

Contending with Multimodality as a (Material) Process

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“[N]ew media texts” [are] those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materiality’s of texts and who then highlight the materiality: such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text—like its composers and readers—doesn’t function independently of how it is made and in what contexts. Such composers design texts that make as overtly visible as possible the values they embody...new media texts do not have to be digital; instead any text that has been designed so that its materiality is not effaced can count as new media. (Wysocki, 2004, p. 15)

This article is about materiality. How our process is deeply rooted in writing—digital or analog—being inherently multimodal. While more recent composition studies have asserted this plainly in both classroom and scholarship, this article aims to trace the ways that we have been doing this work all along. This article also puts pedagogy into conversation with theory, thereby drawing attention to the materiality of multimodality and process theory.

1. An Introduction: Learning from Discomfort

It was mid-afternoon during the fall semester of my second year of coursework. I sat in the office common room on the first day of my last course required to complete a certificate in Digital Humanities and Culture. Prior to

this moment, I had taken courses in digital methods and digital culture; this seminar would ask me to contend with applying that knowledge in my teaching. It would also have me consider how the addition of multimodality might complicate or enhance my pedagogy and scholarship.

The chairs were arranged in a half circle, with objects on the floor before them. I looked down and saw brightly colored construction paper, pipe cleaners, markers, cotton balls, scissors, and glue. The fluorescent lights illuminated the objects scattered across the dark carpet. I took a seat in one of the comfy armchairs in the lounge instead of the floor to distance myself from these objects. *What is this teacher thinking?* I asked myself. *We’re graduate students. I haven’t touched pipe cleaners since elementary school.* Before I allowed my anxiety-ridden imagination to run wild with possibilities, the teacher



Figure 1: My relationship to composing in teaching with technology: A multimodal approach. Image by author.

addressed the class: “Using the materials on the floor, I want you to recreate your understanding of your composing process.”

While at first glance this exercise seemed like a simplistic approach to critical reflection, this prompt and these materials challenged me to think about my process in new and exciting ways. From the materials to the arrangement and analysis of the relationships each object or place holds in relation to the other, I was challenged to think about myself alongside the way my invention moves. I was also challenged to consider how both an understanding of my process and the materials necessary to embody it come together, working synchronously to enact an incisive understanding of the material and social considerations that are always in flux with composing.

Looking back, it was hard for me to begin this assignment because of the multiple ways by which I could approach the prompt. Typically, the demands of our classrooms adhere to certain genre conventions and expectations, asking

students to respond in writing as we reflect or contend with prompts that call for an understanding of our metacognition. While this snapshot of my product shows the result of my engagement with that assignment, it is in the process of making, understanding, and visualizing that I understood how my relationship to composing is enacted (fig. 1). As Wysocki argued, it is the rhetorical agency of choosing the tools with which we engage in order to design, compose, or perform in ways so as not to flatten the assemblage of such components that truly allows us to engage and understand the materiality of our texts.

What’s important to remember is that in reflecting on this project or others like it, my audience does not get to see my process. They don’t receive any insight into my frustration or my difficulty in choosing materials, with several bent pipe cleaners and discarded cotton balls circling around me. As is true for writing, teachers often only see our finished product. Whether our end products are monomodal or multimodal, it is important

to understand and develop a process-oriented approach to composing—one which unpacks the material, social, and cultural considerations present within our epistemologies. As such, this article explores the ways in which all writing processes are inherently multimodal by taking time to unpack historical conversations and contemporary approaches concerning multimodality and writing processes within the field of composition studies.

2. Understanding Process: History, Critique, and Implicit Multimodal Undertones

Within the field of composition studies, generous attention has been paid to the ways in which we approach writing as a process. This approach to writing has been so powerful and influential that scholars such as Joe Harris (2012) have argued that it helped to establish composition as a research field. Thus, the enactments of process theory vary based on focus. While James Berlin (1987) counted four particular strands (classists, positivists, expressionists, and new rhetorical or adherents of new or “epistemic” rhetoric), Harris identified particular process thinking frameworks recognized by both Lester Faigley and Patricia Bizzell as expressive, cognitive, and social (Harris, 2012, p. 74). Regardless of the angle scholars’ frame process theory within, it is important to understand the ways in which all process theory approaches are inherently multimodal.

One of the most influential articles concerning process theory is Donald Murray’s “Teaching Writing as Process Not Product.” Murray (1972) argued that process could be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting (p. 4). While this approach seems overly reductive and formulaic in suggesting that writing happens only in three stages, it is important to understand how Murray was the first scholar to really engage in an emphasis on process and prewriting, stating “in prewriting, the writer focuses on that subject, spots an audience, chooses a form which may carry his subject to his audience” (p. 4).

As I reflect on my own engagement with thinking through my own process, my instructor conflated Murray’s stages of process, instead asking us to use prewriting as a way to enact what would become a final product. Rather than approaching such writing processes as chronological, the attuned focus on the materiality of representing our writing using the assets available to us asked to enact such stages simultaneously, engaging in “rewriting” in swapping out materials like cotton balls for pipe cleaners and red for blue marker alongside the prewriting. Though Murray engaged explicitly in the written word in his discussion of process theory, it is significant that he alluded to choosing a form, perhaps opening up space for the possibility that particular modes beyond the alphabetic may be more appropriate and productive for a particular composer and audience.

To expand upon this notion, Murray's third implication for implementing process theory advocated that as composers, students are always enacting their own language (Murray, 1972, p. 5). As I have argue together with Kristin Arola in "Tracing the Turn: The Rise of Multimodal Composition in the U.S." (2016), Kenneth Burke's (1969) discussion of rhetoric as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation, and in defining humans as beings that by nature respond to symbols opens up dynamic possibilities for how we might come to know language beyond the alphabetic, stating, "the question of how humans respond to symbols of all kinds is, in essence, a multimodal concern" (Johnson & Arola, p. 100). Burke's definition of rhetoric allows us to see persuasion beyond the merely alphabetic—as when an audience understands the visual rhetoric of the color red as aggressive or confrontational—which Murray's discussion implicitly suggests.

Murray's argument that we cannot teach writing as a product is central to the aim that "students find their own way to their own truth" (p. 6). It is through the process of discovery and invention that voice and style are cultivated, Murray argued, suggesting that within the classroom, teachers should step back and allow the student room to interpret and develop their own approaches to prompts and assignments. To be too overly authoritative stifles both process and product. As my own personal example illustrates, these enactments can at times be uncomfortable and can push the

boundaries of what we conceive of as academic writing. However, in doing this work, students are challenged to reflect on their own identities as writers. Not only does this work ask teachers to shy away from overt instruction and modeling approaches to composing, but it also engages students in an expansive understanding of forms, taking time to unpack how visual, aural, or kinesthetic modes can be cultivated alongside one another as both the process and product of our composition.

While historical discussions concerning process theory have grappled primarily with alphabetic texts, there are scholars in the field of composition studies that explicitly discuss the importance of a multimodal approach. Perhaps one of the scholars most known for their advocacy of seeing multimodality as an inherent part of process is Jason Palmeri. In *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy* (2012), Palmeri traced the threads of multimodality that have always been present within the field of composition studies. Zooming in on process theory during 1971-1984, Palmeri argued that process theory has always been embedded in cultivating multiple modes as a way to make meaning. Palmeri states, "process researchers conceptualized alphabetic writing as a deeply multimodal thinking process that shares affinities with other forms of composing (visual, musical, spatial, gestural)" (p. 25). Like Burke, Palmeri also saw language as a symbol system that transcends the alphabetic. However, there is a difference between thinking and doing. While scholars may

have stressed the inherent multimodal cognitive strategies central to engaging in process, asking our students (and ourselves) to do such work is still fairly new.

In situating these efforts as a way to move from simply thinking about multimodality to understanding what the practices of a multimodal process approach might look like, Palmeri identifies two interdisciplinary questions that still hold relevance for multimodal theorists today: whether or not there are similarities in composing processes throughout a variety of humanities disciplines and what weight nonverbal modes might hold within the invention and revising strategies of alphabetic texts. (p. 25). Though much of Palmeri's historical discussions of multimodality within the process movement centered around nonverbal modes as invention and alphabetic text as product, Ann Berthoff's (1982) use of visual mental images begins to do the work of conflating the two as a decidedly process-based approach where, "visual perception is itself a form of composing. As we look at the world and compose visual images in our minds, we are constantly making meaning by selecting, arranging, and classifying" (39).

In working with the imagination, Palmeri argued, "Berthoff shows that the process of composing mental images—the process of visual thinking—is analogous to writing" (39). It is in these associations of how we might come to conceptualize the act of thinking beyond the written word to the act of doing or inventing these processes in their material form that we

truly enact multimodal writing processes. In returning to my own enactment, the "product" or representation of my process embodies the types of composing strategies advocated by Berthoff and Palmeri—showcasing a visual imagery of how and where I imagine myself as I grapple with meaning making and material resources to compose for a particular audience (fig. 1). In order to produce a product that exemplified my process, I had to rely on my mental imagery of both place and action. Questions like, where do I do my best thinking? What do resources or tools do I need in order to cultivate an approach? ask me to not only rely on memory, but also imagination as I find ways to visually duplicate the places and resources needed for me to make meaning. It is in these transitions between the cognitive and material enactment that multimodality truly becomes a process of composing.

Another scholar contending with multimodality and process is Jody Shipka. In *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Shipka (2011) discussed the important elements that contribute to process, beginning with the invention surrounding how ideas and material factors play into how we understand multimodal theory. Like Palmeri, Shipka first chronicled a historical discussion of process, but rather than discuss its movements, focused on how critiques of process theory have historically been implemented within two generations. The first generation centers on critiques concerning whether or not process theory produces writing in isolation, and in doing so, if we might be

teaching more toward a heuristic of writing, rather than the notion that *within* the process of composing, critical thinking and voice are constructed and developed. Harris also discussed this assertion of teaching process as a heuristic, in which he argued, “the process you teach turns out to depend on the sort of product you want. The effort of process teaching thus becomes not an opening up of multiple ways of writing but an inculcating of a particular method of composing” (90). It is interesting to consider such assertions alongside Murray’s formulaic approach to composing, suggesting that in limiting students to particular “stages” we might in turn be constricting both process and product.

To combat such concerns centering on *how* to teach process, Harris argued that in looking at the genre and form of our texts, we should urge students to move from a more writer-based approach to reader-based, understanding how process must “go beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that texts enter into” (pp. 90-91). As such, this attention to the cultural and social elements within a given rhetorical situation surrounding the text further stress the relevance of the material elements surrounding the composing process. These assertions from Harris expand upon earlier critiques made by Faigley (2002). In looking at the branches of process theory, Faigley stressed the troubling universal claims about writing made by cognitive approaches to process (see Flower and Hayes, 1981). Referencing Bizzell (1982) Faigley attempted to answer the question

“what do we need to know about writing?” in his critique Bizzell’s inner-directed and outer-directed approach. He argued,

Bizzell uses “outer-directed” theory to demonstrate the shortcoming of cognitive “inner-directed” theory . . . because “inner-directed” theorists seek to isolate the “invariant” thinking process involved in composing, Bizzell claims that “inner-directed” theorists consider the how of composing at the expense of asking why writers make certain decisions. Answers to the latter question Bizzell insists, must come not from the mind of the individual writer, but from the ways of making meaning in a particular community. (p. 31)

Ultimately advocating for an “outer-directed” approach to process, Bizzell claimed that “thinking and language can never occur free of a social context that conditions them” (Bizzell qtd. in Faigley p. 31). Like Shipka and Harris, Faigley and Bizzell’s assertions that all writing is social offers an inherent focus on the material elements present within a particular rhetorical situation that contribute to how texts are cultivated and constructed within our writing processes. Though Harris and Shipka ultimately both approached process theory as inherently social, Shipka is one of the first to explicitly tie this connection to multimodal theory as rooted within the material. In doing so, she argued that aesthetics in any community we inhabit impacts composing “by asking students to examine the communicative process as a dynamic, embodied, multimodal whole—

one that both shapes and is shaped by the environment” (p. 26).

This focus on materiality and multimodality within process theory is important. Shipka’s argument that process is deeply rooted in ecology of place and material aesthetics is an assertion I feel I embodied as I reflect on my own my process as not only rooted in place, but also material objects and actions. Whether it is through the corporeal action (like taking a shower) or object (such as having a glass of wine), the invention of my cognitive process is rooted in my ability to rely on a material multimodal approach to composing, one that cultivates place, action, and object—using my body as a compass to guide me through both thinking and making.

Whereas Harris suggested our writing becomes part of a larger conversation, my visual map of process was done largely in isolation, relying on the material aesthetics of my surroundings to help me work through ideas (fig. 1). Looking toward the particular threads of process theory, such approaches weave between expressive and cognitive movements—aligning with the theoretical frameworks of scholars such as Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, and John Hayes. In understanding these approaches, Bizzell’s “inner-directed” approach encouraged internal strategies for invention, seeing writing as a deeply personal act, which is a framework that enacts Murray’s notion of a writers “own truth” (6). However, as Faigley reminded us, writing does not exist in a vacuum, and even if we are enacting our process independently of others, others such as

Shipka stressed we are still mediated by complex networks of tools and material considerations (p. 41).

Though Palmeri does not explicitly engage in critiques of process theory, his historical framing of process is useful to position alongside Shipka’s focus on historical critiques of how to enact process-based pedagogy in the classroom. In doing so, Palmeri argued alongside Berthoff that “teachers should build upon the knowledge of composing that students already bring with them to the classroom” (p. 40). Such arguments concerning the need for a pedagogy that bridges the gap between home and classroom composing and literacy practices have been made previously by others in the field (see Selfe, 2009; Yancey, 2004; George, 2002). However, such considerations seem to overwhelmingly center on tools as mediation between home and classroom rather than modes beyond the alphabetic as semiotic meaning making systems. In addressing the affordances of modes beyond the written word, Palmeri again referenced Berthoff’s pedagogical approaches to multimodality, arguing,

By focusing the teaching of composition on harnessing the “active mind” of the student rather than on evaluating the formal correctness of alphabetic products, Berthoff ultimately seeks to develop a composition pedagogy that could enable students to draw connections among—and develop a vocabulary for—all the carried ways they make meaning in their lives. (p. 40)

But how does this translate to different

genres and acts of composing? To address this, Palmeri situated interdisciplinary stake process theory has in contending with the arts, and other humanities disciplines. If we are to cultivate students meaning making activities, then this must extend to all available avenues and disciplines. Palmeri illustrated this practice in the following example:

If a student, for example, has already come to appreciate the fact that she could generate ideas through the process of sculpting, then that student might be encouraged to transfer her understanding of sculpting as a process of discovery to considering writing as a process of discovery. (p. 40)

These sentiments voiced by both Palmeri and Berthoff echo Shipka's argument that not only is all composing multimodal, but also that multimodality is rooted in process—necessarily considering the material elements of available resources in how meaning is invented and subsequently constructed. Of the twelve graduate students enrolled in our Multimodal Approach to Teaching with Technology seminar, it is useful to consider how many students may have taken effortlessly to the assignment to enact their process using unconventional “writing” materials; while others like myself were initially incredibly overwhelmed and stumped as to what were the expectations laid out by the teacher, and how I might go about materializing my own composing process.

Graduate students (and all writers really) are shaped by both public and

academic discourses that contribute to our meaning making systems. What's important to consider in Palmeri's assertion is the acknowledgment that epistemology is inherently interdisciplinary, we do not make meaning through letters or numbers alone and as a result, considerations and encouragement of multimodality as part of student's process is ultimately calling upon them to use the tools they know to understand and articulate information that may be initially unfamiliar. We need to do more to put this pedagogy back into conversation with the theoretical concepts that inform our work as scholars. Of equal importance, we need to consider the ways in which these theories need to be enacted in not only how we think about composing, but also how we actually ask our students to do this work in our classrooms.

In returning to Shipka's discussion of historical approaches, the second wave of process theory critique builds off of the assertion that all writing is social and epistemological; critiquing the first wave that writer cannot be removed from reality in understanding process. However, Shipka recognized an inherent contradiction in what we advocate and what is actually enacted, and that in this focus on writing as social, Syverson (1999) argued “while we have, for some time now, worked to enlarge the unit of analysis in composition beyond the individual—through studies of collaborative writing and through ethnographic projects, for example—we have continued to focus on readers,

writers, and texts as independent objects” (Syverson qtd. in Shipka pp. 34-35). In order to address the contradiction presented by Syverson, Shipka discussed the inclusion of technology as a communicative tool to bridge these different components.

Just as new communication technologies have enlivened and provided a sense of urgency to discussions about where the discipline is headed and what our use of terms like *authoring*, *writing* and *composing* include or describe, recent changes to the communicative landscape have contributed to an interest in tracing the material dimensions of literacy. (p. 35)

Such technologies, Shipka argued, make our material processes more visible. It is in these tools that our dynamic relationship to composing embodies choice and agency to be more concise of the material elements possible within a dynamic composing landscape.

These resources need not be digital in order to better convey the materiality of our processes of composing. Consider that of the materials presented on the floor of my graduate seminar, my agency as author may have experimented and considered (and even used at a particular stage) elements such as pipe cleaners and cotton balls; however, different textures and colors of paper and ink are the material resources I ended up using within the final product of my composition because they seemed safe and more in tune with materials that I already associated with composing. How might I have approached

my process differently had I been able to use my laptop, or camera? While there is value in familiar tools, there is also value in learning from seeing analog assets as an inherent part of our literacy and composing practices.

Relying primarily on Sarah Sloane (1999) Shipka stated that “research methods have not often enough considered the myriad influences that shape writers’ choices” (p. 35). These influences in conjunction with technology are often material because, as Sloane argued, “writing technologies, especially computers, are themselves haunted by earlier versions of textuality, speaking, authoring, and reading” (Sloane qtd. in Shipka p. 35). What this means, is that rather than viewing our composing process as solely a meaning-making activity, as authors (and teachers) we must also consider available resources in order to do so. We are always creating meaning through available resources, many of which enact modes beyond alphabetic, calling for new approaches to composing that stress the materiality within a particular rhetorical situation in which we ask students to compose.

3. Explicit Enactments: Seeing Multimodality as a Material Process

Thinking about materiality alongside process within multimodal theory necessarily leads one toward a conversation concerning tools. As briefly mentioned previously, while digital tools provide a vast array of possibilities for

multiple modes and resources, Shipka argued that conceiving of multimodality under an overtly digital lens can be problematic:

I am not suggesting that newer technologies have made little difference in classroom practice or students' lives. . . . While I remain both cognizant of and optimistic about the ways newer technologies promise to impact our research, scholarship, and pedagogical practice, a composition made whole requires us to be more mindful about our use of a term like *technology*. We need to consider what is at stake—who and what it is that we empower or discount—when we use the term to mean primarily, or worse yet, only the newest computer technologies and not light switches, typewriters, eyeglasses, handwriting, or floor tiles as well. (pp. 20-21)

If we are truly to conceive of multimodality and process as inherently linked, then we must come to expand our conceptions of available resources—understanding the ways in which bodies, places, and actions can all be cultivated as resources for contending with and enacting multimodality as process. Like Shipka, Wysocki advocated for a similar emphasis to materiality and new media texts, stressing the inherent focus on the materiality of the making in the final product. In doing so, Wysocki and Shipka stressed digital tools as one option for enacting a multimodal framework that considers materiality, in Wysocki advocated that not all new media texts necessarily have to be digital in order to

embody the material and inherently social threads they advocate (p. 15).

In a slightly different approach to Wysocki, Shipka pulled from James Wertsch's (1991) framework of "mediated action" for attending to "the wide range of representational systems and technologies with which composers work and to examine the role that perceptions, purposes, motives, and institutions, as well as other people and activities play in the production, reception, circulation, and valuation of that work" (p. 40). For Wertsch, rather than seeing tools, humans, and society as separate entities, we must come to understand how all of these components function as a unit, which Shipka expands upon to argue makes multimodality an inherently material activity because we are forced to consider factors such as posture and lighting alongside other agents (p. 42).

As a result, Shipka tweaked the expanded mediated action framework implemented by Wertsch, to consider such materiality, coining the approach as "tool-equipped mediated action", positioning it as "a way of guarding against the tendency to focus on the isolated individual when trying to understand the forces that shape human action" (p. 42). Framing the components that contribute to the materiality of how modes, media, and community work together synchronously is helpful in not only the process of composing, but also understanding how bodies are implicated as both resource and obstacle.

In understanding the role of bodies within our composing process, Shipka

offered the following:

The habitual use of any tool brings about “amplifications and reductions” not only in the moment of use but in the physical and psychological structure of the user. In this way, our analyses need to examine not only how the introduction of new meditational means impacts the activity in which one engages, but how it impacts or alters the body and an individual’s relationship with his or her body. (p. 51)

Shipka’s attention to affect encourages us to consider the ways in which tools and environments have an effect on our bodies, and how the material manifestations of multimodality may in turn, affect the process we enact. In looking at my end product, attention to affect in both place—where I needed to be in order to invent and arrange—and tools I needed in order to compose is displayed in the bright colored paper that encompassed by expressions of my body within each particular stage. As I continue to embody my process with a linear sequence of shifting tools and locations, my emotional response modifies based on those interdependent relationships of mind, body, and place, as well as the role my body plays in my environments and relationships to objects and people (see fig. 1).

Looking toward affect and the ways in which the body complicates our conceptions of materiality and multimodality, Joddy Murray (2009) argued “it is imperative to view emotions as necessary, even essential, both in terms

of process and product” (p. 102). While scholars such as Bizzell (1981) and Faigley (1992) claimed that emotions have strong ties to an inner-directed process that relies on cognitive or expressive approaches, Murray argued that emotions are a visceral reaction to “social networks wherein writers exist” (p. 91). However, with the inclusion of technology as not only tools for composing, but also channels to distribute and circulate texts, the body and our processes can often become invisible in relation to those networks. In an outer-directed engagement with the body, Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes (2014) reflected on putting their bodies into the forefront of digital texts within the digital multimodal composition of a visual conference presentation titled *Viewmaster*. Rather than composing a traditional conference paper, Alexander and Rhodes instead chose a more unconventional approach to presenting, in which they argued that the “notion of the ‘composed’ text, often go hand in hand with notions of the ‘composed’ body, the disciplined ‘subject,’ the individual submitting work that falls inevitably under scrutiny, a gaze” (p. 11). *Viewmaster* primarily depicted both Alexander and Rhodes’ eyes alongside rhetorical questions and quotes—asking viewing to gaze back at the hybridity of image and text, understanding the ways in which bodies are used as both a tool and an argument in the multimodal construction of their installation. As such, Alexander and Rhodes argued that their intention behind the medium was to “provoke consideration of the often unremarked,

frequently unacknowledged pressures that surround the act of composition” (pp. 9-10). What is compelling to consider in their assertion is their attention to composing as an “act”, suggesting that our notion of “text” as something to be performed or embodied. In viewing composing under this gaze, materiality must be considered as a fundamental component inherent within multimodal process, for preforming and assembling with the body in focus calls upon both affect and mode.

Viewing multimodal composing as embodied an act is powerful in considering the role of both discourse and production. In considering the role of materiality in all stages of a text, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2001) looked at both the process of multimodal composing and the product that is preformed, designed, or constructed— understanding how audience is implicated within both the invention and distribution of texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen identify four particular stages of multimodal communication: discourse, design, production, and distribution. Beginning with discourse is important to consider when positioning first generation critiques of process theory alongside contemporary approaches to multimodality. While scholars in the field of composition studies have argued that all writing is social, Kress and Van Leeuwen enacted that avocation under a heuristic that positions “all the semiotic modes which are available as means of realizations in a particular culture are drawn on in that culture as a

means of the articulation of discourses” (p. 24).

What this means is that the modes we engage are the result of the discourses we are a part of, echoing arguments made previously by both Berthoff and Palmeri. But unlike Berthoff and Palmeri, Kress and Van Leeuwen argued experiences encountered within discourse are “physical, physiological, even though it is of course culturally mediated through culturally given systems of evaluation” (p. 28). As such, discourse is not only an enactment of modes, but also an overtly material experience, one in which implicates affect and bodies as visceral responses to culture and discourse.

Whereas discourse is rooted in the invention and exploration of modes, culture, and affect, the design stage of multimodal communication for Kress and Van Leeuwen deals with the material representation and engagement with information. In their discussion, Kress and Van Leeuwen described design as “a blueprint for production” that not only considers modes, culture, and community, but also starts to consider the organization and construction of the text (p. 50). Both discourse and design are involved in the process of composing which ask the composer to not only draw from the social sphere of discourse but to also call upon modes and affect to contend with how the composition becomes arranged.

On the other hand, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s notions of production and distribution are more concerned with the

tools and circulation of the composition as opposed to the invention and arrangement. Unlike other multimodal theorists, Kress and Van Leeuwen separated invention from tool, in which they argued, “production is the communicative use of *media*, of *material* resources” (p. 66).

Unlike discourse, which situates experience as both material and social, production utilizes affect and the material as operating under the following assumption.

Production is always physical work, whether by humans or machines, a physical job of articulating a “text”. And the interpretation of production is also physical work, a use of the body (the sensory organs). Production media are closely associated with different sensory channels, because each medium is characterized by a particular configuration of material qualities, and each of these material qualities is grasped by a particular set of sensory organs. (p. 66)

While material implications of experience are deeply rooted in the social, physical experiences of production are cultivated from a more internal place. To build off of this notion, distribution cultivates the materials used and the modes implored within the production phase and looks toward media as channels for dissemination. At this stage the medium is the prime consideration as text become “re-coded” for particular media channels and discourses. Think, for instance of how my visual map of my process of composing might be distributed

as a handout, what “re-coding” or reproduction rhetorical moves would need to be implemented to make that text successful within a different discourse or genre? Under this scaffolded framework, Kress and Van Leeuwen saw the material as foundational to multimodal composing, stressing the engagement of our bodily perceptions, experiences, and reactions to different social, technological, and cultural encounters.

4. Conclusion: Seeing Multimodality as (Always) Material

Whether it is tracing the historical roots of process theory within the field or looking closely at more contemporary manifestations, it is important to understand the ways in which we are always engaging in a multimodal process. Multimodal scholars like Palmeri and Shipka do important work in conceptualizing the ways those scholars who may not have explicitly engaged with multimodal theory have been enacting it all along. However, what is important to remember is that while we may be implicitly engaging in multimodal process, we are not necessarily aware of it. Making multimodality more visible within process makes students feel more comfortable in breaking away from alphabetic texts.

As I reflect on this experience in my graduate education and how I was challenged to compose dynamically out of initial discomfort, I wonder how multimodal assignments prior to this graduate seminar might have made me

more confident to approach this assignment. Would I still fear the materials I was asked to engage with in that one course? Though these approaches are advocated during adolescent education, we seem to make troubling movements away from them as we continue to grow and become more involved in culture, experience, and perception. I argue instead that our pedagogies and composing processes should make intentional moves that acknowledge the inherent multimodal nature to all writing. We need to stress the relevance for all assets as rhetorically rich material components to authoring. Whether it is the body, acrylic paint, or a digital camera. We need to ask our students to think about how place, affect, and community contribute to how they write, when they write, and what they use.

Rather than asking students to shy away from a multimodal approach to process theory, we should give equal weight to the multimodal products we often ask them to produce. As with our own scholarship, we need to think about our own engagements with writing and we need to put it back into conversations with the theory. Does what we do mirror what we advocate as scholars? Many teachers and scholars in the field see nonverbal modes as modes that carry equal weight alongside writing. We need to make sure we stress this in 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.

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