Exploring Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing

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Chapter 4
“Memeration”: Exploring Academic Authorship in Online Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how digital authorship in graduate education can broaden conceptions of scholarly engagement. Using a blog created by one of the authors in the context of a graduate literacy course as data, the authors explore how digital authoring practices influence both what counts as scholarly activity and how individuals approach scholarship. They analyze this blog using a framework that addresses four characteristics of academic writing in online spaces: remix, paratext, curation, and audience. This inquiry is guided by the following questions: What are implications of regarding multimodal practices as forms of scholarly work? What does it mean to invite multimodal work in graduate education? What are affordances and challenges of engaging in multimodal scholarship? In conclusion, the authors discuss several interconnected ways that multimodal authorship can contribute to renewed visions of what counts as writing, literacy, and scholarship in graduate education.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the potentials of digital authorship in graduate education to challenge and broaden conceptions of scholarly engagement. We explore how multimodal forms of expression—“situated configurations across image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, speech, and so on” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246)—influence both what counts as scholarly activity and how individuals approach scholarship, in form and substance. Our inquiry is guided by the following
questions: What are the implications of regarding multimodal practices as forms of scholarly work? What does it mean to invite multimodal work in graduate education? What are the affordances and challenges of engaging in multimodal scholarship?

We take up these questions in the context of collaborative research conducted in a graduate literacy course Rob taught at the University of Toronto, in which he invited participants to engage with research in literacy studies through the lens of their situated understandings and experiences. Alisa and Eveline were participants in the course. Using a blog created by Alisa in this course as data, we explore how digital authoring practices, including mashup and remix, allow for scholarly resources to be collected, combined, transformed, and shared in new forms.

The blog title, “Memeration” is a remixed term, referring at once to Richard Dawkins’ (1976) conception of “memes,” a term he coined to refer to culturally transmissible units of thought, and the biological phenomenon of “murmuration,” in which thousands of starlings flock together to form a cohesive yet leaderless whole. Within the context of the course blog, the term memeration is reflective of a larger theory pertaining to the transmission, connectedness, and integration of ideas within individuals’ intellectual and social networks. This concept is a heuristic that guides our analysis.

We situate this study within a shifting landscape of literacy that has challenged educators to develop new ways of teaching with technologies as well as new methodological and conceptual approaches to documenting and theorizing new literacy practices (Gee, 2010; Jewitt, 2005, 2008; Kress, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Simon, 2011). We begin with an overview of the “digital turn” (Mills, 2010) in literacy studies, in particular blogging as a form of popular and scholarly engagement. Following a brief discussion of context and method, we analyze Alisa’s blog using a framework that addresses four characteristics of academic writing in online spaces: remix, paratext, curation, and audience. In our conclusion, we look across the discussion to suggest some challenges this work presents, and describe several interconnected ways that multimodal authorship can contribute to renewed visions of what counts as writing, literacy, and scholarship in graduate education.

BLOGGING AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE: SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL DOMAIN

Following the so-called “social turn” (Gee, 2000), the “digital turn” in literacy studies (Mills, 2010) has inspired explorations of practices within what is variously referred to as “new literacies” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), “new literacies studies” (Gee, 2010), or “digital literacies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). This research attempts to capture the rapidly changing nature of literacy, foregrounding, to varying degrees, technologies of literacy, as well as the political and cultural contexts, practices, and relationships within which they are embedded. Technology is a means to power, rather than powerful in and of itself (Simon, 2011; Street, 2011). Yet for researchers and educators, digital literacies have become catalysts for challenging inherited definitions of reading and writing, for reimagining pedagogies, and for exploring new forms of engagement, interaction, and authorship.

Research on digital writing has explored new media practices and youth engagement with “new literacies” in school (e.g., Leander, 2007; Siegel, 2012; Simon, 2012) and in their out-of-school lives (e.g., Gee, 2010; Ito, et al, 2008). Researchers in multimodality have argued that it is no longer possible to think of textual engagement and authorship in purely linguistic terms (Kress, in Bearne, 2005). For example, Rowsell and Burke (2009) argue for the need to conceptualize online
textual engagement in relation to design-based frameworks (e.g., New London Group, 1996). Similarly, Jewitt (2008) describes new writing practices in terms of “reconfiguration of the representational and communicational resources of image, action, sound” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 241). As Siegel (2012) notes, multimodality has necessary and challenging implications for classrooms. Increasingly, as these and other scholars have documented, multimodal authorship is characterized by collaboration, performativity, fluidity, and “remixing” (Fergusun, 2012), as well as working against many traditional (and institutional) expectations of what counts as literacy.

In spite of the rapidly changing nature of writing, traditional text-based forms remain the norm in higher education. At the same time, some academics and their students are beginning to explore new digital forms of academic literacy, including tweeting, podcasting, making videos, digital objects, and data visualizations. For academics, blogging is emerging as a new literacy practice (Davies & Merchant, 2007), a medium for traditional and less formal scholarly exchanges, as well as a forum for writing in coursework.

WordPress—used by Alisa for her “Memeration” blog—and other blog-hosting sites arose in the late 1990s. By 2011, there were 181 million blogs worldwide (Nielsen, 2012). Simply defined, blogs are Websites presenting content in entries (or posts) that appear in reverse chronological order. A blog thus “unfolds over time” (Godin, 2005). Unlike traditional forms of academic publication, blogs are open-ended; they remain works-in-progress (Reed, 2005). Unless a blog owner restricts access, posts are public and searchable, with optional space for comments that offers the potential for dialogue and conversation, even developing a broader community. As will be seen in the examples we explore from Alisa’s blog, in addition to text, sites like WordPress allow for embedding multimodal content, including links, images, video, and audio.

While multimodal authorship is flourishing outside formal academic settings, educational conceptualizations of and uses for blogs remain primarily text-based. Surveying the literature on blog use in higher education settings, Sim & Hew (2010) identify six principal ways students and instructors use blogs: as learning journals for gathering ideas; as personal journals; as places to express feelings; as means of interacting with others; as assessment tools; and as task management tools. Each of these emphasizes linguistic modes. In contrast, Kramer, Gaither, and Honn (2012) describe a multimodal blog developed for and in a digital history course. Their project used a WordPress blog as what they call a “collage management system” that brought together “digital objects—text, multimedia, conversation, data, embedded tools—to narrate, analyze, interpret, make meaning” (Slide 14). They argue that “new forms of digital scholarship offer eye-opening research opportunities [and] great pedagogy” (Kramer, Gaither, & Honn, 2012, Slide 171). As boyd (2006) notes, conceptualizing blogs in terms of pre-existing written forms, particularly journals or journalism, can be unhelpful, even restrictive. Rather, she argues for regarding blogs as a medium—more like paper—for diverse practices and content, which “provides a framework in which to understand how blogging has blurred the lines between orality and literacy, corporeality and spatiality, public and private” (boyd, 2006, para. 3).

Blogging involves issues of identity as well as multimodality. Bloggers may closely identify with their blog: “My blog is me,” declared one of the participants in Reed’s (2005) study of early adopters (p. 227). As boyd (2006) notes, “the blog is one’s digital face, showing the traces of past expressions, revealing both what the blogger brings to the front stage and what aspects of the backstage slip through” (para. 49). That said, like any pedagogical space, a blog is not a transparent medium, but rather a form of enacted identity (Ellsworth, 1997).
Academic blogging has begun to be recognized as a component of changing models of scholarly communication that promote Open Access (see for example, University Leadership Council, 2011). Many university researchers use blogs as, or in addition to, faculty Web pages, as a means of disseminating research, reaching broader (or different) audiences, building relationships with other scholars, and for more process-based approaches including developing writing, asking questions, testing ideas or methods, or as virtual “lab” space (Rutner & Schonfeld, 2012). Many academics use blogs to bring together materials created across different platforms and media—videos, presentations, tweets—in a kind of self-curation, concerned with academic identity, representation, and dissemination (Weller, 2012).

Scholarly engagement with blogging has inspired the development of hybrid forms of publication. Cohen (2012) suggests the term “blessay” to describe something between a short, quick blog post and a long academic essay. The online journal Digital Humanities Now (http://digitalhumanitiesnow.org) aggregates and curates exemplary digital essays from various blogs, with multimodal expression often a core feature. Individual blogs may serve almost as magazines or journals, with regularly posted “blessays” that promote discussion in the comments section; see for example the blog Vocabulogic (http://vocablog-plc.blogspot.ca/). In contrast, though the majority of traditional peer-reviewed journals are now disseminated digitally, most use print formats (e.g., with page numbers and text-heavy content), rather than more inventive forms that academics make use of in blogs. Engagement with new digital forms has inspired the development of hybrid forms of determining what counts as scholarship. For example, in measuring the impact of scholarship, altmetrics counts downloads of online material and instances of online discussion as well as the more traditional citation counts (Priem, Taraborelli, Groth & Neylon, 2011; see also ImpactStory, http://impactstory.org/). As these examples suggest, rather than regard multimodal work as marginal to scholarship, many scholars (e.g., Kramer, Gather, & Honn, 2012) have begun to consider emergent academic practices online as unique forms of scholarly activity.

**METHODOLOGY**

Our brief review of multimodal authorship and blogging suggests some of the ways these formats inspire new understandings of what counts as writing and encourage new forms of scholarly work. As Cynthia Lewis (2007) has noted, changes in how individuals interact with and produce texts demand “re-envisioning writing in digital times.” In the spirit of Lewis’ (2007) call, our analysis of Alisa’s course blog explores multimodal authorship in graduate education from multiple perspectives.

Data analysis was collaborative and inductive, with categories derived in conversation. We analyzed sections of the blog independently, bringing initial impressions to group sessions, where we compared and refined themes and characteristics. We audiotaped these sessions, which allowed us to map the evolution of our understandings. Analysis involved open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to develop conceptual categories and labels that informed our understanding of key factors and features of our data. Through this process, we identified several themes that we used to develop a framework for analyzing the Memeration blog.

This framework is informed by multimodal analysis (e.g., Jewitt, 2008). Though we account for visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and linguistic aspects, rather than separate out modes for the purpose of investigation, we took a more integrative approach, looking at formal and structural features that work across modes. In the process, we developed four concepts that illuminate qualities of this example, but may also be useful in addressing characteristics of academic writing in
online spaces: 1) *remix*, the process of recombining previously existing ideas to form something new; 2) *paratext*, hyper- and extra-textual aspects that shape and mediate content; 3) *curation*, involving selection, placement, and management of digital materials; and 4) *audience*, which impacts the form, content, and reception of digital texts. These concepts are overlapping—for example, curation may include remixed texts, and remixing entails considerations of audience—yet addressing them separately allows us to highlight meaningful distinctions, which will become apparent in our analysis of examples drawn from Alisa’s course blog.

**EXPLORING LITERACY THROUGH DIVERSE MEDIA AND MODES**

Alisa’s blog was created as the final project for Rob’s graduate course, “New Literacies: Making Multiple Meanings,” at the University of Toronto. Rather than positioning graduate students as apprentices entering a complex field, Rob constructed his course as a collaborative inquiry into literacy research, mapping the field as a series of conversations that individuals were encouraged to enter. For example, in addition to reading social practice accounts (Street, 1995), in week two of the course, students were asked to write about their prior experiences, questions, and working theories of literacy. These papers were shared in class as a way to foreground participants’ knowledge and understandings.

Students used term papers in this course to dialectically engage with this research (Simon, Campano, Broderick, & Pantoja, 2012). Alisa’s blog provided an example of this dialectical approach, although it was atypical in form. Although Rob invited multimedia and digital assignments, most students chose more traditional term papers. However, this invitation was well received by Alisa, whose interests and experiences with remix and digital media lent themselves well to multimodal forms of expression.

**The Memeration Blog**

As we noted previously, the term “memeration” remixed Dawkins’ (1976) conception of “memes”—culturally transmissible units of thought—and the phenomenon of “murmuration,” in which thousands of starlings form a cohesive, leaderless, unit. Alisa used this term to reflect how ideas are coarticulated and integrated within intellectual and social networks. The *Memeration* blog consists of nine different posts:

1. **“What is literacy?”**: This first entry may be regarded as a “blessay” (Cohen, 2012) exploring conceptions of literacy from course readings (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995), cross-analyzed with definitions of literacy from international contexts, including agencies such as UNESCO and World Bank. Analyzing these definitions, Alisa identifies four themes that guide the remainder of her posts: 1) “Literacy as an autonomous set of skills”; 2) “Literacy as applied, practiced and situated”; 3) “Literacy as a learning process”; 4) and “Literacy as text.”

2. **“Where I’m from”**: The second entry is a “Where I’m From” poem (Christensen, 2000) which Alisa uses to situate herself in relation to her work and the broader field. The text of the poem, discussed in detail below, contains numerous hyperlinks to extra-textual multimedia context, including a video montage from Alisa’s classroom.

3. **“The medium is the message: Digital literacy and technological determinism”**: The third post explores the role of “the medium” in the context of new literacies, open
access, and technological determinism. This post includes a video mashup, analyzed in detail below, imagining Marshall McLuhan’s perspectives related to the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on education.

4. “Stop me when this becomes a text . . .”: Using an annotated collection of pressed plants and nature drawings as an example, this post incorporates personal narrative to explore the nature of “text” in literacy, questioning the extent to which real-world artifacts must be codified in order to be considered as texts.

5. “Representation, meaning and language”: This post continues the exploration of “what counts as text” by drawing in various models and theories of representation and language, including structuralism, poststructuralism, constructivism, discourse theory, and multimodality. Visual schemas map the interrelationships of these various conceptions of meaning making.

6. “Links to practice: Meta-discourse of 9-year-olds”: This post explores literacy as a learning process, drawing on Alisa’s experiences as a graduate research assistant with elementary school students using “meta-discourse,” a process of self-mediating discussions involving posing questions, posulating theories, and providing evidence to explain phenomena students observe inside and outside the classroom.

7. “Working at the literacy factory”: In this post, Alisa explores the theme of literacy as “autonomous” (Street, 1995) through a description of Alisa’s teaching practice and an analysis of her experiences scoring standardized literacy tests.

8. “Education 2.0”: This post explores literacy as situated classroom practice through a 20-minute stop-motion animated video, analyzed below. Animated clay figures of Sir Ken Robinson, Don Tapscott, and Professor Jim Slotta are brought into conversation with a figure of Alisa in her classroom. Together they explore how the new media age is transforming education.

9. “Final thoughts”: This last entry looks across prior posts to suggest ways forward. Acknowledging that the blog was created as the final summative task for a graduate course, Alisa addresses implications of this format for the purposes of evaluation.

These nine posts employ a startling array of forms, media, and research from within and outside the course content. They take, alternately and sometimes at once, personal and academic stances, drawing on Alisa’s full range of interests and experiences. As will become apparent in our close readings of examples drawn from these posts, multimodal forms allowed Alisa to develop an inquiry-based approach to investigating literacy, and a dialectic stance on scholarship from a range of disciplines, resulting in unique insights into the nature of literacy in research and practice.

Remix

Steven Johnson (2010) has used the term “bricolage” to describe how most new ideas consist of remixing or recombining previously existing ideas to form something new. Within literacy studies, Knobel and Lankshear (2008) argue that all cultural engagement can be understood as forms of “remix.” Academic authorship may present a useful example. As Rob has written about previously (Simon, Campano, Broderick, & Pantoja, 2012), traditional forms of scholarship are situated in relation to prior conceptual and empirical research using the convention of the literature review, which aims to present a genealogical view of related work. While regarding these practices as forms of “remix” may seem to violate ideals
of individual scholarship, literature reviews rely heavily on recombining prior conceptual and empirical work in support of new investigations.

Multimodal forms of remix entail a similar process, whereby ideas are drawn from a variety of mediums and subsequently parsed, compiled, and synthesized to form something new. This is not to say that all forms of remix are scholarly. There are important distinctions between forms of remix intended to convey scholarly accounts and ideas versus those that are generated primarily for entertainment purposes, though some work blurs these boundaries. Rather, we suggest that just as traditional scholarship involves forms of recombination, multimodal remix can be used in the service of scholarship, recombining ideas presented in different formats and mediums to present new insights.

Two instances of scholarly remix are presented in the course blog in the form of video mashups that draw on new as well as pre-existing source material. In the first example, Alisa selected public domain video clips of Marshall McLuhan, spliced them together, and interspersed them with images of students, classrooms, and modern communication technologies (Figure 1). Alisa used audio clips of McLuhan’s voice as narration. The resulting video depicts “Education 2.0” as McLuhan had prophesized well before many of these technologies existed (http://youtu.be/D9aqmbzwz2Y).

The second example consists of a nineteen-minute stop-motion film presenting a dialogue between renowned educators that Alisa brought into “conversation” using animated clay figures. For two of the characters (Sir Ken Robinson and Don Tapscott), Alisa drew upon fragments of TED talks and public lectures that she edited to “interact” with the recorded voices of herself and one of her professors, Jim Slotta. Dialogue and stop-motion sequences are interspersed with images, video clips, and music, which illustrate and extend the conversation (http://youtu.be/Qd6yh6v8SU).

In each of these examples, the juxtaposition of diverse images and ideas presents a unique and persuasive form of argumentation. These ideas could have been presented in written format; McLuhan, Robinson, Tapscott, and Slotta have authored numerous texts and academic papers. While citing these scholars’ writings may be a more common approach to engaging with their ideas, their work is not limited to written forms: their scholarship has been shared and disseminated.
through recorded interviews and public talks. Alisa’s approach allowed her to make use of these materials, including more performative and, some might suggest, more engaging formats.

Recalling the idea of academic fields as conversations, this approach allowed Alisa to virtually enter into dialogue with influential scholars; her remix employed a conversational form of analysis. For example, in an opening vignette that shows the clay figure of Alisa in her classroom surrounded by disengaged students, she poses a question: “Why do I have so much trouble engaging my students?” The figure of Ken Robinson appears, responding: “It’s not a problem of teachers or particular schools, it’s a system problem. It’s to do with the ideology of education.” Alisa uses the ensuing exchange to interrogate the ideological and structural influences that delimit her practice and shape students’ engagement (Figure 2).

Alisa’s argument is advanced by the inclusion of additional images and audio. For example, a video clip of students marching along an assembly line is conjoined with a voiceover from Robinson describing a factory model of education. This remix illustrates and extends the argument Alisa develops from Robinson’s work. This would have been impossible in a written text (or would have required volumes of description)—a challenge we have encountered in attempting to write about these videotexts. This suggests both the limitations of written reports, as well as the conceptual affordances of hybridized forms of digital scholarship (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008).

Further, to return to the convention of the literature review, Alisa’s use of Robinson’s ideas suggests how mashup practices involve alternative means of attribution. In written reports ideas are credited using bibliographic citations. Rather than embed citations into her video (though she did use conventional citations elsewhere in her blog), Alisa made clear that ideas were Robinson’s by presenting them “spoken” by a clay proxy. Additionally, Robinson and other scholars were introduced as they were brought into dialogue, and their names appear in the end credits. In this sense, digital forms of remix allow for multiple varieties of attribution as well as authorship.

Paratext

Literary theorist Gérard Genette (1997) has described how extra-textual aspects of texts—including end pages, prefaces, and book jackets—liminally mediate content. To a greater degree than print texts, digital texts integrate medium and message. Their flexible structures and fabric allow for intentional (re)combination of diverse media, framed within, outside, and between “pages.” In digital scholarship, paratextual elements can be drawn from a variety of platforms (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, Soundcloud, Slideshare, or Picasa), employed, and reoriented toward new purposes.

For example, Alisa’s blog includes a “Where I’m From” poem (Christensen, 2000) containing various paratextual elements, notably the addition of hypertext links. These links direct the reader to images, videos, and audio recordings that Alisa used to contextualize herself as a researcher, highlighting contexts, interests, and experiences informing her research. In a traditional academic paper Alisa might have chosen to describe her positionality as part of her methodology. Digital formats, however, enable authors to embed
multimedia content and link to digital artifacts that can provide more multifaceted exploration of positionality and identity, involving diverse genres—in this case poetry—modes, and media.

Like a more conventional text, Alisa’s “Where I’m From” poem could be read without clicking hyperlinked content. At the same time, these links invite different readings, and provide readers with a means of active participation. Traditional publications may be regarded as what literary critic Roland Barthes (1974) characterized as “readerly” texts, structured in ways that guide and delimit readers’ encounters. By contrast, digital forms of scholarship are “writerly” texts: less predictably structured, characterized by gaps and indeterminacies that afford readers with more choices. Alisa’s “Where I’m From” poem is writerly in the sense that it may be experienced differently depending upon the extent to which readers explore paratextual elements. For example, the line “I am from the most multicultural city in the world” includes a link to demographic data about the city of Toronto (Figure 3). This new site includes additional links. While this hyperlink extends Alisa’s claim about her cultural context, readers are not obligated to explore this paratextual dimension: links are available, but not mandatory. As Genette (1997) notes, just as the presence of paratextual elements is not uniformly obligatory, so, too, the public and the reader are not unvaryingly and uniformly obligated: no one is required to read a preface (even if such freedom is not always opportune for the author), and as we will see, many notes are addressed only to certain readers (p. 4; italics in original).

Alisa’s decision to include a link to demographics may be addressed to readers unfamiliar with the city in which she works. Other links, for example to Alisa’s musical mashups or videos from her classroom, may appeal to readers interested in further exploring personal or professional dimensions of her work.

Paratextual elements inherent in the blog also invite new forms of scholarship. Whereas the conventions of a traditional academic paper impose particular kinds of structures—i.e., a central thesis, supported by examples following a (more or less) linear progression—the blog format removes many of these constraints. While physical texts are bound between covers with fixed beginning, middle and endpoints, blogs are by nature open-ended, editable, and iterative. Alisa reflected on this in her final post:

Figure 3. Alisa’s “Where I’m From” poem includes numerous paratextual elements, such as hyperlinks to additional content and information (e.g., a Wikipedia article describing the demographics of Toronto).
Even though this project had to be submitted by a particular deadline, I don’t consider this process of exploration as being over. Unlike a traditional essay or report, there is no “conclusion” to my blogging journey; my thinking will not stop with my final “Save As” or “Ctrl P.”

Removing structural limitations presents implications for how Alisa may revise her text through ongoing exploration, even “post publication.” In the process of (re)construction, text and paratext become interlinked. As it evolves, the sequential progression of posts may become non-linear in ways that further interrupt expectations, including conceptions of how texts are fixed or finished through traditional forms of publication or dissemination.

**Curation**

In digital forms of scholarship, the medium may be regarded as a flexible “container” and content curation as a form of authorship (Popova, 2011; Obrist, 2012). Multimodal artifacts may be chosen from various sources, brought together, consolidated, and reoriented toward new purposes. Choosing these artifacts is an act of curation. Just as a gallery curator may contextualize particular images or artifacts in multiple ways—for example, Dali’s (1931) “The Persistence of Memory” might be presented in a career retrospective, a collection of Spanish art through the ages, a survey of Dadaism or Surrealism, or an anthology of images representing temporality—authors of digital texts choose and arrange images and sounds to support particular purposes. These curatorial choices impact meaning and message.

In some instances, the curatorial impulse involves drawing meaning from the juxtaposition of different forms or genres within or between pages. For example, Alisa intentionally juxtaposed academic, social, and personal texts. Placing her “Where I’m From” poem immediately following an academic overview of “What is Literacy?” highlights the interplay between Alisa’s personal and scholarly identities. The hyperlinked texts in her “Where I’m From” include academic (demographic data), professional (videos of her classroom teaching), performative (musical mashups), and personal (photographs) content. The collective exhibit presents a three-dimensional, complex image of both the author and her argument—that literacy is multiple, situated, and coextensive with culture and identity. Curation in multimodal scholarship is therefore a form of presentation as well as argumentation.

Elsewhere in her blog, Alisa collected similar artifacts in support of her inquiry. For example, for the post “Stop me when this becomes a text . . .” Alisa included various multimedia artifacts drawn from naturalistic studies of trophic interactions from a field research project in the southern Canadian Rockies (Figure 4). These artifacts, such as videos, photographs, and hand-drawn illustrations of flora and fauna, depict the same physical environment. Alisa used this collection to explore the question “At what point does something become a “text?” While Figure 4 presents these in montage, in the blog post, artifacts are presented sequentially to convey increasing levels of “codification.” The overall effect structures readers’ encounters with this text phenomenologically, much the way that curation, as a form of curriculum, guides perception, consciousness, interpretation, and learning in museum spaces (Ellsworth, 2005). “Stop me when this becomes a text . . .” makes use of images Alisa collected previously, of plants in natural habitats, of plant clippings she arranged, of sketches and written notes in the pages of her field notes. Their curated presentation is explicitly pedagogical.

It is important to note a distinction between “curation” and “remix.” Although they share characteristics—each involves organizing or configuring available resources—“remix” entails the creative selection and reconfiguration of frag-
ments of particular works into a new form, while “curation” involves a selection process preserving the original form/integrity of an artifact. Whereas traditional academic texts involve forms of remix, the curation of full works does not necessarily occur, with the exception of appendices or volumes that collect previously published works. Conversely, digital texts invite curatorial moves. Rather than merely citing external work, curation of digital texts may involve directing readers outward (paratextually) to complete works posted elsewhere, or pulling full artifacts inward (textually) and re-contextualizing them in the service of a new idea, argument, or framework.

Audience

Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) describes the analytical concept of “mode of address,” adapted from film and media studies, that poses questions such as “who does this film think you are?” (p. 1). In education, Ellsworth (1997) suggests, we can use mode of address:

- to shake up solidified and limited ways of thinking about and practicing teaching. We can use it to make visible and problematic the ways that all curricula and pedagogies invite their users to take up particular positions within relationships of knowledge, power, and desire (p. 2).

A consideration of mode of address in relation to digital scholarship highlights the pedagogical dimensions of texts as well as their consideration of audience, both of which impact form, content, and reception.

Alisa’s blog was created for the purposes of a course assignment. The intended audience, as a result, consisted of Rob and Alisa’s classmates. Content, links, and artifacts were selected with this audience in mind, some of which—for example, her review of literacy theory in her post “What is literacy?”—were addressed directly to them. However, many artifacts were originally created for different audiences. For example, Alisa’s “Grade 10 Year In Review” video (linked through the “Where I’m From” poem) was initially produced for her Grade 10 science students as a form of exam review. Additionally, there are personal elements, such as Alisa’s photographs, audio mashups, and drawings that were originally intended only for family and friends. The inclusion of personal artifacts runs counter to academic conventions, making Alisa more visible, and potentially more
vulnerable to critique. While these materials that are not inherently scholarly, Alisa made use of them for scholarly purposes. For example, although her musical mashups were not intended for educational use, Alisa employed them in the context of the course blog to define and illustrate mashup as a literacy practice.

Similarly, Alisa purposefully included personal artifacts in an academic context, re-theorizing them in relation to social-practice conceptions of literacy. This is true as well of professional texts like the video Alisa included from her classroom practice. In the process of repositioning, re-theorizing, and repurposing the video for an audience of literacy faculty and graduate students, Alisa encouraged them to regard this not as a summary of classroom activities in preparation for an exam, but rather as an exploration of how schooled literacy involves issues of engagement, relationships, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Interestingly, the personal and professional aspects of Alisa’s blog suggest an audience beyond the course, something Alisa discussed in her final post:

. . . once I (eventually) open this blog to a broader audience and gradually extend my social network of followers, I will then have the ability to engage in conversations with other academics and educators (or anyone else who has an interest), rather than merely produce a static “essay-text” artefact that no one will ever see.

Alisa stated her desire to reach a wider network, noting that audiences are potentially larger for multimodal texts than “static” ones. This has already proven true. While the number of citations for the most cited article in Educational Researcher, published in 1989, is currently 11,253, Alisa’s “Education 2.0” video, published on YouTube on April 19, 2012, has already received 8,848 views (as of February 24, 2013). Sir Ken Robinson and Don Tapscott are among the viewers, and each has communicated his approval with Alisa via Twitter, as well as broadcast the video to his followers.

**DISCUSSION**

This work suggests implications and challenges for engaging multimodal practices as forms of scholarship. As Kress (in Bearne, 2005) has noted, multimodal writing involves “the dissolution of semiotic framings” between genres and modes, demanding that authors are less “secure about which mode we shall use . . . and in what combination” (p. 290). Alisa’s blog illustrates how digital scholarship works across genre, form, mode, and media.

Multimodal scholarship complicates traditional notions of where ideas come from in academic work, as well as who, ultimately, “owns” them. We have argued that written reports have always involved remix. The examples of digital remixing we described suggest new possibilities for authorship as well as attribution, yet also run against the grain of older forms and expectations. As scholars like Alisa draw upon a wider palette of registers and resources in their work, this work invites new semiotic dispositions in addition to new rhetorical forms (Kress, in Bearne, 2005), which may be difficult to codify into a system of conventions (e.g., APA).

Multimodal scholarship is iterative and open-ended. Unlike traditional written forms, digital texts are by design in-the-making, revisable in perpetuity, and even (ostensibly) removable. As the examples we explored of content that is repurposed for new audiences suggest, open-ended forms invite diverse audiences and purposes. Alisa’s mode of address must be (re)considered in relation to new audiences, purposes, and potential impacts of her work. Shifting dissemination practices favor open access, self-publication and, potentially, less
niche audiences. This presents challenges for what counts toward professional advancement, including the tenure process, where practices like peer review and journal ranking are commonplace, but also presents new affordances for scholars to distributing and mobilizing ideas.

Multimodal texts encourage shifting subjectivities for readers as well as for authors. Alisa’s work invites readers to take up different subject positions in relation to conceptions of literacy and power, questions of ownership, appropriate usage, authorship, as well as concerns (and critiques) related to the purposes of education and the nature of research. At the same time, as a scholar Alisa explores different epistemologies, positionality, and identities through her work. This challenges traditional binaries between, for example, academic and personal or creative and professional domains, between the conceptual and empirical, as well as distinctions about what counts as “research” and “practice.” These challenges are significant and necessary, presenting new possibilities not only for the kinds of practices deemed scholarly, but also the kinds of individuals considered scholars.

Multimodal texts involve new forms of labor. Alisa was able to develop her ideas because of her depth of technical as well as conceptual knowledge and ability, and affordances of time. Production of digital texts would doubtless be challenging for many students. Further, consumption of these texts involves revising manners of appreciation and forms of assessment.

Finally, as scholarly forms evolve, so too must educational institutions and practices. This presents challenges for instruction at all levels—how, for example, do you teach writing differently with multimodality in mind? What counts as “good” multimodal writing, and how do you evaluate it? In schools, pedagogical approaches demanded by current policies work against innovation. Multimodal transformations of writing pedagogy are necessary, even inevitable, means of addressing the evolution of literacy and issues of social justice (Siegel, 2012). Similarly, post-secondary institutions and educators need to consider implications of multimodality for research and instruction, which involves not only revising notions of what counts as scholarship in graduate education, but also reframing ideological dispositions toward students. As scholars like Alisa explore new means of developing their work, this may ultimately be a vehicle not merely for transforming what counts as scholarship, but also whose interests and forms of representation count. This may be a means of academic as well as broader social change.

REFERENCES


