

Review:

Arola, K. L., & Wysocki, A. F.

(Eds.). *composing (media) =
composing(embodiment): bodies,
technologies, writing, the teaching of
writing*

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The collected essays in *composing(media) = composing(embodiment): bodies, technologies, writing, the teaching of writing* articulate our relationship with new media and current and emerging technologies as a dual process of embodiment: As producers of new media/technologies, we express what matters to us, yet as consumers we are always-already carried into and through a mediated world that dictates to us what matters. This collection attempts to untangle the “tensions between those feelings [of embodiment] and the knowledge that we are also experienced from outside” (p. 3) and furthermore, to situate conversations about media(ted) embodiment within composition studies. The essays call writing instructors to equip themselves and their students with critical awareness of the production and consumption of media and technology. By blending theory and praxis, the collection encourages instructors to create a classroom community in which students use writing to explore and challenge the ways

media and technologies (re)mediate embodiment in a variety of contexts.

Anne Wysocki begins the collection with a recollection of her personal experiences with media(ted) embodiment. Drawing from theorists such as Adorno, Haraway, and Butler, Wysocki provides a theoretical framework for the complicated nature of how writing instructors navigate embodiment in the classroom – for example, teaching writing as personal experience versus as socially, culturally, and politically embedded in systems that affect personal experience (p. 11). After this introduction, the collection is divided into two parts: Media = Embodiment and Mediating Bodies ^ Mediated Bodies.

Part 1, Media = Embodiment, explores questions regarding ways media position different bodies and the opportunities that exist to create space for new embodiments. The most interesting approaches in Part 1 examine identities and embodiments that are constructed *within* technologies rather than *by* technologies. Jason Farman's "Information Cartography: Visualizations of Internet Spatiality and Information Flows," for example, identifies internet maps as sites for "visualizing information not as raw data but as a lived social space experienced in a situated and embodied way" (p. 85). In "Authoring Avatars: Gaming, Reading, and Writing Identities," Matthew S. S. Johnson argues computer games are sites for productive explorations of "the self [that] can lead to an exploration of the world ... and how world and self affect one another" (p. 60). The essays in Part 1 implicate the self and the community -- and the physical and virtual entities of each -- in the embodiments created within/by/through media and technology.

Part 1 offers instructors innovative ways to increase agency in the classroom and to encourage relationship and community building by interrogating digital spaces and constructing alternative identities (embodiments). Writing instructors interested in engaging with such work might pair essays in Part 1 with Douglas Eyman's *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, and Practice*, as Eyman argues digital rhetoric requires "the use of rhetorical methods for uncovering and interrogating ideologies and cultural formation in digital work" (p. 44). Bringing together Eyman's theoretical and methodological

frameworks and Part 1 essays' concrete, practical approaches will help both instructors and students embody and be embodied by digital spaces in ways more truthful to self and community.

Part 2, *Mediating Bodies ^ Mediated Bodies*, delves further into questions about relationships to/with new media, technologies, and texts that lead to conscious, explicit understandings of our own and others' embodiments. These essays highlight a variety of voices and identities. For example, Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes' "Queerness, Multimodality, and the Possibilities of Re/Orientation" contextualizes and compares queer narratives in order "to conceive of the possibilities of queer multimodality as a function of both a recovered and an emerging history of queer multimedia" (p. 189); Kristin Arola's "It's my Revolution: Learning to See the Mixedblood" offers both a personal narrative and analytical exploration of MySpace profiles of mixedblood Native Americans in order to "encourage mindful representations" in online spaces by "paying close attention to how we understand identity and representation to function in a highly templated online world" (p. 226). By including essays on identities that are often silenced, Part 2 exemplifies the importance inclusive community writing holds for self, social, cultural, and political change.

Because essays in Part 2 effectively weave personal narratives with digital analysis, their approach suggests an ethnographic framework for interrogating and remediating embodiment in media spaces/technologies. Sarah Pink's *Doing Visual Ethnography* (3rd ed.) would make a useful supplement to these essays. Pink provides a foundation for using visual ethnography to "develop understandings of the meanings and experiences that images and visual and media practices have" (p. 1) and to "consider how visual images and technologies are interwoven with both the cultures that ethnographers study and the academic cultures they work in" (p. 12). Such an ethnographic framework allows instructors and students to immerse themselves in a community in order to experience the embodiments of others and then to effectively communicate about that experience.

While *composing(media) = composing(embodiment): bodies, technologies, writing, the teaching of writing* sets out to mitigate the tensions – both

academic and personal – surrounding new media, embodiment, and (re)mediation, at times it feels as though those tensions only grow more complicated. To an extent, the terms themselves stimulate tension because the essays use them in different ways and ground them in multiple theoretical lenses: queer, feminist, and disability studies to name a few. However, like many contested terms, arriving at one central definition often is not necessary to fully reap the benefits of the conversations those terms generate. This collection generates two particularly compelling conversations. The first is for writing instructors to engage with their own personal experiences with new media/technology and to openly communicate with students about the ways they embody/are embodied by digital spaces. This leads to a second conversation that pushes instructors to be critical about assigned texts and projects, particularly those involving new media and technology. Instructors must consider how “composition through media and embodiment matters now in writing classes” (p. 3). To help instructors move from abstract thinking to concrete action, the collection provides detailed teaching activities for instructors to incorporate into their pedagogy.

Like the collection of essays as a whole, the teaching activities encourage students to be mindful of media/technology embodiments of self and community. Activities range from composing visual literacy narratives (p. 128-129) to designing Tumblr blogs (p. 132-133) to participating in experiential observations (p. 266-267). All activities, however, require students to “observe and question what it feels to be a body mediating and being mediated” (p. 127), to “consider the literacies and bodies encouraged by and required for media production and consumption” (p. 128), and to “take a mindful position in the media landscape” (p. 259). Although the collection’s authors provide objectives, timeframes, and considerations for the activities, they do not situate them within the larger context of a semester-long composition course. Therefore, instructors unfamiliar with teaching and/or composing in new media and digital technologies may feel underprepared to scaffold these activities into their classrooms. Instructors seeking additional context might find Carolyn Handa’s *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* and Claire Lutkewitte’s *Multimodal Composition* useful collections, as both provide practices for effectively integrating media/digital assignments. For instructors who need further support in technical know-how, Kristin Arola, Jennifer

Sheppard, and Cheryl Ball's *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* provides accessible strategies for composing multimodal projects.

Ultimately, Arola and Wysocki's *composing (media) = composing(embodiment): bodies, technologies, writing, the teaching of writing* is a theoretically sound, pedagogically grounded argument for writing instructors to engage students in "thoughtful participation in [their] own mediating and mediated embodiments" (p. 22). The collection also is an important call for us all to remain cognizant of the ways our bodies are mediated in relation to other bodies socially, culturally, and politically.

WORKS CITED

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