Lutkewitte, C. (Ed.). (2014). *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*.

Bedford/St Martin's.

Review of Literature

*Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook* intends to be a starting point for instructors that wish to incorporate multimodal compositions into their curriculum. Continued growth in popularity due to numerous calls to action to improve digital literacies and to incorporate multimodal assignments over the last ten years plush make it difficult for instructors to know where to begin if they are starting to rethink their approach to incorporating multimodal compositions. There’s no shortage of collections that address multimodal compositions. However, this book sets itself apart from other collections. It has much to offer instructors that currently teach, and make use of multimodal pedagogy. The organization of the book proves to be one of the many things it does well to enhance the purpose of this critical sourcebook. Which, I believe, one of the main arguments of this book, is quite simply that it should be the go to sourcebook for those instructors that currently teach multimodal assignments, or the place to start for instructors interested in multimodal composition. Within that framework and goal the book is split into six parts to that address very specific areas of multimodal composition.

This is a long book, boasting over 500 pages of content. For this reason, the organization is incredibly important, but also very necessary. It would be impossible to go into specific detail about each section, but to provide a better understanding of how this book presents itself as the critical sourcebook for all things multimodal composition here is a brief overview of the six sections. The first section aims to work through the very definition of multimodal composition. Part two approaches design. Part three investigate the value of incorporating multimodal composition into composition classes, but also what is lost as result of moving from print based media to the Internet. Part four acknowledges that instructors can no longer deny the importance of multimodal composition, which accounts for this section of the book. This section specifically discusses assignments and assessment of multimodal composition. This section situates assessment as a driving force behind assignments. Simply put, the argument presented in the book here is without knowing how to assess these assignments it is difficult to encourage support for teaching them when instructors have more training in how to assess alphabetic text. This section is the most informative, and demonstrates the practical nature of the book. The pedagogies that influence multimodal composition, the role of composition in creating new meanings by using different modes, gives examples of assignments, and how to assess them, as well as presenting different literacies and practices found in multimodal composition collections such as this one. Often times it is the part of the book with the most advice for practical application, and attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In a collection like this, aimed at the beginning instructor, or instructor just beginning to teach multimodal composition this section likely has the most value of any other section.

Part five discusses the need for building an infrastructure that supports the inclusion of multimodal assignments in a composition classroom. Part six has two purposes. The first is to continue to demonstrate the power of multimodal composition due to the inclusion of multiple voices, and the second addresses the need for more scholars to research this aspect of multimodal composition. Rather than attempting to include a formal conclusion to an incredibly long, but well put together book, the editor chose to include a list of further reading as the closing for this collection.

The organization of the book allows for instructors familiar with multimodal composition to select which section they feel comfortable reading first. The six sections do not necessarily build off of each other. It is possible to read an article in one section and move on to another that complements it. This is interesting, and demonstrates the editor’s knowledge of the restraints of a print book, that e-books or interactive platforms offer the reader. Part of the success of this approach is a direct result of the introductions before each section. The organization is a major strength of the organization of this book, because of the inclusion of introductions before each section. These introductions serve two purposes, for two different audiences. For the beginning instructor, or instructor setting out to include these types of assignments in their classroom for the first time, the introductions help to situate the articles that follow. They offer a brief explanation as to their place in the book, but also in the overall ongoing discussion of multimodal composition, and specific areas of interest as a result of inclusion of multimodal assignments in composition classrooms, and curriculum.

The inclusion of multimodal composition assignments in the composition classroom is common in the filed of rhetoric and composition, as is scholarship on the benefits of these types of assignments to students, but the resistance and lack of deep understanding of multimodal compositions continually needs to be discussed. Without a clear, and agreed upon definition of multimodal, it is difficult For this reason, this book serves as a great resource. It frames the movement towards multimodal composition by providing a history of multimodal composition, and offers not only assignment suggestions, but assessment guidelines as well. This approach to multimodal composition makes this book effective for instructors of all levels.

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An example of how this book is set up to first define multimodal composition, and then dive deeper into the grey areas of why this is done in composition classes, how to do it, how to assess it, and then how to support it can be found in the first section. In an article written by Claire Lauer, the author gives a historical background of the usages of the terms multimedia and multimodal. This article explains why both are in use in composition classrooms despite the fact that multimodal is more accurate in a theoretical sense. However, multimedia tends to be the bridge to discussing concepts associated with multimodal, and is more frequently used in public and industry. This article is an example of how the framework of the book can be useful to both the experienced and inexperienced instructor. It’s obviously aimed more at the beginning instructor, but understanding what the public (our students), use versus what we (scholars and instructors) use help to remind everyone that we arrive at these assignments with different skills and knowledge. An article such as this reminds all instructors that it is important to understand that the vocabulary students are familiar with is not always, or ever, going to be the same as our own.

The section that most reading this book would be eager to read is part four “Assignments and Assessments.” It is one of the shortest sections in the book, despite being one that most readers would want to be longer. In order to incorporate multimodal compositions in the classroom instructors need to know what some of these assignments look like, and what should be considered when grading them. This section does address those issues, but not in the detail beginning instructors might need. The main focus of this section is to inform instructors that they need to be very clear when developing these assignments so that instructors are aware of their goals in teaching multimodal composition, and understand the consequences, or benefits, of teaching one assignment over another. The other sections in this book are incredibly thorough, as suggested by the overall length of this collection, but what might be most vital to inexperienced instructors is the shortest section. This could be in part due to the fact that many narratives exist in other collections, and single author books about specific types of assignments, or it could be a result of the editor’s own choice to promote agency of the reader. This may be viewed by the editor as a book that gives instructors the framework to go out and design assignments, and areas to asses son their own. It is a curious fact that this section is so short despite the book’s claim that is collection is a practical sourcebook.

Another major critique of this book is the length. It’s well organized, which makes the length incredibly easy to navigate, but for the beginner it may be intimidating, and for the instructor that has some, or a lot, of experience teaching multimodal composition it will be repetitive in certain sections. If you are familiar with multimodal composition, then you’ve likely ready some of these theories, or schools of thought in previous journals or collections. This appears to have been put together with a specific audience in mind, but it has value for those that are not entering multimodal pedagogy for the first time. For the experienced instructor this collection will have value because it houses most of the important works on multimodal composition in one place, and can be sifted through quite easily to get to new or different takes on previous research.