

**Assembling Composition**, edited by Kathleen Blake Yancey and Stephen J. McElroy. Urbana: Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English, 2017. 246 pp.

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Yancey and McElroy's edited collection, *Assembling Composition*, offers a "new and helpful way of understanding composing, especially in an era marked by postmodernism and postpedagogy" (3). The volume builds on assemblage scholarship such as Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber's 2006 article, "Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage," Byron Hawk's 2007 *Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity*, Jonathan Buehl's 2016 *Assembling Arguments*, Dustin Edwards's 2016 *Computers and Composition* article, "Framing Remix Rhetorically: Toward a Typology of Transformative Work," and Jacqueline Preston's 2015 CCC article, "Project(ing) Literacy: Writing to Assemble in a Postcomposition FYW classroom." Yancey and McElroy look to both art and critical theory to define and situate assemblages; in art, assemblage is the practice of bringing everyday materials together to create a new text, while assemblages in critical theory can be combinations of bodies, concepts, and ideas, allowing compositions to be seen and traced through the assembled components. This leads to an understanding of how the components work together to generate a composition, or a second broader sense of assemblage results from a constellation of texts being understood metaphorically (3). Building on both assemblages in art and critical theory, Yancey and McElroy situate assemblage within rhetoric and composition as its own assemblage of definitions. For Yancey and McElroy, "assemblage refers to and sanctions the makingness that textuality affords and its use, reuse, and repurposing of materials, especially chunks of text, in order to make something new" (4). In other words, assemblages allow for a way of composing that combines and remixes both texts, concepts, and ideas into something new.

*Assembling Composition* is divided into three sections: "In Theory," "In the Classroom/On Campus," and "In the World." Alex Reid, in chapter two, "Big-Data Assemblies: Composing Nonhuman Ecology," explains how big-data analysis might be combined with assemblage theory in order to see composing as a process that involves human interaction with nonhuman objects. In chapter three, "They Eat Horses, Don't They?" Jeff Rice compares two social media posts and suggests that these assemblages create an aggregated meaning, which involves rethinking both practice and ideology. The final chapter in section one, "Beyond the Object to the Making of the Object: Understanding the Process of Multimodal Composition as Assemblage," by James Kalmbach, examines

a multimodal composition course where students negotiate assemblages to create successful projects. This section offers a theory of assemblage in light of multimodality and digital technology.

Section two, which looks at assemblages in the classroom and on campus, includes Michael J. Michaud's "Assemblage Composing, Reconsidered." He argues for more instruction in assemblage composing, especially multimodal, new media, digital, and multimedia composing, to help students further develop their rhetorical skills. In chapter six, "Copy, Combine, Transform: Assemblage in First-Year Composition," Stephen J. McElroy and Travis Maynard explain the goals of a first-year composition course on assemblage along with major assignments, activities, and readings. They describe how the course helped students become better writers and how an assemblage approach to fyc might be beneficial because it engages students in composing, suggesting that the approach "makes assemblage the central theme that ties together other important concepts like multimodality, genre conventions, remediation, and rhetorical situation" (116).

In the final chapter of section two, "ePortfolio Artifacts as Graduate Student Multimodal Identity Assemblages," Kristine L. Blair examines ePortfolios and their role in building professional identities of graduate students. Overall, the section chapters provide readers with concrete ways to implement assemblage theory into their classes through examples and student perspectives on assemblages in the classroom.

Section three, an examination of assemblages in the world, begins with "To Gather, Assemble, and Display: Composition as [Re]Collection," in which Jody Shipka explores assemblages through a collection-based framework of the Evocative Objects Workshop. In chapter nine, "Assemblages of Asbury Park: The Persistent Legacy of the Large-Letter Postcard," Stephen J. McElroy analyzes the continued use of large letter postcards through assemblage thinking and argues that such thinking effects new contexts from restaurants to politics and architecture. Kathleen Blake Yancey, in chapter ten, "Multimodal Assemblage, Compositions, and Composing: The Corresponding Cases of Emigrant Cemetery Tombstones and 'A Line for Wendy,'" examines multimodal assemblages in the form of memorial compositions and argues that by looking at the composing processes of memorial compositions, we can learn about composing and compositions in general. Kristin L. Arola and Adam Arola in their chapter, "An Ethics of Assemblage: Creative Repetition and the 'Electric Pow Wow,'" argue for "good assemblages" and outline four criteria that make up a good assemblage: responsive; innovative and productive; open to new ways of thinking, seeing, and living; and benefitting the "we" rather than the "I" (211). Finally, in chapter twelve, "Conclusion: Reterritorialization," Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber place the authors in conversation with

one another by re-examining the collection and re-categorizing assemblages as connections with other peoples and times, with material objects, and with performance and pedagogy. Using these themes, Johnson-Eilola and Selber call readers to continually rethink and reassemble their own interactions with text.

While assemblages are examined through four different themes in Yancey and McElroy's volume, assemblages as performance and pedagogy might provide researchers opportunities to further explore assemblages. Readers might be interested in further exploring the role of multimodal composing, especially multimodal composing in assemblage theory. Additionally, teachers might consider how a theory of assemblage could benefit transfer studies and research on transfer. Michaud's "Assemblage Composing, Reconsidered" places multimodal composing, assemblage theory, and transfer into conversation using a curriculum that focuses on rhetorically based concepts. He notes that

For many students, just learning the form and style of a new genre can take a good deal of time and, of course, this process is sometimes hindered if a student fails to understand the larger rhetorical concerns of genre production. . . . In short, pedagogies that, borrowing the language of Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle, teach students both *how to* produce a genre and *about* that genre itself are probably best suited to achieving lasting results. (91)

By emphasizing the importance of navigating the rhetorical concerns of a genre production, Michaud considers how to help students navigate the challenge of genre production within a course.

Just as reflective writing promotes transfer, critical and reflective writing is key in assemblage theory. In his chapter, "Beyond the Object to the Making of the Object: Understanding the Process of Multimodal Composition as Assemblage," Kalmbach explains that "critical reflection is an essential balance to the pleasures of technological engagement" (75). Here, Kalmbach defines engagement as "the pieces assembled during composition" (60). In Kalmbach's multimodal composition course, he suggests three steps that teachers can take to encourage them to reflect on how they are negotiating engagements: let students choose their own topics, have students choose their own tools, and use critique to make negotiation visible or to critically reflect on multimodal artifacts and the effectiveness of the artifact. By asking students to practice critical reflection on multimodal artifacts in a multimodal composition course, Kalmbach effectively uses assemblage to promote transfer.

Yancey and McElroy outline four dimensions of assemblage that the collection speaks to: (1) how theories of writing—in particular, multimodal theories of writing informed by assemblage—might be suited to current digital

composing practices, (2) how assemblage might help students better understand the aliveness of writing, (3) how composing practices can be traces as assemblages, and (4) how interrogating assemblage is an ethical practice. This volume provides readers with insightful research on growing areas in the field of composition and rhetoric.

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