



Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres, Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus

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others mentioned in this review had been incorporated into this work, an already fine piece of scholarship would have been improved.

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Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus, eds. *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. 356 pages. \$25.95 paperback.

That multimodality and new media writing spaces have changed the landscape of composition studies is perhaps, by now, a commonplace. The editors and contributors of *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*, however, continue to challenge students, instructors, and writing program administrators to push our understandings of what it means to communicate in multiple modes by asking, *what else is possible*? Recognizing that “new media and new genres are not some achieved utopia for perfect learning but rather are sites where conflict and agreement, success and failure, coexist,” Bowen and Whithaus’s introductory chapter situates the collection’s primary argument: that thoughtful multimodal composition pedagogies require instructors to “make explicit how readers experience multimodal compositions and how those experiences are shaped by expectations from other genres and other media” (2).

As Bowen and Whithaus outline in the introduction, theoretical discussions of genre tend to fall on either side of a continuum. Drawing from a framework of functional linguistics, one end tends to view genres as relatively fixed and stable; influenced by Bakhtinian theories of semiotics, the other end tends to assert that genres are fluid and shaped by varying social contexts. The chapters in this collection aim to complicate both views, focusing instead on the kinds of praxes that occur between the two ends of the continuum in order to explore “what students are doing when they compose multimodal works in postsecondary writing environments and how those practical compositions reinforce or challenge existing genre theories” (3). Importantly, Bowen and Whithaus take great care to differentiate the term *genre*—comprised of the conventions and expectations that can “both constrain and enable students and teachers”—from other terms such as *text-tool* and *medium*, or the authoring tools used to compose a given multimodal text and the means by which such texts are distributed (5, 4). In so doing, the contributors of this edited collection are able to have rich and nuanced discussions from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The collection is divided into three parts: Part I: “Multimodal Pedagogies that Inspire Hybrid Genres” focuses on students’

experiences with multimodal composing assignments; Part II: “Multimodal Literacies and Pedagogical Choices” discusses the successes and challenges instructors face when enacting multimodal pedagogies; and Part III: “The Changing Structures of Composition Programs” addresses the implications of responding to new media literacies on a programmatic level.

Comprised of five chapters, Part I integrates student voices alongside instructor reflections. Cheryl Ball and former students Tia Scoffield Brown and Tyrell Brent Fenn, in the opening chapter “Genre and Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Class,” set the stage for the remainder of Part I by reflecting on and synthesizing their experiences engaging in a multimedia composition course, focusing particularly on navigating genre constraints and exploring the notion of transfer across multiple contexts. Ball especially calls attention to the challenges and limitations of assigning multimodal projects in a specific genre by unpacking what she calls “wowless” compositions (in this particular case, videos), or new media projects that inadvertently rely on “the generic structures and conventions of a five-paragraph essay” (26–27). While Ball concludes that “focusing on a single, formulaic genre . . . halts the critical progress of students who don’t already come with multimodal composition experience,” she is also careful to acknowledge that “offering students the opportunity to compose completely open-ended assignments” may not be the solution, either (31).

The remaining chapters in Part I offer additional insights on how “older” or more “traditional” genres are shaped and reshaped into hybrid genres. Erik Ellis, in “Back to the Future? The Pedagogical Promise of the (Multimedia) Essay,” argues for what he calls an “essay-based multimedia pedagogy” by reminding us that “alternative antecedent genres” such as the essay continue to be relevant and can complement students’ composing practices as they explore new, emerging multimodal genres (40). Jody Shipka’s chapter similarly argues that solely equating multimodality with “digitized, screen mediated texts may severely limit the kinds of texts and communicative strategies or processes students explore” (74). Instead, Shipka calls for pedagogies that cultivate metacommunicative awareness regardless of whether or not students compose strictly digital texts, print texts, or some combination thereof. The final two chapters in Part I (re)consider how presentation software such as PowerPoint and video gaming environments like *Second Life* contribute to and shape students’ multimodal literacies.

The four chapters in Part II of the collection integrate and extend the multiliteracies framework forwarded by the New London Group in their seminal “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures.” Part II opens with Nathaniel Cordova’s chapter, “Invention, Ethos, and New Media in the Rhetoric Classroom,” where he asserts that a “reengagement with rhetoric can help us extend our understanding of the multimodal nature of meaning making and

strengthen our development of a critical pedagogy and multimodal literacy” (146). In so doing, Cordova remediates the notion of ethos as dwelling place and outlines five dimensions of a multimodal literacy pedagogy (fragmentation and modularity, articulation, circulation and dissemination, convergence, interface) that focus on the fluid and dynamic nature of the ways in which technological relations are understood as modes of cultural production and reproduction (151–56). Julia Romberger’s chapter, “Multimodality, Memory, and Evidence,” similarly situates rhetoric at the nexus of multimodal composing by interrogating what counts as evidence within digital communication spaces such as Wikipedia, Digg, Slashdot, and YouTube, through reimagining the canon of memory. In addition to contributing to existing theoretical discussions about multiliteracies, Part II also offers a variety of classroom applications such as those in Donna Reiss and Art Young’s “Multimodal Composing, Appropriation, Remediation, and Reflection,” which details the ways in which hybrid compositions can be integrated in literature courses to complement the traditional scholarly essay, as well as in Penny Kinnear’s chapter on visualization and research reports. Indeed, one of the collection’s primary strengths is its attentiveness to the integration of theory and thoughtful practice, and this is particularly evident in the chapters comprising Part II.

Despite the benefits of integrating multimodal assignments and enacting pedagogies that tap into multiliteracies (and, as the contributors all collectively argue, the benefits are numerous), evaluating the hybrid genres of multimodal student texts can be difficult. Moreover, articulating appropriate learning outcomes that accommodate multimodal literacies can be challenging on a programmatic level, in addition to the potential for such learning outcomes to be undervalued institutionally. Part III of the collection delves into such issues with discussions that include building multimodal writing programs, securing necessary administrative and institutional resources to support such programs, developing appropriate and innovative curricula, training new teachers, and assessing student learning outcomes. Of particular interest to those of us engaged in writing program work are the final two chapters of the collection. Chapter 12, “Going Multimodal: Programmatic, Curricular, and Classroom Change,” details the development of a program-wide emphasis on multimodal composition at Miami University, which resulted in the ongoing Digital Writing Collaborative (DWC) whose mission is “to develop and sustain a culture and community of digital writing, learning, and teaching in all areas of English studies, especially in composition” (283). Chapter 13, “Rhetoric Across Modes, Rhetoric Across Campus,” also describes another program-wide initiative to emphasize rhetoric and multimodality at St. Lawrence University, which subsequently led to the development of the Rhetoric and Communication Institute (RCI), an annual faculty development institute that

supports faculty from across the curriculum with integrating rhetorically focused, multimodal pedagogies into their own content areas. Both chapters emphasize that such programmatic changes require a sustainable network of support—for all program participants and university stakeholders—as well as the importance of “a critical conceptual shift regarding teaching and learning” (324). For those involved in writing program administration, the experiences detailed in the chapters that comprise Part III are especially invaluable.

While all edited collections must necessarily be limited in scope, there are two primary questions in the collection that merit additional discussion: How are multimodal pedagogies and hybrid composition genres addressed and incorporated in graduate-level courses? How might the teaching of composition or writing pedagogy seminars—which often serve as required training for graduate students teaching first-year composition courses—benefit from a multimodal and emerging genres framework? While a few chapters begin to touch on these issues, as a whole the discussions in the collection are geared primarily for undergraduate curricula.

Still, *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres* provides an impressive range of multimodal assignment sequences including hands-on classroom activities as well as prompts for invention and reflection, all of which encourage students and instructors to thoughtfully engage with modes beyond the alphabetic and experiment with new and perhaps unfamiliar composing genres. The collection is an engaging read and its cross-chapter references allow readers to make numerous connections among individual chapter contributions; it is undoubtedly a rich and useful resource for both novice and experienced composition instructors as well as for program administrators. The ideas and perspectives articulated within the chapters, to return to the original question posed by Bowen and Whithaus, ultimately prompt us all to consider: What else is possible?

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Wendy Hayden. *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism*. Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. 272 pages. \$40.00 paperback or ebook.

The rhetoric of free-love feminists, those speakers and writers who argued that women should have the right “to choose their sexual partners based on love, not economic necessity or social or family pressure,” constitute an important