take stock of our existing practices and to examine what it is we hope to alter by the addition of new technologies and new practices. Modality retrofitting asks us to anticipate how modality does not work the same for everyone – it requires leaning into the inchoate nature of what we make. This version of retrofitting differs from retrofitting in disability scholarship in that it gestures toward a change of activity, not a change of artifacts (Dolmage, 2008; Yergeau et al. 2013). In other words, it is not the addition of new channels of communication or new visual, audio, tactile artifacts. Instead, if we as scholars and teachers of composition, literacy, writing, rhetoric, composition, and communication think we have something to contribute to liberal education and the humanities, then we should not shy away from starting there – at what we hope to contribute, take away, and transform. This, to me, has always been a more defensible stance than competencies for a newly technologically dense world. In my own view of our field, I consider meaning-making, especially outside of language and print, as a political project that can bring about a recognition of the inadequacies of language purity models. In other words, as people come to realize that they take part in the creation of standards and norms, through their own reproduction of media, and come to recognize who these standards enrich, the possibilities for transformative practice (e.g. practice that transforms current power arrangements) remain open and viable.

How to retrofit modality: collaboration

We can begin to approach modality work as retrofitting by starting with the creative practices of design. Let me be clear, designing or composing are not merely technical activities but employ a whole range of ideological and creative components. To remove creative and ideological aspects of design and focus merely on the technical does a disservice to our larger project in Rhetoric and Composition.

In some ways, the media studio is already a retrofitted project. The library space that the studio occupies was never intended to be a media studio but was retrofit from a multitude of former identities[27] in recent years to accommodate lab and media equipment. Additionally, the lab retrofits professional and office practices into a library media space. These are not necessarily "studio practices" – for instance, there are no "recording in progress" signs, no computer station utilizes multiple screens, and the only soundboard is contained in a separate room. Nevertheless, what is missing from this retrofit is an attention to the ideological and creative practices in media. There is some difficulty in proposing changes to this. For starters, the ethos of the studio is to be an accessible space that students can drop-in on an as needed basis. For this reason, requiring appointments or one-on-one tutoring would impose structures antithetical to the media studio's identity. Nevertheless, one significant change that is possible is to move toward an ethos of collaboration. Collaboration is particularly useful because, by virtue of requiring multiple perspectives, it foregrounds the difference inherent in all practices.

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[27] In attached appendices the 1980's floorplan shows the first floor of the library. The studio space is where the Koster reading room is indicated on this floorplan. In an excerpt from a 1990's alumni magazine, a picture shows the space that had since been retrofitted into a new open space. Finally, according to library archivists in the 2000's the space in question was part of the CopyIT center where staff were warned to look cautiously out of fear of being blinded by the laser scanner (R. Pattillo, personal communication, March 2020).

Retrofitting toward a collaborative model of the studio requires only a few small changes.[28] For starters, staff members can be reintroduced not merely as technical help but also as another set of eyes and ears – or a sounding board for creative projects. The staff can approach more of the designers and inquire on their projects, although a simple notation system could be devised to indicate if designers wanted to be left alone (e.g. a stop-sign tagged to the back of the computer). Larger moves toward collaboration could also be initiated. For instance, when designers need stock photos and videos for visual projects, they might be encouraged to borrow studio cameras to go out and capture their own video rather than use images cribbed from internet searches. Even more grand a gesture would be the annual creation of stock sounds and images. The studio could employ staff or designers to capture our own local based stock resources. Moreover, the studio could collaborate to host on-the-fly edits and combined screenings for class and extracurricular projects. The important part here is that these gestures toward collaboration locate modality work within the physical and material practices of meaning-making. They are to show that meaningfully engaging and changing modality does not require abstracted theoretical work but can be done (and is done) in the seemingly mundane day-to-day work of design.

A collaborative ethos is also made possible on the backend of projects where staff could discuss intellectual property and help designers apply copyright and copyleft to their projects. A culture of copyleft would encourage studio projects to draw from past projects made in the studio. In such instances, the designer is not given an out when trying to recreate or transform a project. They cannot say – this project was made with

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[28] Collaboration is, of course, inevitable with or without in situ interactions but for the purpose of this model interaction remains important.

tools outside of my means. Instead, they are given the opportunity to realize the expansive potentials of modality work.

Finally, the studio can take a more direct role in working with courses that require studio space to complete a project. Rather than continuing the pedagogical lineage of individuality, wherein a student "individually" composes a piece that is then graded, the studio can instruct professors in the practices of dialogic collaboration as a feminist political project (Lunsford & Ede, 1990; Ervin & Fox, 1994). Such dialogic collaboration, rather than hierarchical collaboration that mimics masculinist, top-down organizational power structures, is based around the multiple and fluid contributions by each team member. In this way, a single individual is not responsible for the visuals, for instance, and another responsible for the audio. Rather, both individuals recognize their contributions to the development of the project wholly as well as their contributions the various piecemeal aspects that they may be more distant from. Such collaboration is a key element of the Free and Open Source Software movement (Davis, 2019) and also provides a useful challenge to the pedagogical primacy of individuality.

Conclusion: toward a fully realized transmodality

In this chapter I have framed the digital media studio in two ways. The first framing is to locate the very idea of a media studio: what cultural baggage and organizational biases we bring to our understanding of a media studio in educational contexts. What I have shown is that the media studio operates toward an ethos of replication. The space largely exists to give student-designers the tools to replicate relevant media projects. The underlying logic of this replication is not based on subversion or transformation, as either an inevitability or a political project, but instead is a logic that responds to our cultural

moment's values of sound and image-based compositions in kind. The second framing of the studio is through the nexus of techno-infrastructure. This analysis shows that the studio is also oriented toward the activity of legitimization. Across contexts, legitimization acts as a tacit gatekeeper to cultural practice, and in the context of this studio this gatekeeping upholds an industry/professional standard as legitimate. These two critiques ought to be read in the context of the transformative potentials of multimodality that have historically been gestured toward in our research. The New London Group (1994), Selfe (1999), Yancy (2004), Hull and Nelson (2005), and many more have all gestured toward potentials of multimodality to decenter from power differentials prevalent in current-traditional literacy forms. However, such power differentials have been recreated within the multimodal norm. The industry and professional standards legitimize only a subset of the potentials with new technology. For this reason, I move toward an approach of retrofitting modality. Retrofitting is not radically transformative – it does not remove the techno-infrastructure limitations but instead recognizes their saliency and it positions difference as a means of small change. Nevertheless, a transmodal future is possible.

I want to clarify that a realized transmodality is not a directive from above. The people of this study – the designers in the media studio here and otherwise are not monomodal, multimodal, or even transmodal. People are people and with the territory comes varied practices in varied contexts. Any paradigm that attempts to place people into categories ought to be carefully approached, well justified, and aimed toward the improvement of peoples' lives. I am not convinced that categorizations of modality practices are warranted enough to take the risk of categorization. For instance, there is

potential for fetishizing modality practices as analogous to cultural differences, and such an approach must be nipped in the bud. Similarly, I am careful not to assume generational differences based on access to modality technologies. Instead, I offer transmodality as a critique of infrastructures, contexts, and tools by way of recognizing that the varied practices of people result in what multimodalism has come to recognize as modes. In other words, these contexts and infrastructures have shaped and been shaped by practice so, in this chapter, I have critiqued such contexts and infrastructures for their role in adopting a multi/monomodal approach.

Within the current contexts and infrastructures there are possibilities for a continued realization of transmodality. When transmodality is enacted it is not necessarily apparent on the surface but instead operating behind the scenes. Such possibilities for this involve challenging and recreating the technological tools, staking a claim at a new identity, and reconfiguring our bodily perception. The next chapter explores cases where some of these possibilities come to a fruition.

CHAPTER IV

UNEXAMINED BACKGROUNDS

Introduction

As addressed in Chapter 1 and further explored in Chapter 3, modality research often

orients toward media artifacts or the techno-semiotics rather than practices of designing

media. At best, when practices are discussed they are explored post-hoc, resulting in

analyses that more often than not confirm biases toward modality (Manchin & Van

Leeuwen, 2016). In ethnographic contexts, Sarah Pink (2011) rightfully points out that

such post-hoc analyses are a result of the social-semiotic approach that conceptualizes

culture as readable and "*represented* in social action" that relies on "separating out of the

world into sets of discrete components that work necessarily in relation to each other"

(270). For instance, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) make the distinction between

scientific naturalism and the photographic naturalism of visual information and conclude

that in many science communication contexts, images without texture, lighting, or

shading are more natural and believable due to an implied usefulness in simplifying

observation to only the most salient data for scientific understanding or experimentation

(164). This attention toward naturalism is not gleaned from ethnographic work with

science communicators but instead from the linguistic baggage of modality as indicator

of perceived reliability[29]; likewise, Kress and Van Leeuwen's conclusion, although

possible, is divorced from the material practices of scientific publishing that include

lineages of printing technologies and costs.

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[29] See Ravelli and Van Leeuwen (2018) for a more in-depth critique of modality and reliability.

In contrast, an enactive approach to modality work recognizes that practices are not entirely reactions to any inferred or implied "realness" of modes but emerge from the interaction of meaning-making and being in the world. In some scientific contexts this alternative is better conceptualized as drawing or visualizing activity that places the scientific value in the object[30]. For this reason, a transmodal analysis begins in medias res – at the moments of creation and instantiation of practicing media composing. Nevertheless, no moment of activity is singular and fully encompassing of the complex processes of composing. Toward this end, this chapter aims to explore, disentangle, and analyze the myriad of influences in cases of media composing. Specifically, this chapter attends to the plurality of backgrounds (i.e. Historical, Cultural, Technological, and Aesthetic) designers face when composing in new technologies and, in part, reframes backgrounds as more than temporal-spatial in order to bring each to the foreground through the terms of activity analysis. In other words, backgrounds are not merely fixed and unchanging histories but are subject to ongoing emergence as they constrain and provide resource for present activity.

I offer a tentative definition of each of these backgrounds below – these definitions are what have guided me through my analysis and should not be taken as set-in-stone rules but instead as heuristics for future transmodal research.

Historical	Historical backgrounds are the canonical stories, cultures, genres that the activity operates within. This history is reflected in the assumed rules and conventions for design activity.

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[30] See Chapter 1's discussion of Janet Vertesi's (2015) *Seeing Like a Rover*

Cultural	Cultural backgrounds are the personal and collective (real or assumed) experiences surrounding the activity. These backgrounds might manifest in the rules or labor divisions but are also likely to manifest across the communities of the activity.
Aesthetic	Aesthetic backgrounds are what we commonly think of as backgrounds in our consumption of media. For instance, we might listen to background vocals or look toward the fuzzy backgrounds of a portrait.
Technological	Technological backgrounds are the lineages of technological development. The pathways, as diverse and splintered as they are, that have lead hardware and software to look and act as it currently looks and acts within the activity. As evidenced by the previous chapter, tools can be a troubling category for analyzing new media composing. Nevertheless, I take technological backgrounds to be the development of a technologies from a more strict perspective.

Undeniably, these backgrounds interact and intersect with each other. For instance, the development of recorded sound initially via the phonograph is, in no small part, tied to its historical lineage as a dictation machine. In this way, the machine's development is suited more toward the middle frequencies of spoken words than the upper or lower frequency of other-than-human sonic phenomena. Friedrich Kittler's (2010) *Optical Media* provides a lengthy example of technological lineages of optics and its many intersections across diverse categories.

These backgrounds provide a frame of reference for the activity I analyze, but it is worth noting that key to my analysis is the ongoing formation or contribution to new backgrounds understood through these temporal-spatial frames into materialist terms. In other words, my analysis is interested in not only the backgrounds brought to design activity but also the backgrounds newly enabled by design activity. What I mean here is this: within each composing activity, the designer is newly enacting backgrounds for themselves and others to use. For instance, designing a public webpage contributes to the milieu of public webpages even as that webpage is subversive, glitchy, or unremarkable.

In the first section of this chapter I analyze a participant's web-designing activity. In this section, I reflect on how JJ's history with computer coding shape his design activity. Following his prototyping, I analyze the design principles that he was drawn to during his mockup of a website. My analysis demonstrates how JJ – in utilizing rather than subverting design principles – is engaged in an act of defiance as he moves to claim an affinity or identity for design. His recognition of design principles as seemingly inherent yet tied to an ethos of professionality invites further exploration. Subsequently, his linking of web-designer competency to his independence as a video game designer demonstrates a forward-leaning approach to developing his own cultural and historical backgrounds into a professional identity.

In the second section of this chapter I analyze a participant's photoshopping tutorial. Here I reflect on KT's relationship with her photograph of a bird while she isolates, transforms, and blends the bird into new contexts. I turn toward two features in this analysis. First, I focus on the technological division of labor – that is, how KT learns to let the software do the work and how the software is used in the circulation of her

Photoshop file. Secondly, my analysis turns to the aesthetic and technical photography feature of achieving bokeh and the intersecting division of labor mandated by the tool. Following this turn, I consider bokeh as a material and algorithmic phenomenon and describe how KT's photograph is an evidence of blurring genre and technological determinism.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter I bring each analysis together by turning the backgrounds into the foreground. In this section I argue that bringing our focus to the backgrounds of designing and composing reflects the reality of composing more accurately. These backgrounds are the very real working conditions of composers, and such conditions offer new reflection to the work they produce. Rather than wrestling with the possibilities newly gained through abstracted channels of modality, designers in this study are engaging in the production of media that produce those channels. Transmodality is especially well suited to benefit from the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) analyses I provide here. A key component of my transmodal approach is the recognition that modality work is not isolated to the production of artifacts. A designer is not merely making a website or a podcast, they are contributing, in whatever small way, not only to the entire milieu of websites and podcasts but to the encultured ways of understanding visual and sonic means. What I mean here is that it is the process of meaning-making (both conscious and unconscious) that makes what is historically recognized through multimodalism as a mode. In other words, the analyses of activity I conduct through CHAT's methodological exploration of tools, actors, rules, divisions of labor, community, and objects share the aim of exploring the agency of designers to shape and change, in whatever way is possible, the interactive systems they work within.

For this reason, the final section concludes that transmodality, as I have shown here, is most useful as it orients toward "mode" as the manner of producing a way of making-meaning.

JJ: Claiming Conceptual Tools

In this section I analyze JJ's process of designing a newsletter style website in Adobe XD. As I explain below, a key nexus for JJ's design process was determining the amount of whitespace – or "empty" space, in the visual layout of the website. If we allow an interpretation of design principles as "rules" for visual design, then JJ's activity aligns with a fairly strict adherence to conventions. Such adherence raises two key questions. First, where do these design conventions come from? Examining the "always-already new" of new media (Gittleman, 2008) gestures toward antecedent and previous publishing avenues. Looking toward these publishing venues offers a quick answer to the historical and cultural development of design principles as developed out of movements of corporate art and professionalized media.

Secondly, what is afforded to JJ by this adherence to rules? I've been cautious throughout my writing to lean away from using variations of affordance because affordance is often used to indicate new persuasive or communicative possibilities through and within media. I use it now to point to the difference between transmodal and multimodal. Here I am asking what new life, new identity, new practices, are made possible within a specific media activity. The key difference that I want to point out is that in the multimodal purview affordances are static outward changes. For instance, a composer using sound might suddenly have the ability (granted by sonic composing) to raise alarm or direct attention. On the other hand, this transmodal purview views

affordances as fluid and (intra)active. These are changes to the very nature of what we might be trying to communicate. They are changes to the very nature of how we might define ourselves. In answering this second question I reorient an analysis of JJ's activity that recognizes the principles of design as conceptual tools. Reframing design conventions as conceptual tools allows an analysis that recognizes the identity-forming goal-setting of JJ rather than the object-creating goal.

Repeating Rules

In this analysis of JJ's activity I focus on the design rules he chooses to privilege in the creation of his website. JJ had volunteered to take the lead on turning a community newsletter into a robust online website. During his process he created several mock-ups and sent prototypes to peers via hyperlinks in a Slack[31] channel. After receiving some feedback he dedicated an afternoon to fleshing out the concepts into a working prototype. I coded the activity following a flat CHAT approach, like the coding paradigm I used in the previous chapter. Here I expand each data point and attempt to bring history of data points into analysis and beyond our interactions during his design process.

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[31] Slack is a popular chatroom application.
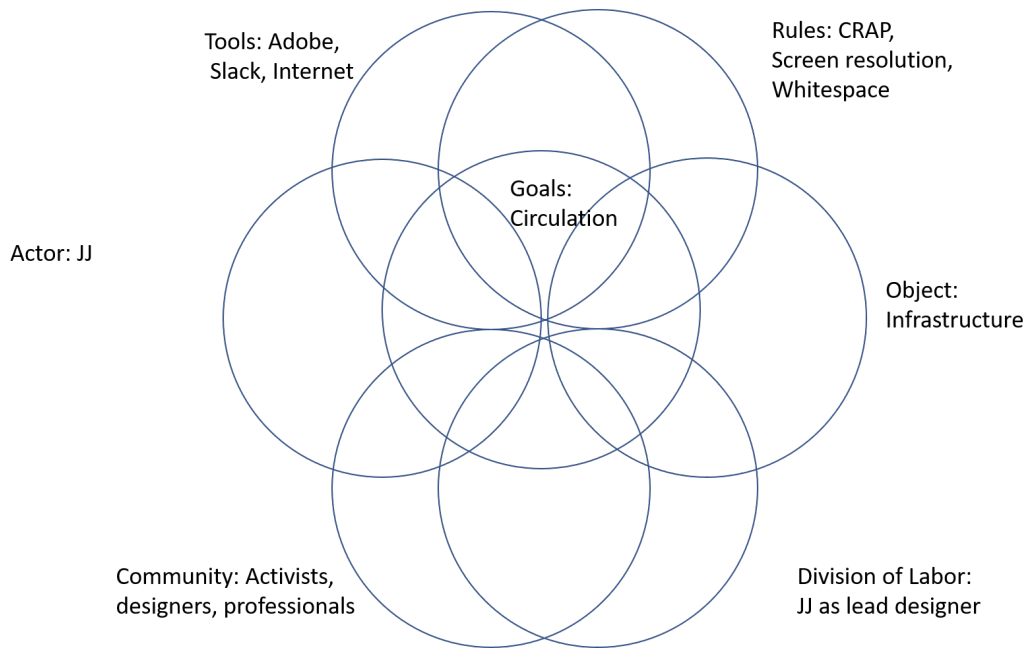
Figure 7 JJ's flat CHAT

Actor: JJ

JJ is a student in computer programming with, what he admits are, limited design skills.

He is also a member of several online and local activist groups that coalesce around

environmental justice and labor issues. He is a self-described "techie," and as far as he

can remember he's enjoyed tinkering with technology and being online. He tells me that

he has visited the studio before and that he treats it as a stand-in for a more structured

workspace.

Tools: Adobe, Slack, Internet

JJ uses the digital media studio not because he lacks the access to the Adobe

subscriptions software but because they have larger screens and because he enjoys

working away from his laptop, where he is too tempted to connect with friends on his

social media accounts. In the studio he uses one of the Mac computers. He is creating a

mockup of a functional website in Adobe XD (a vector based prototyping software) and

sending links with his phone via Slack. He uses very few tutorials – he seems to understand the software very well. At times he moves from his design board in Adobe XD to a mock-up of his website's code in Adobe Dreamweaver. Dreamweaver allows him to "split-the-screen" so he can see the code he is interacting with while also seeing the impacts on the website.

Rules: CRAP, Screen resolution, Whitespace

During his design activity JJ finds himself obliged by both technological and aesthetic rules. For starters, he draws from a handbook for design in following rules for contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity in his mock-up.

JJ tells me that he came up with the idea for the design of this website by reading a lot of other magazine and news websites.

> When you pull up the website – you just need to break it down into what everything is doing – like – even if the first thing you see is a picture or words or something, just pay attention to where it is. Each website they have little slots. Where they just plug new images or words in.

As we worked on his website, he taught me his version of "seeing" a web page. He said when he sees/reads a website, he doesn't look at the images or the text – at least not right away – but instead he looks at the infrastructure of the website. When I asked him where he learned to do this, he told me he read it on a blog but that it just comes natural to him at this point. At one point he pulled up an example and helped me break it down.

During the production design of this website, JJ often remarked on the need to fill "less of the screen" or "less of the page" – this he said was to avoid people looking at it and "not wanting to read it". He was worried that clutter would undermine his design and

look "amateur" or unprofessional. In this way, the overall design and the availability of "whitespace" was a notable presence in the design process.

When he began working on his website he started with contrast and color. His group of collaborators had a specific color theme they are drawing from, but it was up to him to take these available colors into design arrangements that contrast. He used a white background for the website with red boxes inlaid with white text. When he was satisfied with font strength and size, he virtually cut the page into three major columns and two rows. JJ followed a strict design approach. He pulled out a calculator to figure out the exact third size of a page and wrote the number down in a notebook. The guides he made here helped him keep each box and image aligned. As he gathered the featured pictures, he edits some and instructs his collaborators to submit images that repeat the low-resolution and red hued aesthetic. JJ told me that through repetition in each column, he was devising a specific way of reading the headlines. First, he said, a reader might see the image and think it's really moving. Then they'll look and read the bolded headline before reading a brief aside about the article.

During this creation process, JJ sent links to his collaborators via Slack. At one point, his friend messaged him to say that the website is difficult to navigate – when he tried to scroll, the images changed size and make him accidently click different links. They troubleshoot this and decide that the screen resolution changes how the website pulls up and that JJ needs to edit the eventual code to make the website "responsive". As he started working toward making the website "responsive" he seemed to get frustrated. He told me that the design he was working on looks too "cluttered" and doesn't use

enough "whitespace," and he's worried that it looks unprofessional. To fix this, he went back to the paper and pencil notes he took and recalculates box and image sizes.

In these ways, the design "CRAP" (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity) principles and screen resolution became the "rules" that JJ needed to follow to enact this website to the world. To be fair, JJ is also obliged to follow access rules of the studio, and the technology is obliged to follow the rules that I laid out in the previous chapter. But the design activity itself is largely mediated through JJ's interpretation of design principles and the technological rules for encoding images to different sized screens.

Community: activists, designers, professionals

JJ drew from communities in three intersecting domains: academic, activist, and design. Rather than explore these domains separately, I spend significant time on the intersections between these communities and how they contribute to JJ's design process through a pattern like Prior and Shipka's (2003) environment selecting and structuring practices (ESSP).

JJ located his academic (and supposed professional) identities broadly around his studies in Computer Science and Engineering. As a self-described techie, JJ has used his education to learn about hardware and software limitations and has an interest in computer networking. His education often stresses that he view networks and computer issues with a view-from-above. He told me that when designing a webpage he "looks past the things on the page to try to see the code that tells everything what to do." In some ways, this approach parallels the approach Donna Haraway critiques as a "view-from-nowhere" or the god-trick of seeing everything all at once from non-contextualized places

rather than seeing the embodied and enacted practices (1988). However, JJ's struggles with making a responsive design (e.g. a design that changes depending on the device it is viewed on) complicates any simple reading of this view-from-nowhere. Rather than settle for a web site that is best viewed on any particular device, he challenged himself to create a more accessible object that can be viewed ideally from multiple devices.

JJ's design and activist communities intersect with his professional communities. JJ told me that his online activism began recently when he got involved in climate activism and eventually labor activism – especially tech worker labor activism. He told me: "I used to play video games a lot which is why I guess I wanted to be a computer science major … because I still want to make games for a living." But now the possibilities for working for a large game industry look less promising. This, he said, is why he volunteered to design a website for his online activist groups – so he can get the skills to design his own independent website when he makes his video games. In doing so, JJ is recognizes that to be taken seriously in an online space might require specific design skills and conventions.

The design skills and conventions that JJ oriented toward are vectors across the three communities his activity happens across. Importantly, these communities inform a set of ESSP that JJ used throughout his process. Prior and Shipka theorize ESSPs as the varied external environments, actors, and artifacts that shape and help direct the activity taking place. I locate these ESSPs in community because they operate as the material artifacts of community knowledge that JJ uses. For starters, he works in the studio because it most represents a professional workplace out of his house and off his smaller screened technology at home. The studio itself represents a form of intentional workplace

structuring. By using a public rather than private computer, JJ is forced to keep his social media accounts off his screen, and this helps him treat the time as working time. Additionally, he brings in the design community as he pulls up example websites and reads from *The Non-Designers Design Book*. Throughout his process he structured his practice by sending ideas and prototypes to his activist community via his Slack channel – by sending his prototypes out he was not only seeking affirmation of design styles but also enacting a largely decentralized editorial collective he and his group aspire to create.

Each of these intersections with his communities strengthen and alter JJ's personal affinity for this designing activity because each community imbues separate needs and wants onto the designed object. As he sent a draft to peers, he took their critique and internalizes it across the multiple community frames he occupies.

Division of Labor: JJ as designer

JJ was the lead designer on this project. He told me that he gets direction from his friends online, but while we sat and worked together very few messages are exchanged. Although he used a technology that allows for synchronous communication, most of his design conversations with his peers happen, as evidenced by his chat logs, over the course of many hours. In this way, the activity of web designing is distributed across actors, places, and time. JJ's affinity for hands-on designing was apparent. When he resized an image to fit in his mockup he pulls up the image file and manually crops it instead of relying on the resize function in the website code.

Object: An infrastructure

After about two hours, JJ produced an infrastructure of a website. This infrastructure is not fully brought into the HTML and CSS coding languages that render it readable to all

computers but is, instead, a prototype of what will be materialized elsewhere into a website. He was not concerned, at this point, with coding the website. He told me that the coding will just fall into place now that he's got a design that he's happy with, and that the hardest part was knowing what he wanted to do, not knowing how to do what he wanted.

Goals: Circulation

It's not enough to just create a website and thrust it into the world. Part of JJ's long-term goals for this design are oriented toward the circulation and uptake of this website. His design activity is, after all, involved in activist editorials and social change. Nevertheless, throughout his designing activity he didn't stop to ask questions like: "will this change someone's mind"; "will this bring us an audience". Implied in the inevitable life of this website is that if you build it well, the audience will come.

Circulation is also a frame to analyze additional aspects of JJ's design process. For instance, JJ was an aspiring game developer and hoped to circulate his own creations into the world eventually. In order to do that, however, he wanted to be independent from a larger corporate model of game studios.

Transcending boundaries: A Transmodal turn

On the surface, JJ's design activity appears to look a lot like what we imagine any standard version of designing for the web might look like. However, as I work with JJ and as I focus more on learning how to perform web design rather than analyzing design choices, I find myself surprised at the number of activities that are contained within designing.

Approaching this case from a transmodal perspective enables us to look toward the various activities that coalesce into the activity that is identified here as JJ's web designing. If we take transmodality to be privileging the modes of production – or the manners and methods of an activity – we could likely identify a dizzying amount of activities here. For example, we could code collaboration, brainstorming, invention, editing, tutorial, and so on. However, the mere identification and categorization of activities would offer limited returns and impose an artificiality to the complexity and fluidity of this case of designing. Similarly, we could surrender to theoretical complexity and settle for calling this a very wish-washy "designing" activity. This too, seems to have limited returns for researchers.

Instead, a transmodal approach locates the moments when categories themselves are transcended as part of the larger activity. This is to say, we can look to where boundaries are shared, challenged, and changed during this web designing and plumb those intersections for a richer understanding of the whole activity. Let me be clear, this is the strength of a theoretical paradigm that recognizes difference and transformations at the heart of activity; in this way, evidence of transcendence is not a methodological flaw or problem that needs to be explained away but instead is an affordance of transmodal research. Such transcending happens along two time-directions. The first of these is oriented from the past and into the current moment of designing. In JJ's case, we can look at how whitespace is not merely a rule that he uses but a conceptual tool that helps direct his designing. My enactive ethnography with JJ led to me embody a designer's orientation toward whitespace. In fleshing out this embodiment I further explored the material history of whitespace, below, which allows for an informed view of whitespace

as a conceptual tool that indexes cultural codes that JJ implicitly followed and changed in his design. The second type of transcending happens in looking forward. In JJ's case, this forward-looking transcending is simultaneous with his use of whitespace as a conceptual tool. Specifically, JJ was not only creating a website that will be further circulated in his communities but was also staking a claim on his identity as a designer. Becoming a designer, in this context, means embodying a designer's view of whitespace and a designer's view of website layout. For JJ, this skilling of the designer-eye was informed by his education and predilection for computer coding. His trained seeing of a website is based around the background code that creates the website rather than the outward appearance while, seemingly paradoxically, he was abundantly worried about the outward appearance of his website when he wrestles with the available whitespace

Re-rendering

JJ's approach to seeing like a web designer by examining the background code of web layouts offered him an invention technique for web design. Rather than starting with a blank screen, JJ took out a series of numbers that represented grid ratios. Once he built this scaffolding the rest of the design involved largely just plugging in the content and occasionally editing content to make it fit the self-imposed constraints. As expected, there is some similarity here with newspaper or magazine layout. Here the designer is the editor – editing photos and headlines with an eye toward the spatial limitations of the print medium. Like print paper size, screen size was a constraint that JJ kept in mind when setting up his landing pages. When I brought this cultural background up to JJ he was reluctant to agree with this sort of editorial work. He did not want to change headlines but instead said that the author would just learn to make it fit. In this way, JJ

imagined any content creators for this website will tacitly adopt the conventions he has created.

Of course, spatial organization is one of the significant features of what Kress (2006) identified as the visual (specifically screen) mode's ability to make meaning. The screen or image, argues Kress, does not have the centuries of "naturalized" convention that demand it be read in a singular direction like printed books. Using the example of a webpage from 1992, a 1940's chapter book, and an updated 2004 webpage, Kress argues that the screen has the potential for open, as opposed to constrained, order designated by reader rather than author. This, and other features, he contends are because in the updated webpage the logic of "image" begins to take hold as opposed to the logic of writing. Books, nevertheless, are not webpages and Kress' observations about fixed order would likely be different had he opted to juxtapose newspapers or periodicals with the updated webpage. To any effect, does it still hold that the screen has different potential because of the lack of "naturalized" convention? Not necessarily.

JJ's relationship with space is particularly telling when thinking of the naturalization of design conventions. For instance, one of the affordances of web design is endless directional scrolling – that is to say, the web page can be infinitely wide and infinitely tall. In many ways, the web page is unconstrained by a physical structure, yet a physical structure remained imposed on it by JJ's idea of a website. Nevertheless, JJ insisted that the website all land on one horizontal page with any necessary scrolling being vertical scrolling. When pressed, he said that vertical scrolling just made sense – he referenced social media, online news, and even computer-code editors all scrolled down rather than across. Vertical scrolling, in the context of computer coding, makes sense –

rather than a singular character being forced off the screen as you scroll, entire lines are disappeared which enables context to stay cloistered together – in this way, web texts seem to operate as remediated interactions with computer screens as much as they operate in accordance with the historical lineage of print publications.

Although there is likely more to discuss regarding historical lineages of computer screen and printed media, the next section will focus on an element of design found in both print and screen: whitespace. Below, I analyze JJ's relationship with whitespace in his design activity and how this principle of design overlaps with his work.

Whitespace, a historical background

JJ's relationship with whitespace is twofold. On one hand he used whitespace as a stand in for a design rule. For instance, when he said that whitespace is a way to rest the eyes – he was recognizing a tacit agreement between the designer and the audience that he should attempt to follow. In this rendering, the designer's job is not to overwhelm the audience but to keep things simple, pleasant, and inviting. The definition of whitespace in the frequently referenced book, "Non-Designers Design book," is:

> The space on the page that is not occupied by any text or graphics, you might call it "blank" space. Beginners tend to be afraid of white space; professional designers use lots of white space.

What I think is important to note here is the professional identity of designer is mediated, in part, by adherence to conventions of design literacies. There is a bit of a tautology here – you're no longer a beginner when you stop designing like a beginner – for instance, when you deploy the conceptual tools of design such as whitespace, contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity.

But – just as we do in our studies on language-- we have an obligation to investigate where conventions come from. Here I start with the antecedent genres: for JJ's project, I looked toward the print magazine - especially critique on "dense whitespace" in print environments. It is important to note that whitespace, as in the unoccupied space in visual media (including print), has always co-exited with visual media. However, only relatively recently has the density of whitespace (i.e. the amount in relation to occupied space) become such a center point for design.

In a series of experiments and articles, Pracejus, Olsen, and O'Guinn (2006)[32] have tracked the origins of this dense whitespace in publishing to the development of Western print advertisement. Their findings suggest three intersecting movements: minimalism, corporate art, and mid-century minimalist architecture. Corporate artists, with their increased relevance in business[33], drew from a contemporaneous minimalism movement that stressed the essence of an object rather than flashy or loud surrounding details. Additionally, mid-century minimalist architecture reflected an ethos of seeing open design as opulent and clean. Whitespace, in this way, is linked to an upper-class aesthetic. There is class stratification here that those who are "well off" are people with simple, elegant, orderly, and clean spaces that they can afford to keep empty.

Although unaddressed in their work, it is worth noting that these movements dovetail with development of inkjet and laser printing. Consider this in the context of visual reproduction technologies and the increasing relative ease of visual reproduction –

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[32] Also see Pracejus, O'Guinn, and Olsen (2013).
[33] Robert Jackall and Janice Hirota's (2003) *Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy* traces the developments of corporate artists in American advertising through, importantly, post-war propaganda.

as intricate visual designing becomes more accessible and more affordable the

convention switches to value the seemingly empty space. It is the absence of needing

signification that signifies the importance of the visual work. This holds true in Pracejus,

O'Guinn, and Olsen's (2013) research on whitespace that asked trained corporate

advertisement people and American consumers for thoughts on a hypothetical

advertisement. Both creative professionals and designers and the untrained consumer

associated high amounts of whitespace with prestige, trust, and luxury of the brands. In

other words, if you do not need to show or demonstrate that you are worthy, then your

worth is not in question.

There is a way to read the history of whitespace and JJ's use of whitespace as

conflicting. JJ was not inherently trying to make his webpage look elegant or luxurious.

Not once did he use these words to describe his process of designing. Nevertheless, these

values are likely reflected and coded as "looking professional". Looking professional, in

the context of web designing here, means, at least to some degree, reproducing the norms

and tropes of already existing corporate design. Furthermore, this professionality is

naturalized to JJ when he reflected on whitespace to "rest the eyes" or "make it pop".

This naturalization speaks toward a larger trend in multimodality studies where tools and

modes are imagined as having affordances and effects inherent in their being or design

and abstracted from the practices in time and space. If JJ were working on a print

publication in the 1930's it is unlikely that dense whitespace would be such a

domineering element of his design. In the context of JJ's design, dense whitespace is

recognized as valuable and professional – nevertheless, despite the cultural importance of

dense whitespace, JJ's relationship transcends the mere reproduction of conventions.

Framing conceptual tools

JJ's relationship with whitespace is less like following a rule and more akin to recognizing whitespace as a conceptual tool – to demonstrate that he is not afraid of making a "clean" and simple design. JJ was using whitespace to add contrast that he claimed helps make the design "pop" but also, and perhaps more importantly, to claim professionality in his design process. His dense whitespace is a signal to his audience that he knows what he is doing and that he understands the norms and expectations of this cultural moment. In this way, the visuality of the website afforded him a place to demonstrate his knowledge and practice meeting the expectations of his readers. This is quite different than the way affordances are rendered in multimodalism. In other words, if we are to find any use in the term affordances, we should link it to the production in time-space rather than the abstracted mode. To put it simply, we should be asking what our processes of composing allow us to feel and claim about ourselves and how these are related to the effects that features or inscriptions have on our audience[34]. Using the conceptual tools of a specific design culture affords JJ a claim to an identity as designer. The meaning that whitespace affords JJ's making is not inherently based on a sign. Instead, it is the absence of needing symbolic means that gives any power to whitespace or – to put it differently, as Cheryl Glenn (2004) describes it in the sonic context of silence – whitespace acts as "an absence with a function" (4). Whitespace, at least in JJ's web design, relies on a supposed display of opulence where whitespace occupies a

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[34] What I am calling for is reminiscent of Cheryl Ball's (2006; 2012) distinction between readerly & designerly although applied to the activity of creating rather than interpreting.

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cultural but non-symbolic meaning. Of course, this absence of symbolic meaning-making, like the case of not-speaking, is tied to perceived cultural positioning and access to technologies that, for lack of a better term, enable the *legible* practice of cultural literacies of web design. The difference here is that within a visual object, whitespace is not inherently representational. Whitespace as in: "this page left intentionally blank" does not signify a consistent logic or grammar as whitespace in the margins or the whitespace around an image in an academic article. Instead, whitespace affords a particular kind of practice in each of the contexts that it shows up in. To JJ and his web design this practice is housed in professionality, but whitespace to a printmaker might be a practice in technical expertise. In other words, the use of an organizational feature (e.g. space) is not inherent to the mode, as multimodalism would contend, but is tied to the context and practices of the specific activity.

Seeing like a web designer

For JJ, seeing like a web designer involved multiple activities. Seeing like a web designer involved peering beyond the screen and into the underlying grids and infrastructures that encode a website for individual devices. To JJ this encoding was manifested through ratios and precise numbered grids. But it also involved participating in the long lineage of visual cultures and print cultures. It's worth noting that as researchers, teachers, and designers we must be aware that when we are navigating whitespace we are navigating this complex history of printmaking that includes a corporate bias. I allow that our participation in this history has trained our bodies, including our eyes, to see things in a specific way but that this way is linked, in no small part, to an ideological coding and

valorization of opulence. But for JJ, seeing like a web designer was looking like a professional and claiming the cultural capital that comes with this performance.

There is a fine line between conceptualizing design practices as conventions or design practices as conceptual tools. For example, we can look toward JJ's artifact (a familiar looking webpage) and declare that he has followed conventions uninterestingly. In this rendering, there is little room for JJ to act and change and in many ways, this paints him as determined by conventions. Nevertheless, during my observations JJ employed activity that was both designerly and readerly. He used specific conventions to the degree that they were useful to him and the project he was undertaking and disregarded conventions that didn't enable him to claim the designer identity[35]. Yet, JJ is interesting: his project is a fairly subversive media – he wanted to make a magazine based on labor and climate activism, yet he seemingly drew inspiration from Time Magazine, Huffington Post, and an advertisement for Apple watch, things that likely wouldn't exist the same as we know them now in his version of a green utopia. But if we read JJ as deploying conceptual tools to claim an identity we can see, all at once, the pervasiveness of histories and cultural backgrounds of design conventions in identify formation. This next section demonstrates a moment when history and cultural backgrounds fail to explain a phenomenon and activity so we turn to the technological and aesthetic.

KT: Becoming Bokeh

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[35] For instance, subscription & profit model design is disregarded in this website while "write for" is featured more heavily.

In this section I analyze KT's Photoshop activity. As I explain below, KT's activity is especially oriented around the selection, removal, and transformation of one image layer onto another. She worked on this assignment quickly as the Photoshop file needed to be uploaded for her class on the top of the hour. This editing ability is complicated by her selected artifact – a picture she had taken on vacation. Discussing this artifact with her and recreating her picture taking activity enables a richer understanding of her photoshopping activity while simultaneously blurring the boundaries between picturing and editing. In doing so, I focus on bokeh as a technical and aesthetic development in photography that is complicated by a relatively new algorithmic[36] bokeh. Bokeh itself is a technical aberration and not based on what the eyes see but how light is shaped by a lens and mirror apparatus. Nevertheless, it is the real result of a process that genuinely captures light. Algorithmic bokeh, however, is simulated. It is a post-hoc techno-aesthetic. This is all to say that there are limits to reading design convention histories – especially as we look toward the technical and mechanical labors of composing.

Grade Points

An aspiring journalist currently taking a course in visual design, KT was a regular in the studio. She was enrolled in two universities and took online courses in journalism and writing while taking design-based courses locally. I observed KT in several projects – the one I focus on here is a homework assignment that was to allow her practice using color and light correction.

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[36] I hesitate to call this "artificial" because on what basis can I recognize bokeh (originally, a technical aberration in photography) as sincere?

Over the course of about an hour, KT pulled up a picture she had taken on vacation and started to "cut out" a bird from the photo in order to place it into a new context. The point of this assignment, we gathered, was to explore the color and light correction tools. During this she transformed and shaped the bird to fit more naturally into its new place on the wing of an airplane. She stopped frequently to question why her photo didn't look realistic and how the two disparate photographs weren't blending properly. As she worked to cut out this bird and place it into the new frame she encountered many dimensions – as recreated in this chart and discussed further below.
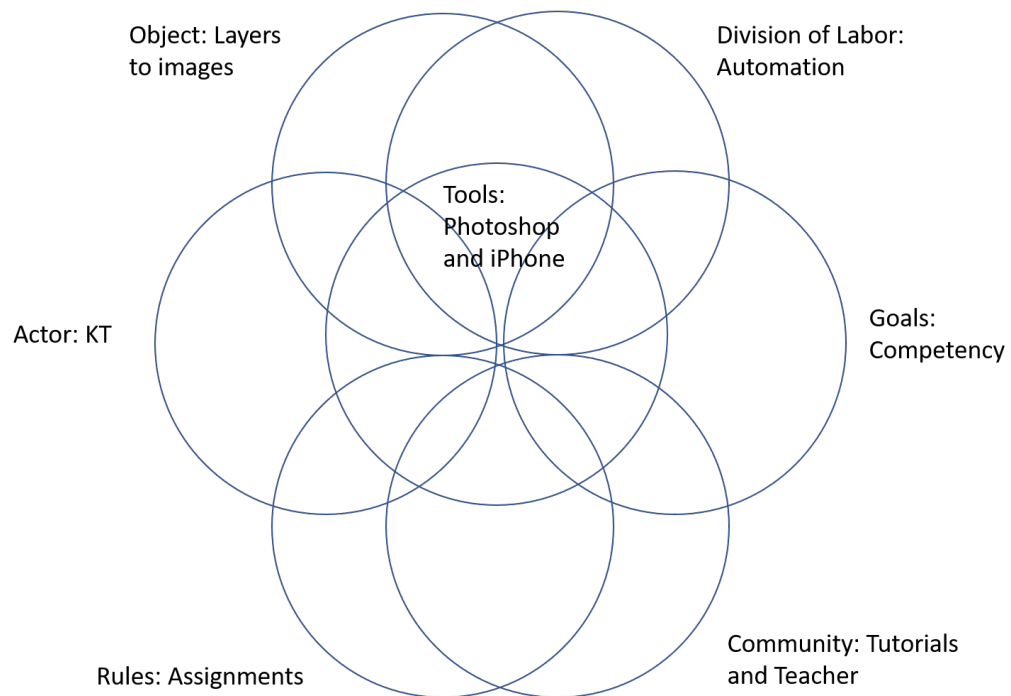

Figure 8 KT's flat CHAT

A teleological focus on her activity would identify KT as primarily focused on turning in an assignment that has done enough to warrant a decent grade. Although she rushes to complete her project her design work extends far before the project was assigned.

Actor: KT

I identify KT as the actor here as it is her editing that is the primary focus of this activity. KT herself is an aspiring journalist. She told me how interested she's been in journalism and especially photojournalism. I inquired about any journalist beat that she aspires toward but at the time of this writing she remains undecided. She has a keen interest in photography and owns several high-quality cameras, but she doesn't practice photography in a typical way. Instead of photographing landscapes or portraits for aesthetic appeal, she instead says that she photographs as if she were a reporter on site. The old adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words" comes to mind here, but for KT the picture helps her begin to write the story and doesn't act as the sole storyteller.

Object: Layers to image

The object of KT's activity were the layers of photographs she was turning into a singular image. Photoshop imported her photographs into layers on a singular frame. Imagine that you stack two photos on top of each other – the top layer is the only layer that is visible, so that is all you would see. Photoshop allowed KT to cut out the spaces around this top layer so you can see an object, in this case a bird, in the foreground while a background remains fully visible. In the case of her project, she was aiming toward a realistic rendition of an unrealistic scenario – specifically, she hoped to seamlessly cut out and place a picture of a seagull onto the wing of a moving airplane. Both photos were taken from separate devices and in different lighting conditions. This requires her to use many of the editing tools of photoshop to correct the light and color balance of both photos so they can appear to be cohesive. What she hoped to produce here is a singular Photoshop file that she will send to her teacher for comments and grades.

Rules: Assignments

Aside from rules of studio access and the rules that dictate how specific tools will operate, KT is primarily bounded by the interpreted rules of her assignment sheet. These rules are simple enough – use specific photoshop tools in order to correct color and light balance of two photos.

Tools: Photoshop and iPhone

KT used a Mac computer and Photoshop during her editing activity. She tabbed between two versions of her bird photograph. The photograph in question was taken on her iPhone camera using a new feature called portrait mode. On the software, KT used the magic eraser, the magnetic lasso, color curves, hue and saturation, and more as she isolated the subject and transformed it into a new setting.

Community: Tutorials

Despite the two universities she attends, the communities that KT operates within for this project are limited. The object of her activity is an educational object – it is unlikely that people outside of her and her teacher will ever see this photo. She used tutorials on YouTube and glances at Adobe blogs as she balances the transformation of her photograph, but these interactions are one-directional, meaning she takes advice or interprets the effects and tools in her context but does not communicate back. As we discuss how her teacher will grade this assignment, she confessed that her teacher pulls up the photoshop file tool log, the history of which tools and effects were used in creating the image, and grades the image with this surveilled knowledge.

Division of Labor: Automation

At face value, the division of labor for KT's activity is straightforward. KT is the single editor of the image while her teacher will likely be the only viewer of the image.

Nevertheless, we can bring a focus on the way KT uses tools that act as outsourcing of design labors. For instance, in the bird layer of her image – she used the magnetic lasso to try isolate the bird picture. When this strategy is inadequate, she transitioned to using an eraser to erase the background from her bird layer. She zoomed in at times and increased contrast in order to aid her eyes and hands as they cut this bird from the photograph. She adjusted saturation – not by inputting a number but by dragging a selector tool further to the right until her eye is satisfied with it. She opened the curves menu for each layer and attempted to correct them for each other before continuing to cut out her bird.

At one point she stopped in frustration. At that moment she was convinced that it's not going to work because the bird photo has blurred the bird's tail feathers and feet. As we talked about this she told me that she used her iPhone to take the picture of the bird and she had used the new "portrait" mode. This phone setting automatically identifies a subject in a photograph and applies a filter to blur the background of the photograph. But in this case it appears to have mistaken the bird's tail and feet for background. We wrestled with this for a while. To my eye, it seemed to be a very minimal flaw – truly maybe not even visible without using the zoom tool. She debated if she can just cut the bird's legs off and have the body resting on the wing but decided against it because it doesn't "look right". Eventually, she quickly performed an internet search and sees that she can reverse the portrait mode on the iPhone. She does that and reapplies the color correction and selection filters from before.

Goal: Demonstrate Competency

There is a way of viewing KT's goals as an activity focused on the demonstration of competencies. To be fair, this activity fits well in the regulated environment of an

educational assignment. Unexplored, however, is the unasked question: competency in what? Is it tool use? She might say so. Her teacher might say so as well. After all, the purpose of the assignment is to adequately use the photoshop tools to put two disparate images together while keeping their lighting and coloring consistent. KT summed it up as she is explained this to me: she wants the teacher to not know where one image ends and the other begins. There is a contradiction here, however, because turning the two photographs into a singular image creates an impossible scenario of a bird resting on the wing of a commercial airplane in flight.

There is also a sense of aesthetic competency here. KT selected the photograph that she was editing because she liked the original photo. It was a picture she had taken on vacation. The subject of the picture, the seagull, was well focused and centered in the frame and the background of the photo achieved the soft blur effect of bokeh. Initially, to my untrained eye, I thought it was an unremarkable photo, but when we encountered its faults and she told me more about the photograph, I learned to focus on the technical details and to see what she saw in the picture. When we finally compared the filtered versus the unfiltered image next to each other it was clear that the image she originally liked looked more "like a real picture".

Focal Points: Developing a cybernetic eye

After KT turned in her assignment we keep talking about her photograph because I want to get a fuller idea of how she took the picture and what she thought the picture might be used for. By expanding KT's editing activity to include the photographing, transporting, and tutorial-seeking practices that exist in conjunction with her editing I bring a new focus to KT's burgeoning cybernetic eye.

Despite the failings of the iPhone portrait mode, KT felt that a strong bokeh was important for this task because she was cutting a single subject against a complicated background out of the picture and putting it into a new picture. She had hoped that the soft focus would make it easier for Photoshop to automatically cut out the bird. Her relationship with bokeh is, in no small part, related to the division of labor for her assignment. KT is demonstrating a technical competency by making the tools do the work for her. There is a similarity here with JJ's case. Both cases show designers using tools to accomplish paratextual goals--that is to say, goals that are beyond the original scope of the tool design. JJ is using a concept of whitespace to stake a claim as a designer, and KT is using a portrait mode to hasten her cut and replace task. The failings of this simulated bokeh do not foreclose such paratextual activity. Below I expand on KT's experimentations with simulated bokeh.

Simulation aesthetic

Traditionally, bokeh is understood as the soft out of focus background behind the subject of a scene. Historically, this element is produced in the lens of the camera. A rough rule applies here that a more expensive camera lens produces bokeh more consistently. In the case of KT's phone things are a bit different. Her phone's "portrait mode" works by selecting a focal point, drawing an outline of the subject, and applying a blur filter to the remaining parts of the picture. This meant that the parts of the bird were already blurred, complicating her cut and replace activity. As we initially struggled to cut and place the bird, we questioned just how much of the bird really needed to remain for the image to succeed. Could we – perhaps, just salvage the bird head? Or maybe not worry so much

about the border between bird and background and just take a bit of the feathers? Or, perhaps we could digitally chop off the bird's legs.

Whether this simulated bokeh is successful or as aesthetically pleasing is irrelevant to the discussion here. Instead what is important here is that the historical technical proficiency required to achieve bokeh has, in part, started to be supplanted by automation and algorithmic cognition. The suggestion I want to make based off this data point is that the historic understanding of composing has its limits when the decision-making proficiency falls to the machine approximation. Bokeh works in cameras because of depth of field – the blur is the by-product of light behind the focal point hitting the sensor or filmstrip in multiple places. This portrait mode image was – to my eye – aesthetically pleasing but was a useful deception. KT and I talked a bit about why we think the portrait mode was rolled out on the iPhone – in part for capturing more aesthetically pleasing and more "Instagram-able" pictures of friends and faces. We even did our own experiments around the studio. Taking pictures of faces, objects, and such we concluded that the portrait mode was much better at locating faces and applying artificial bokeh than non-human faces. Space does not allow for a full history of portrait mode in cellular devices, but KT was operating under the impression that the mode is specifically created for improving the visual aesthetics of pictures for social media. Although portrait mode is seemingly participating in a social media "selfie" culture, KT's experimentations suggest something else is happening here.

Subverting the anthro-poetic

As KT reflects on taking the picture of the bird, she talks about the difficulty of getting the tool to act the way she wants. In hindsight, we both agreed that maybe her phone

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doesn't know what a bird looks like and it was too busy looking for faces, but as she reflects on that moment she talks about how the tool instructed her bodily activity of taking this picture. She said that she didn't have the luxury of zooming in and out – but had to sneak closer to the bird to take the photo. As she begins to train the iPhone to focus on the bird by tapping her finger on the screen – her phone instructs her with an onscreen prompt: "move closer". Here KT is not the only one in the driver seat. She is not merely manipulating the apparatus; an apparatus is manipulating her. She takes a few and then, finally, she says – the bird turns and presents a full profile view to the camera. This is the picture she keeps.

Although KT was manipulated and instructed by her phone she was, simultaneously, redefining the apparatus herself. What is interesting in KT's experience is that she re-made the portrait mode in order to capture a different type of picture of the bird. Although she and I both agree that portrait mode is probably supposed to only take pictures of faces, KT showed that in the face of a "single use tool," inventive and experimental engagement still happens. Even more, in some ways KT is challenging the history of portraits. The historical convention of portraits, generally visualized as the top third of a person, is challenged by KT applying a portrait to a bird. In doing so, KT was wrestling against human exceptionalism and technological and aesthetic determination and, at the very least, her relationship with the medium and mode is better summarized as an active relationship rather than the more passive relationship often assumed in remediation[37].

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[37] I am referring here, specifically, to the Bolter and Grusin (1998) approach to remediation that frames new media as paying homage to older media in their refashioning.

A future for transmodality

Through this chapter, I offer a version of transmodality that looks toward the backgrounds and unexplored spaces of design. This can be extended via the metaphor of *bokeh*, or the fuzzy and out of focus area behind the subject. Bokeh is not merely an aesthetic quality of photography but is the result of many interacting agents (the photographer, the lens-maker, the camera) all within domains of historical, cultural, aesthetic, and technological activity. In other words, I orient toward asking: what new interactions and insights become available when we come to reckon with how these fuzzy backgrounds have been created. This is in contrast to a simulated bokeh – one that is divorced from the material history of how these backgrounds are created and instead attempts to replicate them artificially. Throughout these analysis I oblige you to understand modes not as the abstracted channels of possible meaning-making but instead as the material labors of meaning-making.

I want to end here with some possibilities that I see emerging for transmodal work. A key theme to this chapter has been to address these two questions: 1) what we do in the background and 2) what is happening in the places that we've often ignored or glossed over. This is first reflected in the selection of data points: whitespace is that empty space on a screen that you might not even notice at first. And bokeh is the space behind the subject – that blurred background in something like a portrait picture. Secondly, these questions about background are reflected in my analytical framework. Largely, transmodality here is addressing: what entangles a designer as they use white space, how does an iPhone camera change the way we think of pictures, and how do we change the camera in our experimentation and play.

The point of my critique is not to complicate the process of making media. The process is complicated enough as it is – on the contrary though – I hope to illustrate what is operating underneath the surface of the simple and straightforward, "visual design elements". Well-meaning educators should approach conventions with caution and recognize that such conventions are always the result of emergent negotiations. Designers are always still experimenting with tools, and researchers need to wrestle with the long and emerging histories of design literacies alongside the interactions of designer and tool. Nevertheless, in each of the instances I analyzed here the participants elected to, more or less, reproduce[38] the genre expectations. At the end of JJ's project, he produced a conventional looking website with ample whitespace and elegant "simple design". And KT, despite her experimentations with the iPhone portrait mode, elected to select a different photograph without the artificial bokeh to more easily produce those hard boundaries that she thought her teacher would expect. That we can replicate norms from well in the past should not be to disparage the everyday designer or even to speak of the staying power of such norms. Instead, it should be read as the massive capabilities the everyday designer has to continue traditions and practices and, despite what appears to be only reproduction of norms, deploy such conventions strategically and newly.

A website that doesn't look like or act like we might expect a website to look and act runs the risk of being largely illegible, but we can rightfully point out that the methods for recognizing a website as professional are not without fault. Additionally, the tools themselves are built toward specific genre expectations and requirements, but a

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[38] This is not to suggest that reproduction of expectations is uncritical – on the contrary, the reproduction of genre features hints toward motivated rhetorical action on behalf of the designer (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010).

flexibility and experimentation is possible (to a fairly large degree) within the complex tools. For instance, countless layers, filters, and effects can be added with complete openness toward when and where. For the most part the tools themselves allow complete open transformation of the medium (almost a "if you can dream it you can make it") approach. To truly grasp the openness we should encourage experimentation and approach diverse understandings of genres with an openness.

By looking at activity – rather than supposed channels – we can enable a more robust analysis of multimedia work. There is a way in which we have always taught rules as tools and that reframing them enables some possibilities in the world – essentially, affording you access to a world when you play by the rules. These post-hoc approaches to modality – looking at the modality landscape through canonical adherence rather than new activity - contributes to keeping this landscape the same and, more troubling, obscures the active work of designers and others who, in part, contribute toward the continued, even as it is slightly revised, status-quo. The result of this approach is that we land on the commonplace of naturalized views of modality that leave little to no room for alternatives. This is especially problematic because, in matters of modality, we have worked hard at institutionalizing a canon because it is there, not because it is very good, and not because it has the interests of the humanities at its core. What I hope transmodality enables instead, is to not keep the world unchanged but to center how our everyday practices fundamentally change our modality landscapes. New manners of making will always emerge whether academics are there to study them or not, but if we truly aspire to pay attention we must learn to see, hear, and act like the makers.

This is not without precedent. Bourdieu's (2017) final lectures on Manet and the symbolic revolution[39] of Impressionism demonstrates how related such new meaning making endeavors were to material conditions of making meaning-making. According to Bourdieu, Manet's symbolic revolution manifests, in part, due to the sudden influx of art school graduates which stressed the contemporaneous system of state-sanction and produced art, combined with prepared tubes of paint and prepared canvas that enabled painting to leave the cloistered and controlled studio space and move outdoors. Suddenly, natural light and movement of the natural world, combined with the flexibility to paint on the go, were newly afforded by technological and social practices, and the world of art followed suit.

As researchers and teachers, we should engage with and learn to recognize these emergent practices from within rather than reacting to them after the fact. In order to do as much, it is imperative, and what I have hoped to achieve in my analysis here, that we move modality research outside of the discussion of what abstracted channels enable us to do and toward the sustained analysis of activities and materials that we make do with. In the following chapter, I articulate a theoretical orientation toward such a transmodal paradigm.

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[39] A symbolic revolution is always difficult to specify for the very reason that the manner of thinking and critiquing the new system is inherent to the new order and taken for granted.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Reflection

This project has largely coalesced around being present for multimedia composing. By observing and participating in the digital media studio I have been able to take part in the training of seeing, hearing, and feeling like a multimedia designer. One limitation, however, has been that I rarely looked toward modality-work outside the studio and out in the rest of the world. This should not be understood as locating modality-work as inherently based in studios and on screens. Rather, this project has been about re-framing modality as activity, and the studio space is just one place where such activity happens. Despite such limitations, I have kept in mind the myriad of activities that presuppose studio time – the photographing, interviewing, researching, and brainstorming. Nevertheless, the benefit of conducting research in the studio space is that it has prompted participants, and myself to be sure, to be mindful of meaning-making practices. The novelty (to some) and complexity (to many) of our tools demand a more present attention than the more naturalized[40] practices of sketching, doodling, or jotting that might take place in contexts less marked as "multimedia".

Chapter summaries

In concluding these chapter summaries, I briefly offer the key takeaways from individual chapters while outlining a connection, by way of examples, between each. In doing so, I articulate a through line that demonstrates the value of a transmodal theory of rhetoric and composition.

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[40] Naturalized as unmarked

Reading our past and rethinking our future

Chapter one historicizes the rise of multimodality theories and located multimodality in philosophical lineages of sensation and semiosis. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that rhetoric and composition has largely adopted an immaterial-semiosis approach to modality as an extension from the works of the New London Group (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, Cope and Kalantzis, 2009). In other words, our field has, with a few notable outliers (Prior 2005, Wysocki, 2005 Shipka, 2011), oriented its approach to modality based on seemingly new ways of mass meaning-making afforded[41] by technology and constrained by technical definitions of inherited and ontologically frozen semiotic modes. Even as multimodality has worked to address low-fi designing outside of fetishizations of material technologies,[42] the imperative to count abstracted resources from canonical practice still exists. This approach, although well equipped for naming some of the material constraints of modality,[43] is ill equipped to account for how modality-work often falls outside of and beyond strict abstracted definitions. This is especially true in matters of looking beyond a vague reference to enculturation and attending to material practices. There is a contradiction here wherein multimodalists, whose version of mono/multimodalism claims to draw its rhetorical power from mythicized autonomous modes and who define the proper use of multimodality as a

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[41] Though, as I have said earlier: what is probably more likely is that technology has afforded new visibility to mass meaning-making practices outside of print – that, however, is a whole other debate.
[42] This is the case with the NCTE 2014 poster on multimodality (https://secure.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/CCC/0653-feb2014/CCC0653PosterMultimodality.pdf)
[43] This is especially the case as multimodality has been used to identify disability and accessibility concerns in print, digital, and other environments. For instance, in Multimodality In Motion, the authors do not challenge or ask to reshape a theory of modality based in disability studies but instead point toward how multimodal texts and environments intersect with new inaccessibilities that have historically already been worked around in text delivery (Yergeau et al., 2013).

harnessing of many resources, examine spontaneous artifacts or products of multimodal

creation that are seemingly born of abstracted and unspecific contexts or contexts so far

removed historically so as to be pragmatically spontaneous. In other words, despite the

multimodal recognition of historic practices that sediment into current practices,

multimodal analysis turns toward the use of semiotic resources for their own sake rather

than an ongoing shaping of semiotic resources for current or future contexts. In this way,

under multimodalism the users of a modality are divorced from the ongoing

sedimentation that renders the modality so apparently powerful to begin with. This is in

stark contrast to how writers and designers actively create with modality. For example,

when JJ is creating his webpage in chapter 4, he is not uncritically following rules of

design or affordances of websites but is imagining how an audience will take his website

up.

Transmodality and enactive ethnography

In chapter two I outline a version of Cultural Historical Activity Theory and enactive

ethnography that allows for a more robust interpretation of and participation in

transmodal activities. If our field is to shift toward a view of modality-work that

recognizes the agentive possibilities of composing, then our methods must shift to

accommodate this new agenda. What I suggest here is that researching to perform rather

than to explain enables new insights into the everyday practices of modality-work.

Refocusing our research as emic, or emergent from the participants we work with, rather

than based in our own etic, or pre-determined, categories does not necessitate an

immeasurably subjective approach to modality-work. Instead, we look toward how

participants encounter and circumvent the challenges implicit in various ways of

composing to identify skills, materials, and proclivities that have a current impact. For instance, in KT's photoshopping activity of the bird and the plane, we both agreed that she likely could have cut the photo of the bird differently, perhaps shaving off the legs or back tail feathers, and still accomplished the understood goals of her assignment, but she resisted because her proclivities were to have the entire bird captured in the photo, in no small part because of her attachment to the bird and the experience of taking the picture.

Troubling and Interfacing

In chapter three I analyzed the media studio as both a human-less and idealized human-occupied place. This analysis demonstrated how studio spaces often act to legitimize practices inasmuch as these practices can be replicated from elsewhere. This chapter served to trouble a techno-semiosis virtue of replication and legitimization by way of framing a transmodal virtue of retrofitting. The transmodal approach to meaning-making is one that recognizes the agentive role of retrofitting (or making what is available fit into new arrangements). If the Aristotelean norm of our field has been that rhetoric is using "the available means of persuasion," then the transmodal approach is to recognize that the means are made to fit (and in the process indelibly changed) to fit our contexts.

Unexamined Backgrounds

In chapter four I analyzed cases of new media composing in practice. These cases point toward the ongoing remaking and occasional subversion of multimodal channels – or the processes of retrofitting. Across this dissertation I have argued that semiotic channels – as multimodalists have imagined them being encultured resources for meaning-making – are insufficient for understanding modality-work. In concluding this chapter, I argued that the practices themselves shape the channel into what is eventually researched under

the guise of multimodality. For instance, KT and her use of the phone's portrait mode remake a version of technology and portrait making all while she's remaking a way of interpreting the visuality of her image.

Implications for the study of modality

During this research, the question has sometimes been implied: does multimodality have a place after transmodality. The answer is not a simple yes or no. On the one hand, yes – multimodality is such a well-established and diverse field across the globe that to write it off entirely would be presumptuous and impossible. People will continue to dissect and research the channels of communication via a semiotic approach that encapsulates cultural history into meaning-making practices.

But should the future of rhetoric and composition be tied to these approaches? To this, my answer is no. I imagine the techno-semiotic definitions of modality are a relief to many of my peer teachers and researchers because in our busy lives it gives us a base to hold on to. We can stand definitively behind the many books and articles and say: this is what it means to do visual work, or this is what it means to write in sound. But we must be wary of relying too heavily on these technical approaches. An overly technical approach lends itself to constraint and acts to legitimize practices because they have traction in a certain set of contexts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) are no strangers to this and caution against such a "visual literacy" in *Reading Images* despite simultaneously claiming that such literacies and grammars are more akin to suggestions than edicts. Their approach recreates the old saying: know the rules before you break them – and we are right to be cautious of this statement because knowledge of rules,

without the consideration of how rules are made and enforced, does not enable any authorized "breaking" of rules and, in fact, reinforces a sense of norm.

What is often identified as the skill in using the *rules* of modality is abstracted from the actual practices of composing. Kress and van Leeuwen's discussion of a horse and prison guard photograph[44] illustrates this disjoining. In their reflection of a horse seemingly gazing and offering some mysterious force to the viewer, they neglect the paratext of this photograph. The photograph in question is part of Danny Lyon's *Conversations with the Dead*, a book of photographs, prisoner artwork, stories, and letters from death row inmates in Texas State prisons. Does the low angle make the prison guard look powerful? Perhaps. But is this the intention behind the image and/or a reflection of Lyon's positionality as non-incarcerated but nevertheless subjugated position[45]. More telling, perhaps, are the preceding pictures of inhumane treatment of inmates and the nonchalant posture of the guard. The gaze of the horse might be powerful to Kress and van Leeuwen, but to locate such power in the angle and lines of an apparent visual grammar misses large portions of the activity surrounding the photograph in its composing and circulating activities and the history of Lyon's civil rights activism.

As a field we should be prepared to come to terms with the limitations of mainstream multimodalism. The theoretical reliance on canonical pasts and abstracted grammars based on the reception of an object provide very few ways forward to scholars who aspire to research modality as it unfolds as current and critical practice. What is needed is a theory and pedagogy for recognizing the agentive moments of modality-work

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[44] The photograph in question is Danny Lyon's (1969) Prison Guard
[45] In subsequent interviews Lyon has talked about feeling out of place and incompatible with the guards while simultaneously feeling connected with the prisoners.

that happen today as it aspires to make new possibilities for the future. In other words, a theory and pedagogy that answers: "what can we do now in order to be able to do tomorrow what we are unable to do today" (Freire, 2006, 108).

For Tomorrow: A Theory of Transmodality

The theory of transmodality that I have hoped to articulate across this project is one that is best summarized by shifting a key theoretical frame from a multimodalism view of using a mode to the transmodality approach to doing (or enacting) modality. The multimodal framework is, generally, oriented toward the analysis of the creation of artifacts through inherited semiotic channels. In other words, multimodality contends that by looking toward how the "available means" have been deployed, we can understand the process of creating. Transmodality, on the other hand, recognizes that these "available means" are always in flux and available only to some in specific contexts – for this reason, the means themselves require further expansion. Where multimodality functionally blackboxes the emergent logics and grammars of singular modes, transmodality recognizes the ongoing work that is creating, revising, and otherwise changing the channels of composing. This means that as a theory of composing, transmodality is better off conceptualizing modality as an activity of production.

Playing with the old adage: "to a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail" might shed some light here. The multimodal approach has been to look at how someone uses the hammer (the mode) and to, perhaps, reason that the hammer has a long history from stone tools to modern carpentry that affords its current use of driving a nail into a wall for the purpose of hanging a painting. This offers a rich analysis, to be sure, but does it explain the activity? Does it explain how or why the person acts and does it

explain other tools, for instance a level, that are used in conjunction with the hammer? The transmodal framework instead looks at a person hammering, perhaps with improvised tools, and reasons beyond this to say the act of hammering is inventive – what historically hasn't acted as a hammer or hasn't acted as a level is brought into new contexts and newly created by the actor. To be fair, we can discuss the historical and contemporary access to hammers, but to only recognize hammering when a hammer is present or to only recognize hammering as a function of a hammer is a theoretical misstep. This is a simplification, to be sure, but it illustrates that conceptualizing modes as something to be used rather than enacted has significant limitations on how to view activity. Let me be clear, the imperative to recognizing complexity in modality work is not seeing complexity for the sake of seeing complexity, and the result of recognizing complexity is not to throw our hands up and declare infinite reductions or expansions.

To put it simply, transmodality recognizes that it is the mode of production or the activity that is more fruitful to our research on writing and designing in historic and contemporary contexts. It is the processes of seeing, doing, writing, drawing, and more that are not merely deploying cultural resources but are actively shaping them. Such processes are, undeniably, connected with their history, which includes access to tools and materials, but the history does not create the process – on the contrary – the process enacts the history.

The differences between multimodality and transmodality are illustrated in these two diagrams representing composing activity.
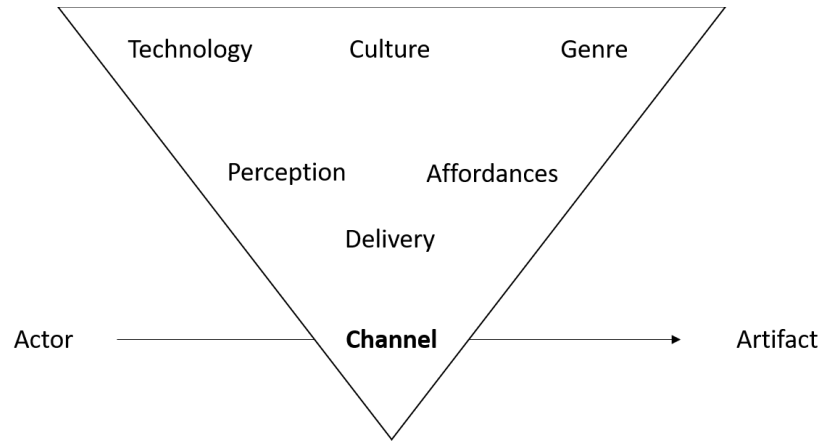
Figure 9 Multimodal process

FIGURE 1, represents a multimodalism framework for composing activity. In this framework, an actor is creating an artifact by going through a semiotic channel or mode. Within this channel are the myriad of concerns, constraints, and affordances. Nevertheless, the semiotic channel is the container through which these concerns and constraints are understood. In this way, multimodalism looks toward how the actor *uses the means embedded in the semiotic mode* in creating their eventual artifact. This language ought to be familiar with teachers who have used popular rubrics to give multimodal assessments that measure adherence to mode expectations. The next figure is the transmodal framework for composing activity.

Figure 10 Transmodal process

As seen above, this figure is primarily focused on the activity or mode of production that, in creating an artifact, also contributes to the creation of the artifact's channel. Above the mode of production are the intra-actional components of composing. Such intra-actions[46]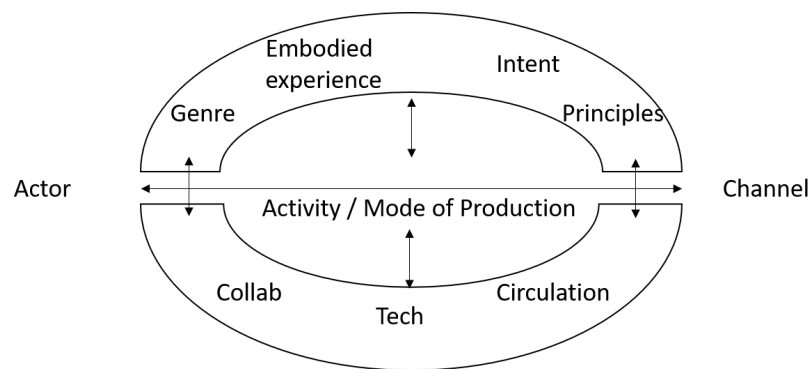 might historically be framed as the invention techniques, but their role continues throughout the process. These intra-actional concerns are not new to our field and, to date, each of these concerns has tomes of pedagogies and research dedicated to them. To be sure, these intra-actions are not closed from the inter-actional work below the mode of production. Below, the inter-actional work is focused on connections across actors and artifacts both conscious and unconscious. For instance, a single person working on a billboard design can still be collaborating when they borrow images from image sharing libraries or as they follow tutorials and templates in their designing. Even something as simple as font choice, if it becomes an element of design, is evidence of collaboration. By technology I do not mean simply digital or computerized but instead all tool use and the interactions between tool and designer. In other words, the inter-actional layer below the activity is a representation of the external and material influences on the composing activity.

Let me be clear, it is not that the intra/inter-actional concerns are new concepts that need to be addressed – we've had a long history of addressing each of these both separately and in cohort with the other concerns. What transmodality offers here is a very clear time and place when these concerns interact and asks researchers and pedagogues to plumb the ongoing activity rather than rely on grammars or conceptions from the past.

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[46] I have called these intra-actions because they are most easily conceptualized as internalized forces. Of course, they are not wholly internal forces but instead reflect how the topics in question are taken up by the actor.

This is not to suggest that our analysis aims to be atemporal – on the contrary – histories are enacted and brought into new life through everyday practice. The historic view remains important, yet history is not inevitable. In other words, history, especially the history that multimodalists have told to date, as an explanation can only go so far and is always, by virtue of continually emerging, in process. The methods or channels we use to continue communicating are powerful, but they are not abstract and immaterial from the practices that enact them. In other words, we do not need to look backwards to explain *why* a particular facet surfaces during composing activity but instead look toward *how* a particular facet reenacts a history.

In other words, a theory of transmodality is a theory of enaction. The manners of meaning-making that we take as pre-given are, in fact, newly created through our everyday actions. Accepting this approach to modality has important implications in the teaching of writing in our 21st century contexts.

For Today: Sketching a Transmodal Writing Program

At the institutional level, the writing program remains an integral part of the university system. A Transmodal Writing Program isn't remarkably different than a writing program based in the recognized practices of NCTE and CCCC. This is to say, writing programs that have reflected on how they use disciplinary knowledge in their local contexts, rather than adopting a skills or competency model, may likely see themselves reflected in the Transmodal Writing Program. In both the traditional and the Transmodal Writing Program students come to learn that writing is emergent, recursive, and contextual. Both programs might manifest by having students first recognize the

contradictions and emergent nature of composing before then reflecting and extrapolating on what the causes of these contradictions are and eventually revising these causes through their own practices. Both programs will engage students in the process of composing.

The major difference here is that the Transmodal Writing Program extends this recognition and reflection toward meaning-making more broadly. At face value, this might sound like it could fall victim to a trap of additive monomodal/lingualism whereby additional practices are continually added. Yet, this is not necessarily the case. Although any number of meaning-making practices can be demarcated out across many situations, the role of writing education and, indeed, scholars of rhetoric and composition is not to inoculate students to compose well in every situation. In other words, to the Transmodal Writing Program, it becomes apparent, very quickly, that there is limited time to dedicated to the multiple ways of doing composing. The recognition here stresses that the outcomes that will have the most lasting value to the students we teach are outcomes freed from competencies or the replication of norms and tied instead to reflection and contextuality. This reflection and contextuality is apparent across a broad range of languaging-practices – the Transmodal Writing Program recognizes that drawing connections across meaning-making that is recognized as visual, sonic, or linguistic based allows for different in-roads to understanding and unpacking how contexts influence meaning-making.

In other words, writing – as important as we recognize it to be – is not the singular torchbearer for meaning-making. And, as seemingly contradictory as it sounds, the Transmodal Writing Program recognizes that writing, especially the manner of writing

that we regularly teach, is not inherently special[47]. Street's (1985;2003) critique of

autonomous literacy is particularly salient here and below I give two examples of how

writing is rendered as acting upon people and society in order to argue that such action is

not inherent to writing but is a feature of how we currently understand writing as a mode

of production and circulation[48]. On one hand, we consider writing as a way of bridging or

enabling new forms of participation. Sylvia Scribner (1984) points out three metaphors of

literacy, and each representing one version of this approach to writing. In her work

recognizing latent cultural metaphors for literacy she recognizes three separate metaphors

for writing: writing as adaptions (functional and pragmatic participation in society),

writing as power (ideological access and critique to larger social issues), and writing as a

state of grace (cultural capital and a sense of endowed purpose). Each positions writing,

or in her case, literacy, as the bridge to new forms of participation in society. The way we

often conceptualize writing as acting upon us is when we view writing as an instrumental

process: or writing that does something to the writer. Writing-to-learn is a version of this

approach to writing. In writing-to-learn pedagogy and research, writing is positioned as

instrumental to the learning process through various levels of structured (e.g. synthesis)

or less structured (e.g. reflection) practices. Historically, these practices reflect and

recreate the epistemic logics of the discipline in question, although increasingly reflection

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[47] I do not mean for this to be polemic. Nevertheless, as a field we should be cautious as to how we justify
the value of writing without relying on folk definitions, cultural myths, or logical syllogisms. McLuhan's
(1964) *Understanding Media* is one such syllogism where he posits that Greco-Roman alpha-numeracy is
the enabling extension whereby the West harnesses power via science, logic, and classification but in
doing so mistakes the medium of dominance for the source of dominance. If McLuhan had grown up
writing in Japanese Kanji it's safe to assume he might have a different perspective on the power of any
particular alphabet.
[48] I am using a monomodalism definition of writing here as the act of legibly transmitting one meaning-
making system to elsewhere based in alphanumeric symbols.

on tool use and learning in situ are popular within professional and trade practices (Klein & Boscolo, 2016).

Although alluring and, at times convincing, the autonomous model of literacy's approach to writing, if understood as abstracted act of producing alphanumeric characters for circulation, wrongly empowers writing to act. The strength of Scribner's accounts of literacy metaphors is that she locates writing in already existing and active systems. Literacy, in her rendering, is contingent upon participating in a world where writing systems are already culturally significant for interaction. Writing-to-learn, at best, locates writing as an activity within practices and routines. In neither of these accounts is writing constructed as the abstract production within a semiotic channel because such a decontextualized perspective on writing remains unremarkable. Any abstracted perspective of writing says little to nothing about the motives of the people and systems who write and receive and little about the actual, physical activity of writing.

The degree to which we hallow writing merely makes writing hollow. Alphanumeric writing is special as we use it to think, problem solve, express feelings, reflect, and digest, but these are not inherent to writing but instead are inherent to the local practices (Street, 2003). Perhaps it is the case that such writing is most suited for these activities in our current cultural moment[49] – I do not think we are equipped to claim as much but I allow it as a possibility. The same is true as we move across other manners of knowing. The power of visual work is not that vision allows for some universally unique capabilities but that diverse versions of vision-work enables some versions of invention, relationships, and expression. The same is true for sonic-work and others, to be

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[49] We should, nevertheless, critique why writing – with its link to accounting, precision, and domination is the primary way we have hypothesized thinking, feeling, and otherwise.

sure. The claim has often been that each of these ways of knowing have their own affordances—for instance, that vision allows for spatial organization and differentiation in more accessible ways then sound or writing. That vision and sound are taken into the human mind differently is readily apparent when looking at various scans of the brain; but what purpose does it serve to look so far back and presuppose that visual, sonic, or other manners of knowing have some primordial affordances outside of the activities using such manners of knowing? Visuals work to instill organization, in no small part, because we have grown accustomed to using visuals to organize information. To make grand claims about the nature of human meaning-making based on such limited historical context is a semiotic version of phrenology. Instead our focus must be on operating and reflecting on the contexts in which we are asked to live, work, and produce meaningful compositions. In other words, the Transmodal Writing Program recognizes that writing and composing, no matter how they are achieved, are powerful to the extent that we use them.

A potential mission for the Transmodal Writing Program can be as simple as: the study and practice of making-meaning. Looking toward how meaning is made for others requires a tool set for unpacking the contextuality of meaning-making practices. The transmodal toolset for unpacking context is based around the figure in the previous section that locates composing activity as paramount to the creation of semiotic channels. I have given semiotic channels plenty of guff across this project – as starting points for a multimodal framework they are entirely insufficient. Nevertheless, the semiotic channel – that is, the way of recognizing meaning-making—remains a useful end point in modality work. This is to say, the transmodal process of composing does not start by

conceptualizing a pregiven modality but instead creates the modality through the composing activity. In this way, the students in the Transmodal Writing Program learn to recognize and reflect on how their work participates in the ongoing creation of ways of seeing, knowing, hearing, understanding, and so on.

Such reflection and contextuality will be different at each institution and therefore difficult to summarize here. For what it's worth, I imagine that to be a strategic and useful WPA will require that we take stock of how the writing program contributes to cultures of writing at the institutional and community level. Researchers in rhetoric and composition understand that academic or college writing is not a monolith, yet, to the many people outside our fields this misconception holds true. For this reason, a mission of the Transmodal Writing Program is dispelling these misconceptions at the institutional and public levels by collaborating across disciplines and encouraging careful community work. In short, the students, peers, and colleagues of the Transmodal Writing Program learn to focus their energy on both creating ways for people to understand what they compose and recognize the outside world of composing.

Making Modality 101 (a tentative and incomplete outline)

In outlining a first-year writing curriculum in a Transmodal Writing Program, I begin with two sets of questions that can just as easily be asked institutionally as well as to students in our classes.

In my own local context, I focus on two questions to inform the creation of a Transmodal Writing Program first year curriculum. The Transmodal Writing Program begins with "what does it mean to compose?". This is not to say that the Transmodal Writing Program is singularly concerned with what writing or composing enables in the

world (although this is a topic worth exploring) nor does it mean that a Transmodal Writing Program is singularly concerned with the affectual dimensions of composing. Instead, the program is concerned with the multitudes of doing that coalesce into writing and composing. Toward this end, we can utilize reflection and autoethnography as pedagogical tools to have students investigate the myriad ways of creating. Secondly, the Transmodal Writing Program asks, "what are the local conditions of composing?"; "what resources exist for students?"; "What are their time scales?". This question can likely be reframed as "what does it mean to compose here and now" and will be different across university contexts.

Like any contemporary writing program, a Transmodal Writing Program recognizes the value and expertise that students bring with them to the classroom. Such experiences are ripe for reflection, but it is important that this reflection is not reflection for the sake of critique – but instead reflect on how to do/perform. In forming my own online version of a first-year writing course I ask students to write a narrative of how they have created a thing they were proud of. This object can be an essay, story, song, poem, video as long as it is some form of meaning-making for other people. Key to this assignment being useful is guiding students to think of how they created their artifact outside of the abstract narratives and into the gritty reality of creating. Asking them to reflect on the process of learning to sound out rhythm or learning to use a photo editing technology positions them to reflect on how they learned to create meaning in these new contexts. Throughout this process, I ask them for continued reflection on their choices. For instance, perhaps a student's prized audio-essay required their practice in achieving a particular vocal tone –in this case I direct their reflection on what this tone might work to

signify and why it seemed so important at the time. Throughout the process, I look toward the intra/inter-actional facets of composing. For instance, how did personal experience with radio influence an audio-essay or, perhaps more interesting, how did a history of essay reading and writing influence an audio-essay? By the end of this project, they will have begun to recognize their past processes of creating their own ways of seeing, sounding, and knowing. And will have, perhaps, come to potential avenues for revision and rethinking their future work.

These essays form a collaborative corpus for the class to then analyze and discuss further. Through group projects students can find connections across their ways of making-meaning for others and their peers' making-meaning for others. In a collaboratively written piece, students examine, compare, and synthesize how, for instance, some sonic work is both similar and different to visual work or work that is primarily text. Students also learn to recognize how even compositions in the same media are inherently different based on context--for instance, business memos and PR releases.

As a final project, students will recreate something they've never created before as inspired by a classmate. Classmates can be used as expert resources as students learn to teach each other new ways of making-meaning for others. Throughout this project students will draw from their past experiences reflected in their first essay and might be guided to think about how they are drawing from similar genres or past embodied experiences as they meander through their new creation. The culmination of this project is both the created artifact and a very brief reflection on the process of creating the artifact.

The purpose of this curriculum is the reflection and practice in what it means to learn a new way of meaning-making. The meaning-making contexts that these students graduate into are disparate and radically different from one another. Writing in biology might be more similar than different to writing in chemistry, but both require learning discipline specific skills, contexts, and proclivities. As a writing program, we are often charged with inoculating students for an ongoing and tacit enculturation into diverse meaning-making paradigms. Without individualized courses of instruction this task is seems impossible. But, learning how to make enculturation and learning-how-to explicit puts a set of tools into the hands of the learner.

Researching a Transmodal Future

Transmodality as a research paradigm is focused on practices. At the largest and most abstracted scale, modality practices can be summarized as how meaning is made for others or how the activities of creating an artifact also contribute to creating the decoding mechanism the audience will use. Nevertheless, there are a few useful caveats for the future of Transmodal research.

First, Transmodality should not replace critique through difference. Recognizing that each modality practice is inherently different does not mean that other differences are to be brushed aside. To put it simply, the recognition of modality practices as inherently and individually different should not result in ignorance to critical differences. Non-English speakers and writers face significant challenges in our cultural systems and this is exacerbated by visual and sonic features of their languaging practice (accent, perceived race, etc.). Transmodality researchers should not lose sight of how some differences are more impactful than others and absolutely should not minimize these critical differences

in favor of more readily accessible differences. Secondly, Transmodality is not a theoretical stick to beat multimodalists over the head with. Many of the multimodalists that continue writing and teaching are compassionate teachers and researchers who are concerned with the instruction and reflection of non-textual meaning-making. The findings and implications of multimodalists are often that non-textual matters, to various degrees, matter more than we might think. These sorts of findings are allied with the transmodal paradigm, even if their theoretical imperative to locate grammars and structures are more reflective of current culture than ontological reality.

At the very least, what I have done across these few chapters is point toward the specifics of how we might come to study and theorize the activities of modality-work. By working with participants and keeping a keen attention toward their personal methods of retrofitting for their particular context I have attempted to show that modality-work is not merely the activity of creating an artifact in a new media but is the ongoing creation of the changed channels of communication. At best, what I have hoped to have done across these chapters is to convince a reader that the activity of making modality is a useful location for critiquing how our ideological, political, and educational systems work to instill a monomodal norm.

Toward a People's History of Multimedia Composing

A limitation of this project has been that I have focused entirely on present activities. I want to address this limitation by offering a brief outline of how transmodality might contribute to an archival or historical research paradigm. One direction for transmodality is to look at the background work that has gone into creating our various modes of production. Despite transmodality's bend toward practices and activity, historical and

archival work remains a way to intervene in and understand the current conceptions of meaning-making. Such transmodal archival work is not done to canonize or legitimize design principles or practices but to better understand the phenomenon as it relates to the practices from which it emerged. For instance, analyzing the Web brutalist movement[50] in the context of nostalgia for early internet design before largescale consumerism might help to point toward an untold, but nevertheless subversive, style of web design. Additionally, recreating and bringing voice to the telecom workers who manually connected phonelines puts into context the unseen labor that built the seemingly effortless mass-media of today. Toward this end, what is missing from our books and articles on modality is a people's history of multimedia composing.

A people's history of multimedia composing is a transmodal project as it seeks to enjoin the activities of many of the unseen and unrecognized actors in creating the norms that multimodalists take for granted today as well as giving narrative to non-mainstream modality practices that continue to be marginalized. Such a project wouldn't aim to merely explain why the norms are what they are but how they became that way – with specific attention toward how, in our current moment, we might better recognize where we steer modality-work. In summary, when faced with a contemporary design principle, such a project would ask: off whose back was this design principle made? Who was left excluded by this design principle? Who had the most to gain by enforcing this design principle? These questions, and more, are a necessity to creating and teaching a transmodal future for all.

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[50] A movement of web design that is focused on dated, low-fi, and, at times, difficult to use interfaces as a response to the streamlined corporate norms of web design.

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Purely Presidential

It's necessary to emphasize the library in the next few years as we strive to build quality at the University of Louisville, for the library is the symbolic heartbeat of the university. I'm happy to say almost everybody agrees that this should be our highest priority. In fact, we won't be able to take our place among the major urban universities of the country in the years ahead, as I believe we should, without improving the depth and range of our holdings.

Our library has many fine points—a rich rare books collection, a good general archive, an extraordinary photo archive, and a fairly solid monograph collection—but overall the holdings aren't good enough. We have to improve them. We can build quality in a library only one way—by sustaining a high level of acquisitions over a long period of time. That's what we must do, and that's what we're committed to do. We'll try to get more money from the state, but I frankly don't expect to find a treasure trove of new resources in Frankfort.

Instead, we've positioned ourselves so that we can reallocate some of our available resources to improve the library. We also have to go out and raise private money. Our ambitious five-year major fund drive, which we shall explain fully in the next issue of this magazine, will begin later this year. Of the funds raised, we hope to target five or six million dollars for the university libraries. About a million dollars is needed for a quick infusion to improve serials and retrospective acquisitions. The remainder will form an endowment fund for the library. By investing that money, we shall have a steady income year after year to augment the state allocation. That will be the key to quality in the long run.

Over the years the Library Associates have been a loyal, devoted group who have supported the library, both as a center of scholarship and as a source of aesthetic pleasure. To book lovers, after all, books are beautiful. The Library Associates include some wonderful people who love books and who appreciate them as an art form, as a cultural asset, and as a valuable resource for scholarship and research. We're indebted to the Library Associates for everything they've been able to do, and we hope they will become the core of the group that will now help us raise an endowment for the library.

Ekstrom Library is a magnificent building, one of the most beautiful and functionally attractive libraries I've ever seen. Now we must improve its collections. Our libraries are the real benchmarks of our quality as a university. The better their quality, the better the quality of intellectual life in metropolitan Louisville and in Kentucky.

—Donald C. Swain

Photo by Mike Saffran

U of L Magazine undated 1980s? or 1990s?

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Fire Alarms and Exits

When the fire alarms sound, the building must be evacuated immediately. Do not use the elevators. Stairwells are located on the north, south and west sides of the building. There are five fire exits off the main floor, as well as the main exit in the center of the building. The fire exits are to be used *only* in case of fire; they are *not* public exits. The only public entrance or exit is in the lobby on the main floor.

Group Discussion Rooms

Students who wish to study together may use the group discussion rooms located on various floors throughout the building. Rooms are available on a "first come" basis only.

Lost and Found

Items, and reports of lost and found items, should be taken to the Circulation Desk. Unclaimed items are periodically taken to the Student Government Office.

Money Changers

Dollar bill changers are located in the Photocopy Rooms on the second and third floors.

Pencil Sharpeners

Pencil sharpeners are mounted on the walls across from the north and south stairwells on each of the floors except the main floor. A pencil sharpener is also located in the Reference Room.

Restrooms

Restrooms are conveniently located across from the stairwells on each floor on the extreme north and south ends of the building.

Smoking

Smoking is permitted only in the following areas: the ground floor lobby, the Smoking Lounges on the third and fourth floors, and the Student Study Lounge on the main floor.

Student Study Lounge

Located at the Library entrance, the Student Study Lounge offers students a pleasant place to take a break. Public telephones and vending machines are found in the lounge area, as well as a campus bulletin board and a TARC schedule stand. Eating and smoking are allowed in the lounge. An after-hours entrance from the vestibule to the lounge enables students to use the area at times when the rest of the Library is closed. After-hours use of the lounge varies depending on the availability of staffing.

Telephones

RED on-campus phones are located across from the north and south stairwells on each floor. Public pay phones are located at the north corner of the Student Study Lounge.

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Typewriters

Unfortunately, typing facilities are not available in the Ekstrom Library. Typewriters are available in the Student Government Office for student use.
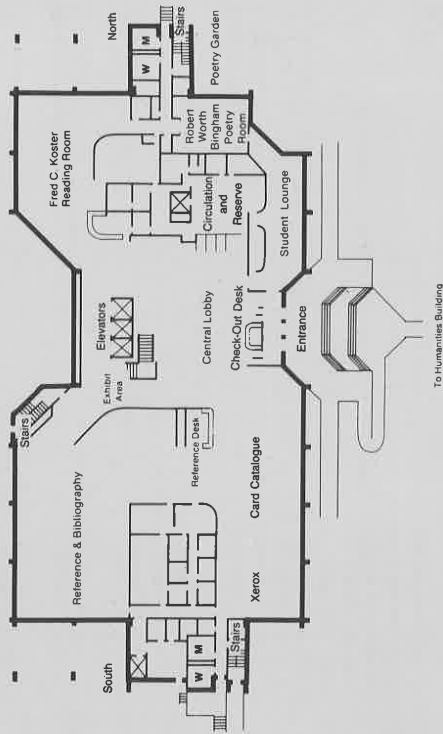
Vending Machines

Food and beverages may be purchased from the vending machines located in the Student Study Lounge. Consumables are restricted to the lounge area only.

Water Fountains

Water fountains are located across from the north and south stairwells on each floor.

Maps

Main Level

CURRICULUM VITAE
Christopher Scheidler
Education
Ph.D. Rhetoric and Composition, 2020
University of Louisville
Dissertation: *Making Modality: Transmodal Composing in a Multimedia Studio*
Committee: Bruce Horner (director), Bronwyn Williams, Karen Hadley, & Anne Francis Wysocki

M.A. English, 2016
University of Louisville
Culminating Project: *Touching and hearing the writing feels: Multimodal and (im)material embodiment of clackers*

B.A. Professional and Technical Writing, 2014
Saginaw Valley State University

Positions Held
Visiting Assistant Professor of Technical Writing
Weber State University, Beginning fall 2020
Department of English Language & Literature

Doctoral Fellow
University of Louisville, 2018-2020
English Department

Graduate Teaching Instructor
University of Louisville, 2015-2016; 2017-2018
English Department

Assistant Director of the Virtual Writing Center
University of Louisville, 2016-2017
English Department

Writing Center Tutor
University of Louisville, 2014-2015
English Department

Peer Reviewed Publications
Patrick Danner and Chris Scheidler. (2019). "Getting there: Reflections on community engagement and activist support." *Spark: a 4C4Equality Journal*, 1(2): https://sparkactivism.com/volume-1-coda/getting-there/

Chris Scheidler. (2019). "Review: *Critical fabulations: reworking the methods and margins of design*." *Entanglements,* 2(1): 211-214.

Chris Scheidler. (2019). "Making Future Space." In R. Wysocki & M.P. Sheridan (Eds.), *Making future matters*. Logan, UT: Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State University Press. https://ccdigitalpress.org/book/makingfuturematters/scheidler-response-essay.html

Beth Jorgensen and Chris Scheidler. (2013). "Toxic Structure: Investigation of the structure and intended purpose of the EPA." *Proceedings of IEEE International Professional Communication Conference*.

Manuscripts In Progress

(in progress) Chris Scheidler, Alex Way, and Tobias Lee. "Translanguaging beyond the paywalls: Modality and languaging as open source." *Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies.*

(in progress) Chris Scheidler. "Clicking and clacking: Material affects of clackers in an online community." *Literacies in Composition Studies*

(in progress) Chris Scheidler. "The trouble with WEIRD modality." *Written Communication.*

Presentations

Who designs the revolution?: A Case study of activist media. *Computers & Writing*. Greenville, NC. May 2020

Co-constructing knowledge with multi-disciplinary students: Collaboration and creativity in TPC courses and alternative sites. *Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication*. West Chester, PA. October 2019.

Activist support networks in mixed-media activist-artist student collaboratives. *Conference on Community Writing*. Philadelphia, PA. October 2019.

Collaborative activism and mixed media design. *Computers and Writing*. Lansing, MI. June 2019.

Remaking modality: A Transmodal theory for future matters. *Watson Conference*, Louisville, KY. October 2018.

Modality (re)working. *Conference on College Composition and Communication*. Kansas City, MO. March 2018.

Change and compromise: Interrogating and responding to issues of power. *Conference on Community Writing*. Boulder, CO. October 2017

Touching and hearing the writing feel(s). *Conference on College Composition and Communication*. Portland, OR. March 2017.

Gazing and appraising: Exploring paradigms of community writing programs. *Conference on Community Writing*. Boulder, CO. October 2015.

Consulting identities: Agency and student identity. *Southeastern Writing Center Association*. Nashville, TN. February 2015.

Toxic structure: Investigation of the structure and intended purpose of the EPA. *IEEE: International Professional Communication Conference.* Vancouver, BC, Canada. July 2013

Teaching Experience

English 3100: Professional and Technical Writing   Fall 2020
Weber State University

English 2120: Introduction to Writing & Document Design   Fall 2020
Weber State University

English 306: Business Writing   Winter 2018
University of Louisville

English 303: Science and Technical Writing   Fall 2017
University of Louisville

English 306: Business Writing   Fall 2017
University of Louisville

English 102: Intermediate College Writing   Winter 2016
University of Louisville

English 101: Introduction to College Writing   Fall 2015
University of Louisville

Community Engagement Projects

Aspen Challenge, 2018-2019
JCPS Storytelling Project & Commonwealth Center for the Humanities and Society
A yearlong community digital-literacy partnership with a local middle school and high school activists who created and presented on a local community wellness co-op.

Freedom of Voice, 2016-2018
JCPS Storytelling Project & Commonwealth Center for the Humanities and Society
A yearlong community digital-literacy partnership with local middle school and high school activists that resulted in the creation and subsequent screening of a documentary video.

Community Writing Workshop, 2017-2018
University of Louisville Writing Center with The Louisville Free Public Library
A yearlong community literacy partnership with a local library that provides individual writing and reading support.

Comic Writing Workshop, 2017
University of Louisville Writing Center with The Louisville Free Public Library
A summer long community literacy partnership with a local library that teaches the foundations of comic book writing.

Fellowships and Grants

University Fellowship ($20,000), 2018-2020
University of Louisville
Department nominated competitive stipend

Dow Student Research and Creativity Grant ($1,500), 2013
Saginaw Valley State University
University research grant for travel and research in environmental rhetoric

Awards

Faculty Favorite, 2017, 2018
Student nominated teaching award

Outstanding MA Student ($100), 2016
Peer nominated graduate student award

Service

National
Organizer and presenter, *Community Call Series: Teaching Technical and Professional Writing Workshop*, Writing Program Administration Graduate Organization, April 2018

Regional
Alumni panelist, SVSU Association of Professional and Technical Writers: Mini-Conference, April 2015

University
English Graduate Student Representative, Graduate Student Council, 2016-2019

Department
Co-president, Teaching Professional Writing Reading Group, University of Louisville, 2019
Ph.D. Peer Mentor, University of Louisville, 2017-2019
Member, Teaching Professional Writing Reading Group, University of Louisville, 2017-2019
Social Chair, English Graduate Organization, 2016
M.A. Peer Mentor Coordinator, University of Louisville, 2015

Community
Citizenship and English Teacher, Kentucky Refugee Ministries, 2016-2017

Course Work in Composition/Rhetoric/Writing Studies

Teaching College Writing	Brenda Brueggemann
Composing Identities	Bronwyn Williams
Writing Center Theory & Practice	Bronwyn Williams
Writing Program Administration	Bruce Horner
Rhetoric of Social Movements	Stephen Schneider
Public Spheres (Independent Study)	Stephen Schneider
Online Writing Pedagogy (Independent Study)	Bronwyn Williams
Mobility Work in Composition	Bruce Horner
Political Rhetoric	Stephen Schneider
Keywords in Writing Studies	Mary P. Sheridan
Emotion in Premodern Rhetoric	Joe Turner

Research Methods in Composition   Andrea Olinger
Cultural Rhetorics   Lu Ming Mao