From the Editors:
The Critique of Everyday Life; Or, Why We Decided to Start a New Multimodal Rhetorics Journal

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> "…the dividing line no longer falls between work and leisure. These two areas of activity flow together. They repeat and reinforce each other…. A distinction is required other than the one that distributes behaviors according to their *place* (of work or leisure) and qualifies them thus by the fact that they are located on one or another square of the social checkerboard -in the office, in the workshop, or at the movies. There are differences of another type. They refer to the *modalities* of action, to the *formalities* of practices." (DeCerteau, 2011, p. 29)

We the editors would like to thank you for having a look at the first issue of the *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*. Getting here has been a long, edifying journey, but we have had a lot of help from friends, colleagues, contributors, mentors, and associates along the way. We would like to take this opportunity to also say thank you to all of you. The launch of this venue underscores the importance of such academic community. For us, it proves the answer to the different issues that prompted us to undertake this project.

The idea for this journal stems from many a conversation about current problems facing junior and minority scholars and their effects on us personally. These include a general lack of research support (Jaschik, 2014); a need for greater assistance in making our work ready for publication (Conrad & Sinner, 2015; Cavanaugh, 2012); and finding means to address audiences beyond academia (Wai & Miller, 2015; Kristof, 2014). Along with hoping to foster a friendlier atmosphere when it comes to the publishing process, we also seek to create greater transparency into the knowledge-making ways of academia and help to make more of this knowledge public. We believe these aims to be of the utmost importance to women scholars and

scholars from marginalized groups because oftentimes, our research interests reflect our personal identities and those of our respective communities, and yet, writing for those communities is typically regarded as a side note rather than a fundamental goal. As researchers encouraged to always write for, rather than over, those we are writing about, we wished to make some kind of intervention within the field at large.

Thus, we set out two years ago to launch the *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics* (*JOMR*). From the onset, we decided that what we most wanted to do was promote rhetoric and composition scholarship from a cultural studies perspective since that reflected our own training and because all rhetorical and composition praxes are based in cultural systems even when they are, unfortunately, framed as reliant on universal principles. We wished to address the teaching and learning of these subjects in ways that centered the practices of real people whose rhetorics may not align with academic norms but are no less effective for navigating the world. And, we wanted to publish reader-friendly scholarship for the public as a means to keep ourselves accountable to those for whom we build knowledge but who are usually left out of scholarly discussions. Of course, access to information does not necessarily entail equitable access to learning, but we hope that as this digital space takes on a life of its own that its presence will corroborate an invitational and public-oriented approach to research.

So Why Multimodality?

From the beginning, we decided that a focus on multimodality allowed us to address concerns about inclusivity theoretically and practically, and to critique media's potential to enhance or hinder rhetorical agency. We wish to stress that multimodality is "not to be confused with or limited in advance to a consideration of Web-based or new media texts" (Shipka, 2009, p. 347). However, even as we recognize that all communication is multimodal, the potential for digital media to make academic knowledge more accessible to broad audiences is not lost on us. So while digital multimodality is decentered within our journal's purview, it nevertheless remains an important aspect of our critical endeavor. Hence, by "multimodality," we imagine all those material, spatial, embodied, aesthetic, and procedural strategies that communication engages, but especially those employed by marginalized individuals and groups with limited access to legitimized modes deemed "speech." These include the diverse everyday rhetorics of popular culture as well.

Multimodal practices not only facilitate communication; they also transmit values and traditions. Because they can enable liberatory possibilities or uphold hegemonic norms, attending to their social and cultural attributes demands critical forms of literacy. Extracurricular rhetorics tend to engage such literacies, though they often go uncredited within the academy. Avoiding simplistic definitions of literacy, critics like James

Paul Gee, Jabari Mahiri, and Tony Mirabelli establish literacy's social functions as performance and interrelationship. As Mahiri notes, understanding literacy as defined by events and practices allows educators to honor the "multiple literacies" through which students create identity, share values and beliefs, and even critique dominant discourses (2004, p. 7). These vital literacies are ignored when we center academic language use. Ironically, rhetoricians run the risk of focusing on what communication *says* rather than what it *does* when we overlook homegrown ways of knowing that don't rely on the verbal mode. On a similar note, Mirabelli (2005) speaks to literacy's embodied aspects—the ability to "read" others' body language and respond accordingly. In analyzing the complex interactions that occur in diners, he underscores how attunement to multiliteracies invites us to be ever aware of spatial concerns, to become more conscious how we move and interact with others within certain spaces.

Along those lines, scholarship on popular media such as video games teaches us much about the creation of discursive spaces and how spaces rely on, reinforce, or challenge prevalent ideologies. Video games are not mere diversion but complex rhetorical media (Gee, 2004). These popular forms of rhetoric create immersive environments that demand gaming audiences' collusion in the creation or completion of narratives. They provide spaces where cultural values can be negotiated procedurally, but in the process they require players to subscribe to implicit ideological frameworks. Such rhetorical matrices can standardize injurious impressions within the game space that can reinforce their understated or unquestioned status outside the game. Or, they may encourage interrogation of real-world ideologies in which they are based. They can draw critical attention to ways in which hegemonic views inform a game's logics and how those views compel players to accept their authority and assume the primacy of a particular subjectivity.

However, these insights cannot and should not be confined to games alone. All media require similar stringent critique as they can normalize (in the full dehumanizing sense of the word) racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia/transphobia and other punitive norms. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Tyrone A. Forman (2000) use the term *racetalk* to refer to the use of deliberately "non-offensive" language that nonetheless upholds racial privilege. It is crucial that we question how media and other rhetorical technologies enable similar schemes that contribute to the production of normative bodies and practices, and bolster existent power structures.

Furthermore, a focus on multimodality helps us appreciate the phenomenological character of all rhetoric, creating meaning and connection through perceived relationality. Communication is intrinsically intersubjective, and so, too, are the discourses and practices involved. Rhetoric and composition rely on what Bakhtin (1986) terms *interanimation*, the

dialogic interaction of diverse voices and the ideologies they signify. A message is never whole or completed, and it is only once we recognize the positionality permitted by our different voices that we may begin to orient ourselves consciously. Communication doesn't occur in a vacuum but emerges in relation to other communicative events and instances of connection, and in ways that we imagine the world to work.

Likewise, multimodality draws our attention to the diffuse quality of communication, the ways in which modalities compete, complicate, and complement with one another, at times even producing unintended meanings. At all times, we must remain aware that interpersonal technologies allow us "to contextualize messages, to glean essential social information, exchange relational messages, and coordinate conversation" even as their mediation "restrict[s] the modalities through which these communication functions can be achieved" (Burgoon et al., 2002, p. 663). Understanding the influence of these ever-attendant nonverbal processes proves necessary in composing conscientious, invitational rhetorics whether on paper, in performance or material creation practices, or for the web.

We deem it imperative to interrogate these powerful (and power-full) relationships - between modalities, between messages, between parties - since convention permits harmful ideologies to become inured. As J.L. Austin warns, "we must always remember the distinction between producing effects or

consequences which are intended or unintended" (1975, p. 106). Positionality is key in communication, and we would all do well to remember that meaning is always relative: "We are the norm, the center, until that center no longer obtains" (Aegerter, 1997, p. 908). One cannot be a good writer, speaker, or composer while oblivious to ethics of relationality. Moreover, practicing critical analysis, the kind that digs deep to uncover the roots of power structures that inform communicative relationships, can hopefully make for more conscious scholarship. As an academic community, we can become true collaborators in social transformation based in mutual respect and love for each other and for our different publics.

Promoting Critical Multimodality

The language of public discourse is multimodal. Ergo, part of loving and respecting the aforementioned publics involves demonstrating a conscious regard for multimodal communication that occurs outside of the academy. As rhetoricians, we know meaning is contextual, discursively constructed through social interactions and situations, but power dynamics work to exclude popular practices. If rhetoric indeed "adheres to power and property," as John Bender and David Wellbery have observed (1990, p. 7), then the historic denial of multimodal genres' inherent rhetoricity - or worthiness of serious study altogether -

is nothing less than an attempt to deny their power as well. When one stops to consider that multimodal rhetorics have often been the conduits through which working-class and minoritized populations have spoken, this denial clearly intersects with broader systemic acts of suppression.

Therefore, cultivating a critical awareness surrounding these issues becomes an ethical as well as an intellectual enterprise. Whether or not exigence is rooted in an external reality that demands our response, rhetors must assume ethical responsibility for the situations they create (Vatz, 1973), including those decisions about the technologies and modalities that they privilege. This is especially crucial if, as Rachel Mattson (2008), and Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres (2003) suggest, we are to move beyond dealing with individual manifestations of bigotry to confront the broader, underlying systems of denigration which foster them. In other words, pursuing social justice and critical awareness are perpetually intertwined tasks. Furthermore, we contend that they should be a fundamental aspect of all composition pedagogies.

Overlooking media and modality privilege contributes to the foregrounding of privileged subjectivities and the backgrounding of those who must "attempt to live in the shadows of presence" and "insist upon an existence, a voice" (Powell, 2002, p. 12). It promotes uncritical application and assimilation over the development of "a flexible, complexly defined subjectivity" (Fowlkes, 1997, p.

108) that proves a critical survival skill for marginalized people. In everyday life we employ "a fluency of voices" (Rose, 1988, p. 355), each of them rhetorical beyond words, each of them creating spaces that include and exclude. The ability to scrutinize the value systems bolstered by particular discourses, media, and modalities can provide a vital tool of critique and resistance. Not just in terms of adapting language use to social context, but as a means to interrogate covert constitutive perspectives and the norms that they sustain.

An Invitation

Lastly, we hope that attention to the polyvalence of multimodal communication will encourage academia as a whole to become more receptive to what, until now, have been perceived as "alternative" rhetorics. Such work is often perceived as less scholarly, less rigorous, too personal, or too limited. Academia has not been very receptive to work by writers from minoritized groups, framing our research as not scholarly or significant enough to our respective disciplines (Billingslea Brown, 2012, p. 27). Attention to these issues is viewed as auxiliary, at times even as indulgences that detract from the real substance of knowledge. As more scholars from minoritized groups center their own marginalized identities, we must be allowed to affirm our own histories of scholarship and canons of criticism that may not align with those of more so-called

"traditional" or mainstream fields, or queer notions of canon altogether.

By stressing the cultural contexts and constraints that inform all multimodal rhetorics, we wish to challenge the designation of such research into an array of "niche" subfields, and its relegation to special journal issues, to highlight the relevance of - and great need for - theorizing from situated perspectives. This venue invites our fellow critics to enrich current scholarship by modeling those changes they wish to see by drawing on those topics, perspectives, and practices that are too often absent within academia. We welcome scholarship that speaks to diverse audiences.

In this manner, we return to where we started in this essay by revealing one last intention behind our editorial choices. Despite our own respective investments in the academy, we do not imagine our audiences as researchers alone. We have established *JOMR* as an open-access platform so that readers from all walks of life and many different communities have an opportunity to share in what we do, especially when that is work that speaks to communal concerns. We also aim to expand academic conversations to include those publics for whom we as scholars make and archive knowledge.

Ultimately, we hope that *JOMR* will prove an interactive space that showcases the many real-world voices, praxes, and processes that influence the character of composition.

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