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Contending with Terms: "Multimodal" and "Multimedia" in the Academic and Public Spheres

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Abstract

Scholars have begun naming and defining terms that describe the multifaceted kinds of composing practices occurring in their classrooms and scholarship. This paper analyzes the terms "multimedia" and "multimodal," examining how each term has been defined and presenting examples of documents, surveys, web sites and others to show when and how each term is used in both academic and non-academic/industry contexts. This paper shows that rather than the use of these terms being driven by any difference in their definitions, their use is more contingent upon the context and the audience to whom a particular discussion is being directed. While "multimedia" is used more frequently in public/industry contexts, "multimodal" is preferred in the field of composition and rhetoric. This preference for terms can be best explained by understanding the differences in how texts are valued and evaluated in these contexts. "Multimodal" is a term valued by instructors because of its emphasis on design and process, whereas "multimedia" is valued in the public sphere because of its emphasis on the production of a deliverable text. Ultimately, instructors need to continue using both terms in their teaching and scholarship because although "multimodal" is a term that is more theoretically accurate to describe the cognitive and socially situated choices students are making in their compositions, "multimedia" works as a gateway term for instructors and scholars to interface with those outside of academia in familiar and important ways.
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1. Introduction

In the field of rhetoric and composition, terms such as *new media*, *multimedia*, *digital media*, *multiliteracies*, and *multimodal* are defined by theorists such as Cynthia L. Selfe (2007) and Anne Wysocki (2004), as well as by theorists outside the field whose work is often cited by rhetoric and composition scholars, including Lev Manovich (2001), Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2000), and Gunther Kress (2003). Defining terms is an important and necessary practice in any field, including composition. Edward Schiappa (2003) has argued that definitions "constitute a form of rhetorically induced social knowledge. That is, definitions are the result of a shared understanding of the world and are both the product of past persuasion and a resource for future persuasion" (p. 167). Defining terms is a situated activity that involves determining the collective interests and values of the community for which the definition matters.

In this article I focus primarily on the terms "multimedia" and "multimodal." I examine how each term has been defined and present articles, documents, surveys, web sites, keyword searches, and other examples to show when

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and how each term is used in both academic and non-academic or industry contexts. Although there are differences between "media" and "modes," which would suggest differences in how each term is defined, in actuality, when each is preceded by the prefix "multi," the terms are defined similarly. And as I show through the examples I present later, though multimodal has become more commonly used in scholarly literature related to the new kinds of texts students are exploring in the composition classroom, it is almost entirely absent from course titles, program names, and more public discussions outside of the academy where the term multimedia takes prevalence. My research also shows that although these terms have been used interchangeably in composition scholarship, the same is not true in more public or industry-oriented discussions, where multimedia is used almost exclusively. This suggests several observations:

- Rather than the use of these terms being driven by any difference in their definitions, their use is more contingent upon the context and the audience to whom a particular discussion is being directed.
- These differences can be best explained by understanding the differences in how texts are valued and evaluated in academic versus non-academic or industry contexts. Each term is associated with certain stages of the continuum along which a text evolves from design/process to production/distribution. There is a greater emphasis on design and process in the classroom, which makes the term multimodal more suitable in that context, and a greater emphasis on production and distribution in non-academic or industry contexts which explains the use of the term multimedia in that context.
- Composition instructors need to continue using both terms in their teaching and scholarship because although multimodal is a term that is more theoretically accurate to describe the cognitive and socially situated choices students are making in their compositions, multimedia works as a gateway term for composition instructors to interface in familiar ways with their students and those outside of academia. In addition, by recognizing the more public use of the term multimedia, instructors can prepare students for the kinds of terms they will use more frequently after they graduate.

2. A brief look back

In 1970, Paul Briand wrote a "Staffroom Interchange" piece for *College Composition and Communication* about using multimedia in the classroom. It was called "Turned On: Multi-Media and Advanced Composition," and was one of the first articles to mention the concept of multimedia and its application in the classroom. In this narrative account, Briand described his approach to composition instruction that was inspired by his "failure" to get his students interested in writing. As he put it, "I was ready to try anything" (p. 267). Multimedia, for Briand, was an exciting adventure in which he proposed such innovations as filming and tape-recording himself providing feedback on written essays or having students write essays that they would then tape-record, providing each student access to "a record of his progress, [that he] can replay at will, and hopefully his writing will begin to 'sound' like him now that he can hear it (probably for the first time)" (p. 267). By using such multimedia technologies as the television kinescope, filmstrips, slides, and programmable teaching machines, Briand suggested that instructors would be able to better diagnose the "ills" of student writing and provide new methods to "cure... such maladies as strep punctuation, viral grammar, and malodorous spelling" (p. 267). Through innovations such as the transparency and overhead projector, multimedia also became a way for a student "to experiment perhaps with ways of writing he has dared not try before" (p. 268) because it would allow his work to be critiqued anonymously in front of the class. Briand recognized the multi-channeled characteristics of multimedia and its ability to "assault" students "on as many sense levels as possible" (p. 269). He accurately prophesied that the computer console "is where the composition course of the future will be" (Briand, 1970, p. 269).

In the decades since Briand's experimentations with multimedia in the classroom, our attitudes toward multimedia and our reasons for wanting students to produce such texts have evolved as our culture and technologies have evolved. Today we have sophisticated computers, and instead of audiotapes and filmstrips we have mp3s, digital images and video, 3-D virtual realities, and web sites that support Flash animation, wikis, and blogs. We have hardware and software that will allow us to compose and edit almost any kind of content delivered through any medium we can imagine. With this abundance of technology has arisen an abundance of terms we use to describe the texts we are producing. Briand used the term multimedia, but multimodal is another term that is now regularly included in our discussions of our pedagogies and the composing practices of our students. These terms are used, often interchangeably, to characterize a shift in composition, from a field that focuses exclusively on teaching our students to produce alphabetic print texts

to one that acknowledges the changing communicative landscape of our culture and seeks, according to Cynthia L. Selfe and Pamela Takayoshi (2007), to prepare "intelligent citizens who can both create meaning in texts and interpret meaning from texts within a dynamic and increasingly technological world" (p. 8).

3. Modes and media

The difference between multimodal and multimedia is largely a difference between "modes" and "media." Modes can be understood as ways of representing information, or the semiotic channels we use to compose a text (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Examples of modes include words, sounds, still and moving images, animation and color. Media, on the other hand, are the "tools and material resources" used to produce and disseminate texts (p. 22). Examples of media include books, radio, television, computers, paint brush and canvas, and human voices.

3.1. Defining multimodal

Multimodal is a term coined by members of the New London Group, including Cope and Kalantzis (2000), Kress (2003, 2005) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). These scholars have argued that at this point in history, communication is not limited to one mode (such as text) realized through one medium (such as the page or the book). Rather, as a result of digitization, all modes can now be realized through a single binary code, and the medium of the screen is becoming the primary site where multiple modes can be composed to make meaning in dynamic ways. Essentially, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) put it, all modes "can be operated by one multi-skilled person, using one interface, one mode of physical manipulation, so that he or she can ask, at every point: 'Shall I express this with sound or music? Shall I say this visually or verbally?" (p. 2). Multimodal texts are characterized by the mixed logics brought together through the combination of modes (such as images, text, color, etc.).[1]

Modes and media are independent of and interdependent with each other, meaning that although media and modes are different from each other, the media we use affect the ways in which we can realize meaning through various modes. For instance, the mode of writing is affected differently by the affordances and limitations of the medium of the book versus the medium of the screen (Kress, 2003). The notion of the author as a single, solitary voice communicating to his or her audience through the finished product of the book has been transformed as communications media have opened up the possibilities for textual production to be non-linear, hypertextual, continuously revisable, and interactive. As writing becomes an increasingly screen-based activity, the ways in which we write (from the grammar we use to the style, tone, appearance, and structure of our words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages) necessarily make more fluid and transitory the role we occupy as "author" of a text. This change in the relationship of author to text, and thus in the way in which meaning can be communicated through text, was facilitated by technological advancement that allowed for a shift from the static medium of the page to the more fluid medium of the screen.

The term multimodal made its way into the field of composition through the work of the New London Group (2000) and the influence of Kress (2003, 2005). Within the field of composition, Cynthia L. Selfe has been instrumental in popularizing the term by using it frequently in her scholarship and teaching (2005, 2007). As the co-editors of *Computers and Composition,* Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe (2005) devoted a special issue of the journal to "The Influence of Gunther Kress' Work" following Kress' featured speaker presentation at the Convention on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in San Antonio in 2004. Further, Selfe and several other scholars secured a grant from the National Council for the Teachers of English (NCTE) in which they surveyed composition instructors for how those instructors taught and composed multimodal texts. The article that came out of this study was called "Integrating Multimodality into Composition Curricula" (Anderson, Atkins, Ball, & Millar, 2006). In it, the authors suggested that multimodal is derived from a theory of semiosis that

> [a]cknowledge[s] the practices of human sign-makers who select from a number of modalities for expression (including sound, image, and animation, for example), depending on rhetorical and material contexts within which the communication was being designed and distributed. (p. 59)

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[1] Although multimodal texts are often discussed as texts realized digitally through a screen, Jody Shipka (2005) showed how they can be non-digital as well.

The emphasis on signs (semiotics), materiality, and how communication is designed and distributed borrows from the ways in which the term has been discussed by Kress, Van Leeuwen and others. For the purposes of their audience of rhetoric and composition scholars, Anderson et al. have also emphasized the "rhetorical" contexts in which meaning is made. This explanation is the most comprehensive and theoretical put forth in rhetoric and composition scholarship, which is not surprising because the article was written to showcase how those who are already familiar with multimodal texts are using and composing such texts.

Definitions of just about everything tend to adapt to the variety of audiences to whom they are being delivered. Daniel Anderson, Anthony Atkins, Cheryl Ball, and Krista Homicz Millar's (2006) theoretical explanation is useful to those who can understand and apply it but may not be accessible to those who are not familiar with the semiotic theories on which it is based. Those unfamiliar with the theoretical context surrounding multimodal may not see the real-life applicability of a term that refers to "human sign-makers" and "modalities of expression" and thus may not feel ready to introduce it in their classrooms. Such teachers may be curious to explore new ways of composing but wary of such a complicated-sounding term, and thus may benefit from a definition that shows the applicability of the term more immediately. A simpler definition of multimodal was put forth in a textbook edited by Selfe called *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* (2007). In the first chapter of the book, Selfe and Takayoshi defined multimodal texts as those that "exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound" (2007, p. 1). This definition, as one in which texts simply *exceed the alphabetic*, is much less complex than the explanation put forth in Anderson et al. (2006a,b). It is also more practical in how it avoids theoretical references (i.e., "theory of semiosis," "human sign-makers" and "material contexts") and focuses exclusively on the specific modes that students and instructors can use to compose texts. This more accessible description appeals to a broader audience of teachers who need not be familiar with the nuances provided in the discussions of Kress, Van Leeuwen, Anderson et al., and others to be able to imagine ways of facilitating such textual production in the classroom. This is important because the limited span of a semester or quarter requires that teachers make choices about the composing practices they will help their students pursue. Because there are so many diverse perspectives with which to engage and possible assignments to develop out of those perspectives, the way a perspective is named and discussed can determine whether an instructor feels willing to devote any time to exploring it. Some perspectives, especially those associated with new technologies or non-traditional approaches, may be easily passed over if perceived as being too difficult to understand or implement.

3.2. Defining multimedia

Previous to multimodal's entrance into the scholarly conversation, multimedia was the term primarily used to describe the expansion of composing practices in composition scholarship and classrooms. Multimedia was used most frequently in the 1990's with the advent of the CD-ROM. It was a term that described texts composed by using a computer to integrate words and visuals as well as sound and video. In a 1991 *MACworld* article (as cited in Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran, & Selfe, 1996), Jim Heid defined multimedia as "the integration of two or more communications media. It's the use of text and sounds, plus still and moving pictures, to convey ideas, sell products, educate, and/or entertain" (p. 225). Communications media as they are discussed in this definition (e.g., text, sounds, images) might today be considered modes, but the latter half of the definition puts an emphasis on the finished product and the intended uses of the product, which is more characteristic of multimedia and its use in industry than multimodal and its use in the classroom. I'll discuss this comparison in greater depth later in the article.

In composition (more specifically in the subfield of computers and composition), multimedia was preceded by the term "hypermedia," which described texts that assume a non-linear literary hypertext structure (Hawisher et al., 1996). As editing and web technologies became more accessible, the use of the term multimedia became more common. However, as a term it tends to go much more frequently undefined in the scholarly literature, perhaps because it acts as a catch-all term for any text that is not an alphabetic print text.

Fred T. Hofstettler (2000), in his textbook *Multimedia Literacy*, provides one of the most precise definitions of multimedia. Hofstetter defined multimedia as "the use of a computer to present and combine text, graphics, audio, and video with links and tools that let the user navigate, interact, create, and communicate" (p. 2). In this definition there is a greater emphasis on the user and what the text will allow the user to do with it. Emphasis can also be placed on the author and the kinds of texts an author might produce, as definitions of multimedia found on a variety of tech-oriented

web sites show. As just one example, TechTerms defines multimedia in this way:

> As the name implies, multimedia is the integration of multiple forms of media. This includes text, graphics, audio, video, etc. For example, a presentation involving audio and video clips would be considered a "multimedia presentation." Educational software that involves animations, sound, and text is called "multimedia software." ("Multimedia, n.d.")

In this definition there is no reliance on how a user might consume or interact with a text for it to be considered multimedia. Rather, the definition focuses only on the choices an author makes in composing his or her text (i.e., Does the author include audio and video clips in the text? If so, then it is a multimedia text). Taken together, these definitions show multimedia to be a descriptive term able to support the practices of both authors and users as well as a wide array of technologies and texts. This helps explain its ability to remain a relevant term in both academic and non-academic or industry contexts throughout the multitude of technological changes that have occurred over the past several decades.

But whereas Briand's (1970) notion of multimedia focused primarily on the multiple media he used in the classroom (projectors, recorders, etc.), these more recent definitions seem to suggest that multimedia texts are inherently multimodal texts because rather than being texts that combine various media (such as the book, radio, television, and computer screen), they are texts that combine a variety of modes (such as image, animation, and sound) disseminated through a single medium (such as a computer screen). This change in emphasis has had little discernable effect in non-academic or industry uses of the term because multimedia has proven flexible enough to be adaptable to changes in technology or production that occur. However, in academic contexts, it opened the door for terms like multimodal to come about that more accurately describe the composing practices of students taking place in the classroom today.

4. Using terms interchangeably

Both the definitions of multimedia and multimodal are concerned with the combination of modes, which makes them quite similar to one another. In the context of the field of rhetoric and composition, these terms are not only defined similarly, they are often used interchangeably. Considering the relative newness, in composition, of expanding our notions of text and the technologies we use to compose texts, using terms interchangeably reveals how little consensus there seems to be on what these terms should be used to describe. Thus, scholars who want to open up the conversation to as many people as possible may use a variety of different terms to describe the work they and their students produce. One example of this is Jonathan Alexander's call for papers for a special issue of *Computers and Composition* on "Media Convergence" (Fig. 1).

In his call for papers for this special issue, Alexander (2006) used no fewer than eight different phrases to describe the kinds of texts students are composing. Such phrases include:

- Digital and new media communications technologies
- Multimodal, multimedia texts
- Multimodal experiences
- Array of multimedia
- Media experiences
- Multimodal composing
- Multiple forms of new media
- Multimodal new media texts

The sheer number of different ways that Alexander used to describe the kinds of texts he was looking to address in this special issue suggests that there are a diverse number of terms that can be used to describe "media convergence" and very little consensus on what the terms actually mean. The more terms suggested, the more possibilities for interpretation emerge.

But even when one term is deliberately selected and used, other terms still tend to make their way into the discussion, as is the case in the NCTE-sponsored "Survey of Multimodal Pedagogies in Writing Programs" (Anderson et al., 2006a) mentioned earlier. Although multimodal was the term the survey emphasized, more than one question and response used the term multimedia, especially in the section regarding publication for promotion and tenure. Fig. 2 illustrates just one example of this.

"Media Convergence"/CFP

Alexander, Jonathan (alexanj) <ALEXANJ@ucmail.uc.edu>   Mon, Dec 4, 2006 at 6:54 PM
Reply-To: Writing Program Administration <WPA-L@asu.edu>
To: WPA-L@asu.edu

Just a quick reminder about the following CFP: please circulate. THANKS!

Computers and Composition: An International Journal

Special Issue Call for Papers

Media Convergence

Guest Editor: Jonathan Alexander

This special issue of the journal of Computers and Composition invites contributors to take a critical look at "Media Convergence." As our students become increasingly fluent with digital and new media communications technologies, they are often "mixing and matching" media to produce complex, multimodal, multimedia texts. Sound and video clips are nearly instantaneously uploaded to blogs; IM chats are scooped up for dissemination on listservs, blogs, and cellphones; podcasts offer a medley of sound, sight, and text; and computer games immerse players in rich multimodal experiences. We see media convergence also in the use of increasingly sophisticated portable devices that offer an array of multimedia, from PSPs to BlackBerrys to other hand-held gadgets. These devices make readily available complex "texts" and media experiences that require their own special literacies to understand and appreciate.

In an effort to take seriously such multimodal composing and the convergence of multiple forms of new media in the creation of complex texts rendered by an array of devices, this special issue seeks essays of 20-25 pages that critically examine either the pedagogical or research implications (or both) of "media convergence." Questions to consider are (but not limited to) the following:

Fig. 1. CFP email sent to the Writing Program Administration's listserv seeking submissions for a special issue of *Computers and Composition* journal on "Media Convergence."

The question in Fig. 2 is asking about texts that are described as "multimedia/new media," but the responses include two instances of multimedia and two instances of multimodal. In addition to the texts in question being described in three different ways (multimedia, new media, multimodal), it is significant that multimedia is included in this particular question because it concerns scholarly publications that count toward tenure. Publications toward tenure are valued and evaluated as finished "products." It matters not at all to a tenure committee how long a person has spent on a manuscript or the work they invested in getting it written and published. It only matters that it was published by a reputable press (if a book) or in a peer-reviewed, national journal (if an article) and looked upon favorably by those in a person's field.

114   If you have not published any multimedia/new media texts that have counted toward tenure, what has been a challenge in that process?

- time and/or help to learn new technologies
- time to implement knowledge of technology into multimedia composition
- understanding what a multimodal text might entail.
- desire
- technological resources (i.e., multimedia computer, peripherals, etc.)
- multimodal publications won't count towards tenure
- other

Fig. 2. Question #114 from "Survey of Multimodal Pedagogies in Writing Programs" asking about the challenges of having multimedia/new media texts count toward tenure.
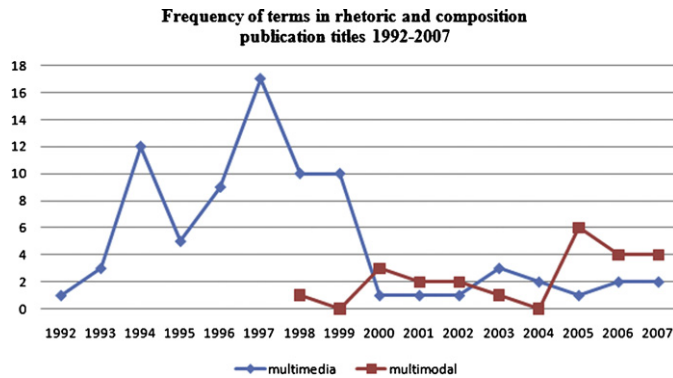
**Frequency of terms in rhetoric and composition
publication titles 1992-2007**

Fig. 3. Line graph showing the frequency with which the terms "multimedia" and "multimodal" are used in the titles of articles in rhetoric and composition publications from 1992–2007.

In short, the "production" and "distribution" of a text can be considered to be more important than the process it took to get there. This continuum—from process to production and distribution—is one I will discuss later in the article to illuminate why, despite terms being used interchangeably in the examples above, in fact multimodal is the preferred term of scholars in rhetoric and composition while multimedia is preferred in non-academic or industry contexts.

5. Multimodal in composition

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, multimodal has become preferable to multimedia in composition both because it is more theoretically accurate in describing our pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text and because it has been championed by leading scholars in our field, including Cynthia L. Selfe. I have already mentioned the NCTE-sponsored survey which asks directly about multimodal composing practices (Anderson et al., 2006a,b), the special issue of *Computers and Composition* dedicated to the work of Gunther Kress (2005), and the textbook *Multimodal Composing: Resources for Teachers* (2007) to illustrate the trend toward using multimodal in our field. In addition, a comprehensive search of journals and books from rhetoric and composition (and related subfields like computers and composition and technical writing[2]) reveals that although multimedia was the preferred (and really the only) term used early on in the 1990s, it has since fallen off in usage and been replaced in part by multimodal. The chart shown in Fig. 3 indicates the trend.

We see in this graph that multimedia hit its peak in 1997, right before the introduction of multimodal to the scholarly literature. Multimodal has since surpassed multimedia in the number of times it is cited in the field of rhetoric and composition, though it has yet to achieve the same frequency of use that multimedia enjoyed at its peak. This is the case in part because multimodal is still a relatively new term and in part because a number of different terms (such as new media and digital media) have also come to be used in place of multimedia.

6. Multimedia in public or industry

But as multimodal has gained popularity in rhetoric and composition, multimedia continues to be the term of choice in non-academic or industry spheres, as well as more "hybrid" sites that interface between the industry and higher education. Such hybrid sites include the following:

- Program or department titles; course titles
- Technical and professional communication publications

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[2] The search was conducted using CompPile (2008), which describes itself as "an inventory of publications in post-secondary composition, rhetoric, technical writing, ESL, and discourse studies" from 1939 to present (Haswell & Blalock, 2008). Additional searches were conducted to supplement missing content, including, for instance, issues of *Computers and Composition* from 1999-present, which are not yet indexed in CompPile.

- NCTE position statements, which outline stances on issues relevant to English studies and are intended to be read by English educators at all levels (K-graduate level), as well as parents, students, members of the press, and policymakers.
- Partnerships such as EDUCAUSE and the New Media Consortium, which bring together people from business, government, and higher education in an effort to improve student learning.

Non-academic or industry sites include the following:

- National news and media outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, etc.
- Information technology outlets such as CNET, ZDNet, etc.
- Business and corporate sites, including those offering communication and marketing services

6.1. Hybrid examples

6.1.1. Program and course titles

A compilation of writing majors, compiled by the CCCCs Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition (2007), showed a variety of courses directed at composing with digital media, technology, and for the Web. One university major (from Arizona State University) and one minor (from University of California Santa Barbara), which is not included in the compilation because it's a minor, use "multimedia writing," in their respective titles, and eight programs require a course called "multimedia writing or "multimedia authoring" (ASU, UCSB, Michigan State, Philadelphia University, Purdue University, University of Texas at Austin, and Washington State University). No programs as of yet had classes that used the term multimodal. There is no doubt, however, that many of the courses listed as multimedia pursue inquiry that would fall under the definition of multimodal provided by Anderson et al. (2006a,b). And yet, multimodal is not used in program and course titles most likely because the audience for such titles are students and community members, many of whom might be unfamiliar with (and suspicious of) a strange-sounding term like multimodal but who would have instant familiarity with a term like multimedia. In addition, because multimedia is a term used so much more often in the public sphere, students can connect courses in "multimedia writing" with the work they may be asked to produce after they graduate.

6.1.2. Technical and professional communication publications

The more public segments of the field of rhetoric and composition are represented through its technical and professional communication magazines and journals, which regularly publish on workplace studies and preparing students for communications industries beyond their college experience. These publications refer to the work students produce in the classroom as multimedia significantly more so than multimodal. In a keyword search of the most popular magazines and journals in this field (including *Intercom*, *Technical Communication (TC)*, *Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ)*, *Business Communication Quarterly (BCQ)*, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication (IEEE)*, and *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication (JTWC)*), the term multimedia is cited a total of 243 times and multimodal a total of 3 times. Examples of titles include:

- "How to Incorporate Multimedia in the Business Communication Classroom—Without Learning New Software Packages" (BCQ, 1997)
- "Hypermedia, Multimedia, and Reader Cognition: An Empirical Study" (TC, 1998)
- "Designing, Developing, and Marketing Multimedia Products" (JTWC, 1998)
- "Teaching and Assessing Multimedia-Based Oral Presentations" (BCQ, 2001)
- "Toward Accommodating Gender Differences in Multimedia Communication" (IEEE, 2004)
- "Tracing Visual Narratives: User-testing Methodology for Developing a Multimedia Museum Show" (TC, 2005)
- "Keeping Users at the Center: Developing a Multimedia Interface for Informed Consent" (TCQ, 2008)

In this more public sub-field of rhetoric and composition, there seems to be greater emphasis on multimedia over multimodal because professional, technical, and business communication programs are often directly linked with organizations and companies where students may engage in internships and eventual employment and where they

need to be able to communicate the kinds of work they do and the skills they have acquired to their future employers.

6.1.3. NCTE position statements

NCTE position statements are intended to be read by English educators at all levels (K-graduate level), as well as parents, students, members of the press, and policymakers. In a position statement titled "Toward a Definition of 21st-Century Literacies," approved by the NCTE Executive Council in February of 2008, the committee used the phrase "multi-media texts" exclusively as part of a bulleted list describing the kinds of composing practices writers in the twenty-first century will need to engage in, specifically suggesting students be able to "create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts." The choice in using "multi-media" over multimodal to describe the kinds of texts students should be creating, critiquing, analyzing and evaluating is significant considering that in 2005, a rather extended "Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies" was put together by the Multimodal Literacies Issue Management Team of the NCTE Executive Committee (2005). The 2005 summary statement seemed especially directed at teachers of English because of the extensive information provided in each section that asked "*what does this mean for teaching?*" And yet, despite this extended statement on the importance of developing "multimodal literacies" in English classrooms, when it came time to take a more general position on "21st-Century Literacies," the committee chose to use the term "multi-media," which signals the need to appeal to diverse audiences in a succinct and familiar way. The committee would be able to assume that all audiences would know what "multi-media" meant and it would thus not need to provide further explanation as might be required if the committee were to use a more obscure, theoretically situated term like "multimodal."

6.1.4. Partnerships

EDUCAUSE. EDUCAUSE (n.d.) is a non-profit organization "whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology" (n.p.). Ninety-nine percent of all research-extensive universities are members of Educause, as are the majority of other higher education institutions (1864 in all). Sixty-one associations, 24 state agencies, and 252 corporations are also members of Educause. Educause publishes a quarterly journal and magazine as well as a book series and extensive other material on their web site. A keyword search throughout the Educause site and all of its web publications reveals that multimedia is cited 5540 times while multimodal is cited just 38 times. These numbers are not surprising when we consider that Educause material is written for and read by a wide range of people entering the conversation from a wide range of backgrounds, including education, business, and government. Multimedia is a term that seems able to best accommodate the variety of knowledge bases people bring to the conversation.

New media consortium. The New Media Consortium (NMC) is a non-profit organization "of over 260 learning-focused organizations dedicated to the exploration and use of new media and new technologies" (2005a). Members of the NMC include colleges and universities, community colleges, museums, research centers, foundations, and corporations. In April 2005, the NMC, along with the George Lucas Foundation and Adobe Systems, held a summit to

> identify strategic priorities for what we are calling 21st Century Literacy - the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap - and to develop an action list of recommendations to meet those priorities. The summit is intended to catalyze actions globally across five focus sectors: policy, research, media, arts, K-12 education, and higher education. (New Media Consortium, 2005b)

Resulting from the summit was a monograph titled *A Global Imperative: The Report of the 21st Century Literacy Summit* (2005a). A "Visual Record of the Meeting" (2005b) was also produced and published to the NMC web site; it showcased the proceedings of the summit through a variety of illustrated discussion boards and photographs. The monograph used the term multimedia several times, including pull-out stories such as one called "Designing for Multimedia Literacy Across the Curriculum" (NMC, 2005a, p. 6). But more interesting is the number of times that multimedia is mentioned on the boards included in the "Visual Record of the Meeting." In the poster in Fig. 4, multimedia is mentioned five times.

Phrases like "We need a TITLE 9 for multi-media," and "multimedia is done in teams" are just a few that accompany some of the visual maps in Fig. 4, such as the arrow pointing upward along a progression of terms (oral, print, graphic. . . multimedia) and images like the one shown in Fig. 5, which was located on a previous poster.
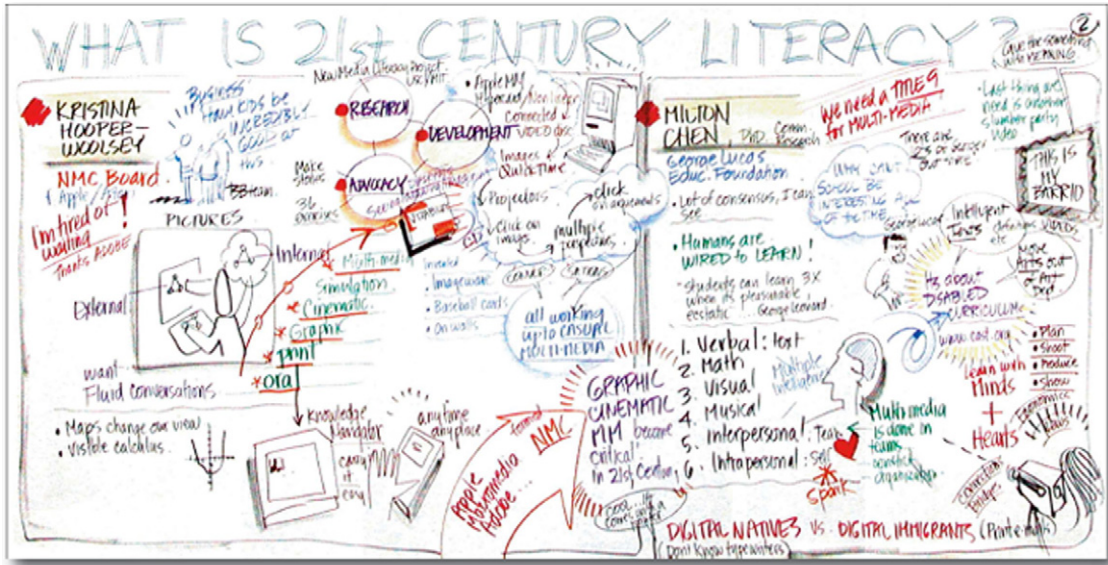
Fig. 4. Discussion board put together for the 21st Century Literacy Summit in which presenters and participants reflected on key facets of literacy in the twenty-first century and related topics. Discussion board shows 5 instances of the term "multimedia" being used.
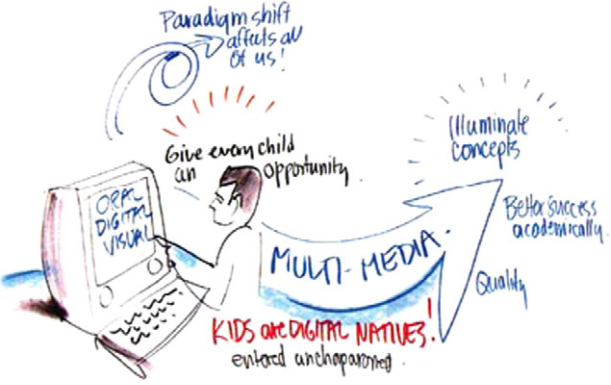

Fig. 5. Segment of a discussion board put together to accompany the "Opening Remarks" of the 21st Century Literacy Summit. This segment uses the term "multi-media" to show the kinds of literacy practices that children are already engaging in.

The fact that the boards use the term multimedia so frequently is significant because these boards represent the starting points for the discussion that was taking place during the summit. Multimedia in this context is not a term that was arrived upon eventually but one that served as the entry point or gateway term to begin the discussion and bring a diverse group of people (with different knowledge bases and discourses) together on the same page.

6.2. Non-academic or industry examples

In the hybrid examples discussed above, multimedia is used to interface among a wide variety of audiences. In non-academic or industry examples, it is used to describe non-alphabetic texts as well as texts whose worth is determined not by the processes through which they are composed but by the finished products that are enjoyed or evaluated upon distribution. To characterize non-alphabetic content, many national newspapers have pages devoted to multimedia. Fig. 6 illustrates that for the *New York Times*, multimedia means images and video, not the more customary newspaper alphabetic print.

In the CNET forum shown in Fig. 7, multimedia is talked about in terms of editing and production software and hardware. Users who post to this forum discuss issues pertaining to video file formats, editing and converting

Fig. 6. Partial screen shot of the "Multimedia/Photos" (n.d.) page of the *New York Times* newspaper, online edition.
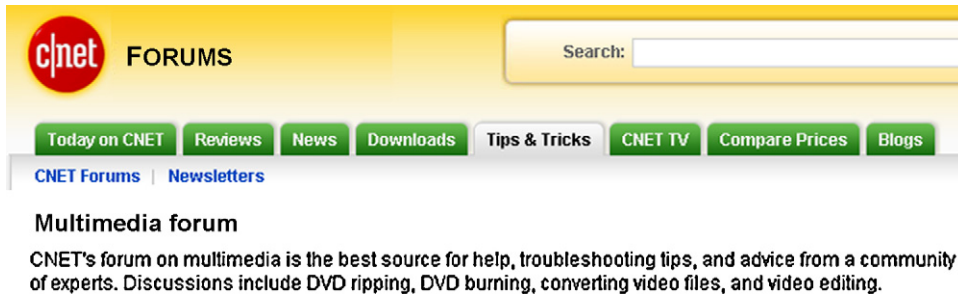

Fig. 7. Partial screen shot of the "Multimedia Forum" section of the CNET web site.

video, Flash animation, DVD recording, and streaming video. Questions are primarily concerned with the technical manipulation and production of material used for personal entertainment rather than the organization and style of content developed for persuasive communication. In the web site for The Communications Group shown in Fig. 8, multimedia is talked about in terms of "interactive sales presentations," "marketing," and "animations." The Communications

Fig. 8. Partial screen shot of the web site for The Communications Group, a company that provides multimedia, marketing, networking, and communication services for clients.

Group (n.d.) web site describes how "text, images, music, voice-overs, video, animation and printed material can all be used to varying degrees in an attempt to 'move' your audience and effectively communicate your message." We might talk about this as multimodal in a more academic context, but this group is out to deliver a product, not a way of thinking, which may contribute to their use of the more generally understood multimedia.

7. Multimodal design, multimedia production

The contexts in which multimedia and multimodal are used become clearer when we recognize that each term is associated with certain stages of the continuum along which a text evolves from design/process to production/distribution. For instance, The Communications Group develops multimedia products, and the success of the company depends on how those finished products are received by clients and how they perform after being distributed in public. Similar to the previous discussion of tenure materials, multimedia is used to describe texts whose worth is determined by their successful production and distribution, not by the process an author took to compose them. Multimodal, on the other hand, is regularly used to characterize the cognitive and socially-situated choices a student or scholar makes while in the process of composing a text, before it enters into final production and distribution.

The difference between modes and media can thus be looked at as a difference between design/process (modes) and production/distribution (media). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) introduced their multimodal approach to communication by shaping it around four "domains of practice" or "strata," which include discourse, design, production, and distribution. More simply, these strata distinguish between the content and the expression sides of communication (p. 20).

Design concerns making choices about which modes a person will use and how to develop a concept or content that will eventually be realized or expressed through one or more media. For Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), design is "a particular way of combining semiotic modes" (p. 21). They elaborated:

> [D]esign is still separate from the actual material production of the semiotic product or the actual material articulation of the semiotic event.... The resources on which design draws, the semiotic modes, are still abstract, capable of being realized in different materialities . . . The same design can be realized in different media. (p. 6)

Kress and Van Leeuwen made the distinction that modes are on the "content" side and media are on the "expression" side of meaning-making (p. 21).

Production, then, is associated with the media through which designs can be expressed. Kress and Van Leeuwen defined production as "the material articulation of the semiotic event or. . .artefact" (p. 6). They further elaborate on the relationship between modes and media in this way:

> A whole other set of skills is involved here: technical skills, skills of the hand and the eye, skills related not to semiotic modes, but to semiotic media. We use the term "medium" here in the sense of "medium of execution" (the material substance drawn into culture and worked over cultural time). (2001, p. 6)

A design necessarily adapts to the medium being used to produce and distribute it; however, many of a design's elements (such as color scheme, language, font, and image choices) extend across various media. So if an instructor were going to have students design a marketing campaign for a new speaker series on her campus, she might ask them, as part of the design process, to determine who they would want to attend the series and how best to appeal to those people and persuade them to attend. The content that the students develop would be multimodal and include decisions they make about language (from a title and description of the event to key words that might especially appeal to their audiences), font style and size, appropriate or catchy images, and appealing color scheme and layout. This content would then be produced or expressed through a number of different media, including flyers, mailers, email announcements, web sites, radio announcements, word of mouth, etc.

To be sure, the evolution from design to production, or from abstract concept to the material realization of that concept, happens along a continuum, and there does not exist a clear line between where one ends and the other begins. However, distinguishing between the two is useful in an effort to explain the prevalence of certain terms being used in certain contexts. Design is important to the composition classroom because it emphasizes the development of ideas (invention) and the engagement with a process by which students make choices, receive feedback, and revise those choices concerning arguments they are making within a particular rhetorical context. Whether developing ideas for a written, visual, aural, or multimodal text, the rhetorical context always includes identifying who the audience

for a particular text will be, what the purpose is, and which modes or combination of modes might best suit the communicative event. This process generally precedes any final production that may occur.

Although design encourages students to make appropriate choices within a rhetorical context and is thus a valued practice in composition classrooms, production, or the material expression of design, is not as highly valued. This is the case for several reasons. One may be that instructors don't always have the technical ability to teach production skills to students. Another may be that the production technology—whether that includes computers, hardware (like color printers), or software (like web-design and image editing programs)—may not be available to students or instructors due to funding or lab space shortages. A third may be that there simply isn't time within the short span of a semester to fully execute both the design and production of a text, so an instructor may choose to spend more time with design because the technical skills required to produce a text aren't necessary until after the development of rhetorical invention and decision-making skills that instructors primarily care that students learn. For example, having students produce a "deliverable" web site, as one might do for an actual client, is not necessary for students to generate ideas and make design and content decisions that precede the technical creation of the site.

But more than these reasons, instructors seem to value design over production for the same reasons they moved away from current-traditional models for composing and embraced more process and post-process oriented models that, though complicated in important ways throughout the years, are still valued in classrooms today. Production is often concerned with streamlining style differences and valuing a text for the completeness of its final product. Since the late 60's and 70's, instructors have moved away from an emphasis on grammatical correctness and rigid, formulaic structures for writing that placed too much weight on the correctness of the final product at the expense of creative invention and culturally situated approaches at meaning making. Multimodal is a term that can support an understanding of design-as-process and the situated choices and strategies students need practice developing.

However, outside of the composition classroom, it is production that is most valued because it is only by way of production that companies are able to meet the needs of their clients and stay economically viable. Were students working on an industry project and a final web site was expected to fulfill a contract between a design company and client, the design choices and process by which a designer worked might be used to explain the final product, but in the end it is the final product that is valued and evaluated. As a result, those outside of the academic sphere, in industry and more public environments, may not readily shift from multimedia to multimodal the way composition has because the more important emphasis is on the final product rather than the process that product took to become realized.

8. Conclusion

Scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have begun the practice of defining terms like multimedia, multimodal, digital media, and new media, terms that are used to describe the new kinds of composing practices occurring in our classrooms and scholarship. Coming to more precise definitions and use of these terms must include attention to their histories and the contexts in which they have been used. When faced with a multitude of terms that are often used interchangeably or with little consistency, it may seem desirable to come to more precise definitions of each in an effort to differentiate one from another and better determine when one term (such as multimedia) should be used over another, similar term (such as multimodal). However, any desire for certainty in term choice may not be entirely within the control of the user. Terms like multimedia and multimodal carry with them histories and contexts that already restrict the ways in which they are understood by audiences and thus make it necessary for people to have the flexibility to use terms that are most appropriate for the context and audience to whom they are being directed, regardless of their precise definitions.

Multimedia is a term that has a (relatively) long history within composition, being used in composition scholarship as early as 1970, whereas multimodal is a term that has emerged out of scholarship published in just the last ten years. Both multimedia and multimodal arose in response to the technological advancement that was occurring—in the late 60's and early 90's for multimedia and late 90's for multimodal—but while multimedia emerged out of industry, multimodal arose out of the academic scholarship of the New London Group. As a result, the use of multimedia in industry remains dominant, while the use of multimodal within composition scholarship has grown.

The definition of a term should be driven, in part, by the audience who will encounter and use it. As the different definitions of multimodal that I have discussed in this paper show, scholars can define a term with great detail if they

are attempting to illustrate its theoretical nuances, as Anderson et al. (2006a,b) have done. Or, they might determine that a definition should remain more simply defined so that it can connect to the less familiar knowledge base of their audience, as Selfe and Takayoshi (2007) have done.

Multimodal and multimedia are especially interesting terms to examine together because they come from different social, technological, and historical contexts and their definitions are technically different, yet they are often understood similarly. Definitions reflect the shared values of a community. Multimedia used to be the only term available to describe the kind of work students and scholars were producing that included computers, video, audio, and interactivity. Now that we have other terms, such as multimodal, that work better to describe the cognitive and socially situated work students do in the classroom, the rhetoric and composition community has adopted multimodal with increasing frequency. But instructors must be careful to attend to the knowledge bases of the other communities with which rhetoric and composition faculty and students interact and must keep those communities' values in mind as well. If instructors want to make sure they are able to communicate the importance of this work to their students, to others in their departments, to university administrators, to journalists, to grant-finding agencies, and to business and government leaders, they would do well to keep the term multimedia in play as a gateway term because that is the term members of those communities are already familiar with and that describe the kinds of texts they value.

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