

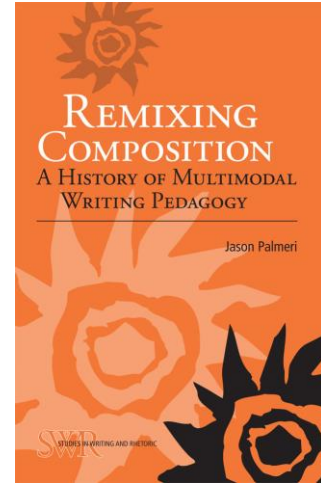
Jason Palmeri, **Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy**, Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 2012, 216 pp., \$34.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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The premise of this excellent historical account of multimodal composing practices and pedagogies is simple: Composing texts, even alphabetic texts, has always already been multimodal. In his impressively sourced history, Jason Palmeri (Associate Professor of English, Director of Composition, and Co-Director of the Digital Writing Collaborative at Miami University of Ohio) offers a unique, nonlinear examination of the history of composition and its pedagogy. Although his book is written to address scholars in composition, it also offers useful insights to scholars in all areas of communication who are interested in, or work with, multimodal composing practices. Palmeri draws on scholarship from rhetoric, composition, psychology, education, film studies, and other disciplines to address the complex “borrowing” and interdisciplinary network of theories and methods that undergird pedagogical approaches to writing or composing. Truly, any reader interested in the multitude of contexts surrounding multimodal composing processes, be they political, cultural, semiotic, or otherwise, will find value in Palmeri’s account of the last four decades of writing pedagogy.



In **Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy**, Palmeri responds to claims and assumptions about the development of multimodal composing practices being a result of recent adoption of digital tools and affordances. At the same time, he also responds to the long-held belief that composition, as a field, has historically been only about composing words—alphabetic texts. Challenging these notions, the author investigates the past 40 years of composition history, noting many of the ways that teachers of writing employed analog methods of multimodality. As Palmeri describes it, he seeks in his book to “recover how compositionists from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s studied and taught alphabetic writing as an embodied multimodal process that shares affinities with other forms of composing (visual, aural, spatial, gestural)” (p. 5). Further, Palmeri resists the narrative of “progress” that often limits which aspects of a history can be told and typically asserts a chronological unfolding. To accomplish this resistance, the author employs the metaphor of “associative remix,” providing his nonlinear examination as “tracks” and “refrains” to move through his historical investigation.

Evoking the experience of playing a vinyl album, Palmeri divides his book into two parts, like sides of a record. Part 1 (like Side A) focuses specifically on the ways that compositionists theorized the process of alphabetic writing and taught it as a multimodal process. Within part 1, he revisits and reimagines the Process Movement, playing tracks in “Creativity,” “Translation,” and “Imagination” to demonstrate “unexpected connections” among scholars in various theoretical “camps” (p. 14). The author continues mapping the unexpected connections between scholars in chapter 2 where he investigates writing pedagogy as an “auditory art.” Revisiting the theoretical camps of expressivist, rhetorical, and

critical pedagogies, Palmeri explores the linkages between the written and spoken word through voice, dialogue, and dialect. In doing so, he challenges what he calls the “artificial bifurcation” between the teaching of writing and the teaching of speaking (p. 52). As just one example of Palmeri’s superb revisioning (re-seeing), he turns to look at the work of Edward J. Corbett in adapting classical rhetoric to the teaching of writing. Palmeri notes, however, that while many histories note Corbett’s important contributions to the development of composition pedagogies, “they tend to pass over Corbett’s simultaneous attempt to develop a rhetorical pedagogy that integrated the teaching of auditory and alphabetic forms of communication” (p. 61). He demonstrates how Corbett used this integration to teach students about ethos development and audience analysis—both exceptionally useful skills in all areas of communication.

Part 2 (Side B) of *Remixing Composition* explores different ways that composition teacher-scholars responded to the “new media” of their day. In chapter 3, for example, Palmeri argues that many scholars and teachers of composition were concerned that “shifts in communication technologies necessitated a rethinking of composition’s exclusive focus on linear, alphabetic text” (p. 87). He notes how film, television, and even comic books were seen at the time as “new media” affecting students’ abilities to appreciate and produce conventional alphabetic texts (p. 88). In the chapter, Palmeri employs four tracks to remix and reimagine composition history in the late 1960s and early 1970s, focusing on classical rhetoric’s influence on electronic media, the current-traditional pedagogies applying multimedia in the classroom, different types of invention strategies that borrowed concepts such as the montage from film, and the idea of composing strategies as “assemblage” (p. 90). Chapter 4 usefully explores the period of 1971–1984 in which many composition teacher-scholars employed cameras in the classroom as part of the composing process. The four tracks in this section each serve to complicate the historical narrative of the role of visual communication in the composition classroom. The exploration leads again through various theoretical camps that employ camera, filmmaking, and television technologies for composing. For example, in Track I (“Writing With Light”) Palmeri skillfully places scholars of expressivist pedagogies such as Donald Murray and Jack Kligerman into dialogue to demonstrate how teachers of writing employed camera technologies as invention in the composing of alphabetic texts and how such technologies could usefully assist students with greater understanding of “point of view” in alphabetic composing.

Informative, instructive, and relevant, Palmeri skillfully guides his readers through this historical revisioning in a way that clearly maps out the unexpected connections his introduction describes. The repeating chorus occurring through each of his “tracks” is that composition is always already multimodal. Rather than merely making this claim, however, he effectively demonstrates this point through his text. He also convincingly demonstrates the importance of resisting binary classifications. In both enacting and discussing a resistance to the binaries inherent in linear historical accounts, Palmeri’s nonlinear revisioning reveals his goal: “not to choose one pedagogy over another, but rather to consider how we can recombine them—remix them—in ways that can enable us to develop a more nuanced and complex view of what it means to teach composition in the contemporary digital moment” (p. 15). Indeed, throughout his book, the author transcends the many theoretical camps he discusses, providing a new lens and new insights through the unexpected connections.

While some historical accounts leave readers in the past, one of the most useful features of *Remixing Composition* is its relevance for contemporary composing strategies across the disciplines of communication. In each of his chapters, Palmeri astutely points to the contemporary implications that a more robust understanding of multimodal composing in the past can offer readers. As each section concludes, he offers a “reprise” that deftly encapsulates “macrotheoretical principles” available to readers through the revisioning lens of the chapter. Each principle—or refrain, as he calls them—succinctly summarizes the previous materials and then extends them by offering practical advice for how contemporary composition teachers might employ the concepts. For example, after reimagining the Process-Movement, one of the macrotheoretical principles that Palmeri offers is that such histories of composition can remind readers of the limitations of alphabetic texts. Palmeri then suggests the process of remediating (or transforming) a text from “one modality to another,” an act that he describes as translation (p. 47). By translating texts from one modality to another, claims Palmeri, “students can potentially develop a more nuanced understanding of the unique affordances of visual, aural, and alphabetic forms of communication” (p. 47). The inclusion of these principles at the end of each chapter not only repeats and recasts the unexpected connections envisioned but also brings the reader back into the contemporary moment with pragmatic applications stemming from the theoretical discussions. Importantly, however, Palmeri strives to remind his readers that such pedagogical applications are meant only as inventive strategies—“to encourage teachers to look to the past (as well as to the future) as they work to design unique, multimodal pedagogies in their own local contexts” (p. 19).

Finally, Palmeri augments the refrains offered in each chapter by providing an epilogue to the book in which he outlines “three broad pedagogical goals” (p. 149). The purpose of these goals is twofold: On the one hand, such broad pedagogical goals provide a means for building on the rich multimodal heritage of composition for the contemporary digital landscape of composing. On the other hand, these goals also provide direction for future conversations about multimodal composing practices across the disciplines. While taking care to acknowledge the situatedness of composition, Palmeri draws out each of his three goals by concisely summarizing some of the pivotal moments of our multimodal past and then offering justification for the importance of such multimodal processes for the undergraduate-level composition class, in graduate-level teaching and composing processes, and, indeed, across disciplines. In his discussion, Palmeri expands on some of the potential pitfalls that teachers of writing may encounter in adopting and adapting multimodal pedagogies, and he lays out potential means to avoid these pitfalls by referring back to the extensively researched history of multimodal composing processes that his book investigates and critiques.