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e.pluribus plures: DMAC and its Keywords

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Abstract

The Digital Media and Composition Institute (DMAC) offers professional development opportunities through its diverse perspectives, experiences, lessons, tools, and resources. In short, the culture of DMAC is rich and prolific. We find it difficult, then, to settle on any one characteristic that best represents what DMAC affords concerning professional development and scholarly methods. DMAC's values are skills, knowledges, and capacities that work together to form a complex exchange of professional possibilities. It is a complex endeavor. With this complexity in mind, our article explores the culture of DMAC as a circulating culture of diversity. Our multivocal essay traces keywords we associate with DMAC and its capacities for professional development. Our keywords include access, assemblage, assets, community, conversations, intensity, novice, and participation.

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Perhaps the biggest draw for attending the Digital Media and Composition Institute (DMAC) at The Ohio State University is its reach. That is, DMAC is valuable because it offers professional development opportunities through its diverse perspectives, experiences, lessons, tools, and resources. In short, the culture of DMAC is rich and prolific. It is difficult, then, to settle on any one characteristic that best represents what DMAC affords concerning professional development and scholarly methods. DMAC's task is similar to recent upstart digital coinage efforts such as BitCoin or Dogecoin. Like those digital currencies, DMAC's professional opportunities lie less in a central reserve than in the communal, shared circulation of value and exchange. In DMAC's case, those values are skills, knowledges, and capacities that work together to form a complex exchange of professional possibilities. The institute itself, along with the ways in which these values are articulated and shared, is a complex endeavor. With this complexity in mind, our article explores the culture of DMAC as a circulating culture of diversity. We offer here a multi-authored essay that collectively makes explicit what we as DMAC alumni consider to be the program's implicit ethos: *from many, many*.

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To best demonstrate this *ethos of many*, we utilize a keywords approach inspired by cultural theorist [Raymond Williams \(1983\)](#). Following Williams, we trace individual terms that thread through and characterize DMAC's professional development culture. In this way, we not only organize our own multiple perspectives, but also attempt to retain and enact DMAC's characteristic culture of diversity. Like [Williams \(1983\)](#), we too understand our own keyword project as "an inquiry into a *vocabulary*: a shared body of words and meanings" (p. 15, emphasis in original). DMAC does not have the range and pervasiveness of the institutions or culture that Williams investigated, so it might be better understood as a micro-institution, one that emerges from and later circulates through the many different institutions its participants come from and return to after DMAC's conclusion. Like Williams's work, however, DMAC does hold a vocabulary, a shared body of words and meanings for its many participants. This vocabulary, however, is in no way monolithic. A keyword is not static but fluctuates in meaning and value as it circulates with its many interlocutors. As readers will notice, many of our keywords collide, overlap, and echo one another as we explore how a single trait of DMAC is experienced and shared.

Our multivocal essay provides each past participant of DMAC and author of this article a space to trace one keyword we associate with DMAC and its capacities for professional development. Our keywords include *access* (Yergeau), *conversations* (Vie), *assets* (Dadas), *novice* (Micciche), *intensity* (Boyle), *assemblage* (Morris), *community* (Smith), and *participation* (Blankenship). Within each subsection, an author works from his or her singular DMAC experience along with relevant secondary scholarship to trace a keyword and explain how that keyword characterizes the institute. Ultimately, we offer a polyvocal text that is multiply focused, a collective composition that aims to offer as rich an account of the DMAC experience as the experience of DMAC has offered its participants.

Our overall goal to sustain DMAC's circulation keeps with this special issue's larger impetus on best practices in technological professional development. It also relays DMAC's overall goal to "suggest and encourage innovative rhetorically based approaches to composing that students and faculty can use as they employ digital media in support of their own educational and professional goals, in light of the specific context at their home institutions and within their varied personal experiences" ([Selfe & DeWitt, 2015](#)). We hope that from this multivocal discussion of key concepts, terms, and ideas from DMAC's past, readers can take away potential "best practices" for similar professional development opportunities at their institutions.

1. Access (Yergeau)

I first attended DMAC in 2008 while a graduate student at Ohio State. In the weeks preceding the institute, attendees were asked to come with a project in tow—something to work on during our time together.

What I longed to build during DMAC seemed risky: a webtext that debunked myths about autistic people and their supposed litany of deficits, using self-disclosure as my rhetorical frame. Upon beginning my program at Ohio State, I made the conscious decision to be open about being autistic. On campus, my disclosure (or, really, series of disclosures) resulted in my becoming involved in disability rights activism. I attended (and later organized) my first disability-related protests; I served as a mentor for campus support groups; I began blogging about autism under a pseudonym; I even joined an autistic book club.

And yet these disclosures, each of them monumental in their own way, had not gone beyond the university bubble. DMAC became the site from which I cultivated my scholarly identity as a disabled person. The conversations there, and my resulting webtext, were my access point into a more public disability identity.

Even several years into practicing disclosure, I write this piece with some trepidation. As well, I frame this piece under the heading of *access* with some caveats.

Access, what [Charles Moran \(1999\)](#) once termed the A-word, is a fraught term. It has in many respects become an empty signifier, a shiny buzzword that sounds lovely on its surface level but isn't fully realized in practice. Often there is a presumption that once we bring people into a space, a conversation, an economy—access has been achieved. Scholars across disciplines have commented on these and other problematic constructions of access. [Jason Palmeri \(2006\)](#) figured access as a rehabilitative project, one that divides the normal helpers from the abnormal in need of help. [Adam Banks \(2005\)](#) critiqued those who would theorize access as being only in the domain of the material or economic, rather than view access as participatory, resistant, or subversive. Both Banks and Jay [Dolmage \(2009\)](#) suggested that access, instead, requires radical social transformation. Transformative access, as they described it, involves the redesign of those normative social systems that define, prevent, or limit access to begin with.

For my own part, access has always seemed inextricable from disclosure, and it's because of DMAC that I've learned to problematize the seeming inseparability of the two. In order for a space to be made accessible, as common logic goes, an individual is required to catalogue the ways in which this space is *personally* inaccessible. There is, then, a certain accommodative logic behind access. For techno-rhetoricians, the impulse is to proceed, business-as-usual, and simply add onto existing designs as "issues" arise. In this way, then, access is configured as the idiosyncratic needs of problemed bodies rather than as a series of practices that center on inclusion, participation, difference, and, ultimately, transformation.

Looking through past schedules, 2008, it seems to me, represented a turning point for DMAC in a number of ways. Brenda Brueggemann and Ken Petri headed a number of sessions, workshops, and informal bagel conversations around closed captioning. These conversations were also buttressed by video narratives from Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the newly seeded Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN). What struck me about this juxtaposition—the how-to of captioning, the literacy narratives of people who variously identified as d/Deaf, disabled, and/or hard-of-hearing—wasn't the connection between captioning on one side and deafness on the other, as though DMAC participants were beholden to help poor deaf people access their Sophie books. Captioning became, in the words of Dolmage, a "way to move." Brueggemann, Petri, Katie Comer, Cindy Selfe, and Scott DeWitt all variously positioned captioning as both a rhetorical and cultural practice. Cindy's mantra was, "Captioning will get you closer to your data." Brenda emphasized—and continues to emphasize, some six years later at DMAC—the found poetry in caption fails and mis-transcriptions (e.g., where the word *rhetoric*, when projected via Computer Assisted Real-Time transcription, is instead represented as *red Rick*).

DMAC provided models not only around the politics of disclosure, but also in how to practice access in forward-moving ways that went beyond the domain of charity, or of rehabilitating a group of problemed others. Based on these models, I redirected my DMAC project around autism, accommodative rhetorics, and identity erasure—exploring the tendency of some compositionists to herald writing as an accessible communication option for autistic writers, while concurrently claiming that autistic writers must not really be disabled if they can read or write.

As important as this webtext project was to me, DMAC didn't end for me in 2008. For the past six years, I've become increasingly involved in DMAC, first as the person who sat in computer classrooms and showed people how to use MovieCaptioner, and later as a visiting scholar. I look at my movement—from panicked grad student trying to do something with an access webtext, to junior faculty member who now can add "visiting scholar" to her CV—and I find this movement iconic of the many kinds of movements, or accessible practices, that DMAC makes possible. The ways in which mentoring becomes less of a hierarchy and more of a relationship or shared project. The ways in which space is not only made, but also a routine practice of making and remaking, for people whose projects feel experimental or idiosyncratic or minor. The ways in which practices from my own disability communities, such as color-coded badges that signal one's communication needs (e.g., red = don't talk to me, yellow = talk to me if you know me, green = talk to me), have become access tools for conversation and ground for communal theorization during DMAC discussions.

If access is a practice, it is a practice and process that never ends. DMAC helped make this known to me, and the people who attended made this known to DMAC. And each year, I look forward to seeing this dynamic re-emerge.

2. Conversations (Vie)

In 2008, social media was burgeoning. The potential for online conversation and connections seemed to be everywhere. And indeed, *conversation* was the key point for many social media users—not just one-way corporate communication pushed out from companies or lengthy monologic diatribes online. 2008 was the year Facebook finally edged out past its main competitor, MySpace, in April and took over as the most-trafficked social networking site in the United States (with 145 million monthly active users in 2008). Blogging, too, was becoming a core part of the social media landscape. Active readers of blogs grew from 54% to 77% globally between 2006 and 2008, and the percentage of blog authors also grew, from 28% to 45% during those two years (Singleton & Meloncon, 2011, pp. 8–9). Conservative blogger [Andrew Sullivan \(2008\)](#) explored his motivations in an *Atlantic* piece, "Why I Blog," comparing the blog author to a dinner party host, who "can provoke discussion or take a position, even passionately, but... must create an atmosphere in which others want to participate." That atmosphere where others want to participate—where conversations can happen—is part of the core experience that DMAC gives participants.

What DMAC offers is a space for conversations to happen, a two-week period that opens up a discussion that resonates long after the participants leave. We see this resonance in this special issue and in the article you are now

reading, where alumni of DMAC have gathered together to participate in a conversation about its meaning for us. We see it also in the interactions we have at conferences like Computers & Writing and Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) each year, where presentations on multimodality continue to increase and participants can sift through live-tweeted sessions using hashtags like #cwccon and #CCCC14. Afterward, many of these tweets are wrapped up and presented together as a conversation through applications like Storify, further reinforcing the conversational, collective nature of social media.

For some of us, we may even see the resonance of DMAC in more unusual places like the academic job market and in the hallways of our local institutions. In 2013, I went on the market and was fortunate enough to receive several campus visits. The search committee chair at one institution was a fellow 2008 DMAC Institute participant; in fact, we had worked together on one of the early projects in the institute, the “Multimodal in 60 Seconds” project. Our conversations during my campus visit were, in my mind, enhanced by the fact we had worked closely during DMAC. And at the University of Central Florida, where I accepted a job in 2013, I now work with not just one but two fellow 2008 DMAC alumni, Douglas Walls and Angela Rounsville; many of our conversations about multimodal composing draw on our experiences at the Institute.

The conversations I’ve been able to share with others about multimodality have their origins in the conversations I participated in during the 2008 Digital Media and Composition Institute. As Cindy Selfe and Scott Lloyd DeWitt articulated in an interview with *The Writing Instructor*, the mission of DMAC has always been to offer a space for such discussions to open up. Selfe noted that participants often engage in discussions at DMAC where they talk about:

Why would we want to go about doing this? What does it buy us in terms of meaningful engagement with students? And meaningful engagement with semiosis and meaningful engagement with multimodality? What is the connection between the theory and practice in these new digital environments and the teaching of composition, rhetoric, and digital media studies? (as cited in [Denecker & Tulley, 2014](#))

DeWitt echoed her response:

Our mission is to not say: This is how Ohio State does it, and this is how you should do it too. This mission is to say: here’s how Ohio State does it, now let’s give you two weeks to think about how does it work at home... I want people to bring their own ideas here, have an environment to think about those ideas and then go home and build on those ideas at their institutions. (as cited in [Denecker & Tulley, 2014](#))

What Selfe and DeWitt’s interview quotes reveal is the emphasis on planning a space where there are no pre-packaged answers presented to attendees, no “just do it like this, and you’ll be fine.” Instead, the space they have planned is one that purposefully begins with meaningful engagement, with connections, and with an environment where ideas can percolate with the assistance of other attendees. The former environment, with its emphasis on pre-packaged answers and one right way to enact multimodality, is akin to a corporate social media account that simply spams followers with get-rich-quick scams. The latter—a place where rich conversations about multimodality can happen—today can be seen in ubiquitous social media technologies like Facebook and Twitter when participants engage with each other in meaningful, sustained ways. The opportunity for sustained *in-person* contact, however, is unique to DMAC: Think of it as the difference between a quick phone call or Facebook exchange with a friend and a two-week working vacation together.

Just as much has changed in the landscape of social media between 2008 and today, DMAC has similarly evolved (including a greater embrace of social networking technologies). Today Facebook, the 2008 upstart, now logs 1.23 billion users worldwide ([Kiss, 2014](#)). Blogging and microblogging are now mainstream, with 255 million monthly active Twitter users and 500 million Tweets sent per day. DMAC has a social media presence, including a Facebook and a Twitter account (check out #dmac12, #dmac13, and #dmac14 for tweets). The Institute, which offered its ninth year in 2014, has successfully created a space for conversations about multimodal composition to emerge (and of course those conversations have been a part of DMAC from its even earlier beginning as the Computers in Writing-Intensive Classrooms, CIWIC, summer institute, offered from 1985–2005 at Michigan Tech).

The words of one 2008 DMAC blogger still resonate years later:

I love sitting around the table here at DMAC, with everyone working away, folks solving problems collaboratively as they emerge. I’m gonna do my best to give this a real try to see what the virtual community that is produced

via the blogging offers. I'll be trying to find my voice in this environment. Right now, I just feel awkward, which is ok. Means I'm in a position to learn rather than perform. ("Curiosity, Creativity, and Collaboration," 2008)

That awkwardness—being faced with the frightening prospect of a multimodal project that won't render the way the author wants it to, for example, or just simply not knowing (as Melanie Yergeau describes in her discussion of access) what the project might even look like—is one that I imagine all DMAC participants can recall. I know I can; I remember spending several days mulling over all of the possible ideas. Though I knew that I wanted to focus my project on social media in some way, I had little understanding of the argument I wanted to make, the form I wanted it to take, and how the two would work together in a rhetorically sound and persuasive way. I eventually found my way.

So what helped me? The conversations. As I talked over ideas with others and thought about all of the readings we'd been presented and the discussions we'd had, things became clearer in my mind. And again, I think this is one of the unique things DMAC affords us as scholars; it's a chance to go back to summer camp, as it were, and have the time, the space, and the energy to just *talk* with others about ideas. About multimodality. About the Creative Commons and intellectual property. About access and affordances, assessment and activism. How often do we have the opportunity to sit down with such a multifaceted group of scholars and hold such conversations? In her section, Caroline Dadas describes these conversations as "intellectual camaraderie," and I think that's absolutely correct. Two weeks of sustained discussions that get beyond just how-to talks and showcases of tools (although of course there are moments that deal with the technology how-to elements) and move into really smart conversations about multimodality with really smart people—DMAC participants are lucky to have experienced that, and I think that's part of why so many alumni are excited to showcase the Institute to others and suggest they too attend. And truly, the best conversations are those that are inclusive, that are multilayered, and that draw you back to them again and again because you have just one more thing to say. The sociality of DMAC offers us that through the conversations it sustains. Here's to many more years of finding our individual voices through the supportive conversations with others that DMAC affords.

3. Assets (Dadas)

As a graduate student interested in digital writing, I had heard about DMAC from several colleagues who had found the experience of attending the workshop transformative. By 2008, DMAC had become the place-to-go for scholars of all levels of expertise with multimodal writing (while DMAC was only two years old at the time, its precursor, CIWIC, as Stephanie mentioned earlier, dates back 30 years). In fact, several of my fellow graduate students from Miami University had already attended the workshop and had brought back assignments that were subsequently incorporated into our First-Year Composition program, such as an audio public service announcement. These assignments quickly became pedagogical staples for many of us interested in incorporating technologies more robustly into our teaching. Even more impressive, to my mind, was the fact that my fellow graduate students returned from the workshop talking about the one-on-one instruction they received from facilitators Selfe and DeWitt, how they became friends with established scholars in the field who were also attending the workshop, and how the DMAC visiting scholars—people whose work I had read and admired in seminars—gave them detailed feedback on their projects. I imagined that for DMAC participants, the connections made during those two weeks would serve as valuable assets for the rest of their careers.

I was able to attend the workshop in the summer of 2008, during a time when the concept of "remix" was becoming central to multimodal writing. That same year, Lawrence Lessig published a monograph, *Remix*, that argued for a more capacious understanding of writing. Cited frequently by scholars in computers and writing, Lessig (2008) argued that:

it is no surprise, then, that these other forms of "creating" are becoming an increasingly dominant form of "writing" . . . Using the tools of digital technology . . . anyone can begin to "write" using images, or music, or video. (p. 69)

Notable to Lessig's work is how he celebrated an economy of idea-exchange that did not privilege ownership. As a co-founder of the Creative Commons, Lessig has argued for a digital ethic of sharing, collaboration, and remix: qualities that Selfe and DeWitt were already enacting through their DMAC pedagogy. Notably, throughout the workshop, Selfe and DeWitt would use the term "assets" to describe the collected digital materials—videos, song clips, sound effects, still images—from which we constructed our projects. The raw material of digital projects, assets (a term they credit to H. Lewis Ulman) are compiled by the writer/designer and subsequently edited, remixed, re-assembled, mashed

together, and re-appropriated for a specific rhetorical purpose. Thus, the final product could take innumerable forms. DMAC participants were encouraged to use Lessig's Creative Commons as a source for digital assets, a move that helped redefine the term more generously than its capitalistic and proprietary connotations (DeWitt & Selfe, personal communication, May 16, 2014).

E. pluribus plures, our guiding framework for this essay, describes a method of composing: from many potential assets, many textual possibilities. With this method emerges a *techné* for multimodal writing—a way of inventing and arranging arguments in digital environments, as well as a theoretical orientation to how semiotic resources combine to make meaning. According to [Susan Delagrange \(2011\)](#), “The knowledge of *techné* is contingent, created in the moment of making, and as such is a heuristic process of discovery” (p. 36). Delagrange's definition highlights *techné*'s capacity as a framework, or way of structuring arguments and approaches to composing. Because *techné* is located within a particular context, it is situation-dependent, making it a useful way to think about multimodal composing with various assets. Through DMAC's instruction, we learned how to approach multimodal composing as an exercise in invention—combining compositional assets, editing them, and re-contextualizing them in the service of our argument(s). The theoretical orientation for such practices (as espoused by [Bill Cope & Mary Kalantzis, 2000](#), and [Selfe, 2007](#), among others), emphasized a sharing economy that was reflected in the workshop itself: Participants passed along resources to each other when we thought they might benefit someone else's project. The ethic of sharing and collaboration that stands at the core of remix culture ran throughout DMAC, as we learned how writers beginning with the same assets could create dramatically different results.

Of course, *techné* also requires practical know-how. Despite the steep learning curve for some, DeWitt and Selfe modeled for us a spirit of play and discovery with technology. In addition to emphasizing the usefulness of such an approach to our scholarship, they also encouraged it with our pedagogy. They argued that many students communicate so well with technology *because* they can be more irreverent and experimental with practices such as remix. Subsequent scholarship such as [Jody Shipka's \(2011\)](#) work has highlighted students' creativity in working with multimodal assets, and as [Paul A. Prior and Julie A. Hengst \(2010\)](#) argued, we must “attend to the diverse ways that semiotic performances are re-represented and reused across modes, media, and chains of activity” (p. 2). What I could not appreciate until I attended the workshop was how DeWitt and Selfe's approaches to working with technology were both highly accessible to students *and* thoroughly versed in the most current scholarship; that encouraging students to “re-represent” semiotic performances and assets was something that would prove highly engaging to many of those students.

As a scholar interested in the possibilities of multimodal composition and remix, I found DMAC to be a place of intellectual camaraderie for this kind of scholarly work. By that summer of 2008, we had already seen the publication of [Cope and Kalantzis's *Multiliteracies* \(2000\)](#), [Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* \(2006\)](#), and [Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc's *Writing New Media* \(2004\)](#): all texts that we discussed during the workshop. But we were on the verge of an influx of scholarship that explored digital writing—and remix in particular—with nuance and rigor. In the next five years we would see publications pertaining to digital and multimodal writing by [Claire Lauer \(2009\)](#), [Susan Delagrange \(2011\)](#), [Adam Banks \(2011\)](#), [Jason Palmeri \(2012\)](#), [Megan Fulwiler and Kim Middleton \(2012\)](#), and [Melanie Yergeau et al. \(2013\)](#): all writers who attended DMAC as participants or visiting scholars. The ideas and approaches cultivated during DMAC exerted an impact on computers and writing and, in a larger sense, rhetoric and composition.

My initial impressions of DMAC, gained from my graduate school colleagues, has held true: DMAC's participants ourselves continue to serve as assets for each other. Over the years, we have combined our perspectives and talents to create many ways of writing, studying, and teaching with digital media—collaboratively sharing the ideas we learned at DMAC with colleagues and students across the country.

4. Novice (Micciche)

Novice is a familiar identity category in the field of computers and writing, both in understanding the approaches of students new to the rhetorical capacities of multimodal composing, for instance, and in recognizing the ways in which we ourselves are situated as scholars and teachers engaging in new media writing. Debra [Journet \(2007\)](#), for instance, wrote about the ways in which senior faculty navigate digital media, often coming to different modes and media as novices. In an article written for the 20th anniversary of the Computers and Writing conference, Lisa [Gerard \(2006\)](#) described talking with Lillian Bridwell Bowles about the fact that most—if not all—attendees of the conference in the early years were notably novices. Since its beginnings, the field has had to address how non-experts (and

blatantly uninterested colleagues) might position themselves in relation to technology. Across her work, Selfe has further situated the terms orbiting around “novice” and “master” in consideration of social and industry trends *and* field-specific happenings. For instance, in her 1997 CCCCCs Chair’s Address, [Selfe \(1999\)](#) described familiar responses to technology among humanists, stating:

many teachers of English composition feel it antithetical to their primary concerns and many believe it should not be allowed to take up valuable scholarly time or the attention that could be best put to use in teaching or the study of literacy. (p. 412)

Making her case for paying attention to and thinking with technology, [Selfe \(1999\)](#) further argued, “When we fail to [pay attention to technology], we share in the responsibility for sustaining and reproducing an unfair system that... . enacts social violence and ensures continuing illiteracy under the aegis of education” (p. 415). Facing our responsibilities as teachers and scholars of writing might be the clarion call of DMAC. This mandate certainly illustrates why novices are not just welcome but *needed* to realize the mission of the institute, where participants learn how to pay attention, use, think with, and reflect on technology as a meaningful and meaning-making literacy partner.

Novice is more than a category of experience at DMAC. It is also an embodied identity: As a novice, you operate without the habitual physical orientation to a task or cognitive routines you might otherwise draw on for quick retrieval of a knowledge set (as when a seasoned scholar begins a writing project or, taking a more general example, when riding a bike after a long hiatus—in both cases, body and brain draw on resources to remember what to do). The repetition of a task or set of activities creates both muscle memory and a storehouse of cognitive recall central to fluency. Body, cognition, activity, tools, and media interrelate and overlap—DMAC acknowledges this swirl by reinforcing composing as corporeal activity, calling to mind [Jay Dolmage’s \(2012\)](#) point that to compose with media is to “compose embodiment” (p. 110; see also [Arola & Wysocki, 2012](#)).

This idea is evident in DMAC’s focus on captioning video and audio and on designing webtexts with principles of universal design in mind, which Melanie Yergeau described in more detail in her section on access here. In addition, learning how to hold and manipulate an audio recorder, as well as position it to achieve good sound quality, is not taken-for-granted knowledge. Handling media—literally putting one’s hands on it—is part of instruction. I came to view this aspect of the institute as a process of remediation through which individuals adapt their embodied uses of older/other technologies for new uses (for instance, the audio recorder’s antecedent includes the tape recorder; see [Bolter & Grusin, 2000](#)).

While producing a video for the first time, I used my knowledge of written text to develop a narrative structure and my general experiences as a viewer to frame and edit scenes. By composing with alphabetic text and a visual reception sensibility, I drew on practices rooted in my physical experiences with narration and image consumption. My inexperience with the medium and software, however, was ultimately limited and limiting—an insight that helped me appreciate composing strategies specific to various media and scale back expectations for each product. As novices, our goal was to produce *good enough* projects that applied the technical and rhetorical knowledge we had been practicing and discussing. Mastery was not expected or desired, particularly because what gets valued at DMAC is cumulative knowledge. Participants pay attention to the affordances of communication and then make imperfect products to better understand composing with new tools, in various environments, for different purposes and delivery options.

Novices are engaged in a gradual and progressive interaction with digital media. The approach that guides the institute prioritizes reflection through group discussion, blogging, and assignment design; practice grounded in discrete tasks followed by group sharing; a culture of play and experimentation; conversations (as Stephanie Vie noted) about access, literacy, and rhetorical flexibility; and spontaneous co-mentoring. In this sense, DMAC pedagogy reflects current thinking about new media pedagogy, particularly by making material practices visible and, as Wysocki stated, by reinforcing “the kinds of embodied, temporal positions that we need to be able to see” ([Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004](#), p. 22). The intense, immersive environment and the proximity of participants create the conditions for expressions like frustration, euphoria, and exhaustion to emerge during the ten-day institute. Getting to see, hear, and read projects in stages, over several days, emphasizes the materially and temporally bound nature of our work. Scaffolded assignments (like creating a storyboard for a film) enable participants to witness the evolving materiality of texts in real time.

When I returned to my campus after attending DMAC, I was able to translate my experience into tangible outcomes: a new undergraduate course called Digital Composing; a multimodal assignment in our teacher-training course; a co-taught Digital Humanities graduate seminar enhanced by workshops; and a collaboratively written scholarly webtext.

These outcomes were consistent with some of the outcomes of multimodal pedagogy identified by [Jody Shipka \(2005\)](#). She hoped her students would develop “enhanced awareness of the affordances provided by the variety of media” and strategies for “contextualizing, structuring, and realizing the production, representation, distribution, delivery, and reception” of their work ([Shipka, 2005](#), p. 283–84). DMAC succeeds at actualizing these outcomes for its participants, who occupy various status, rank, and subject area locations.

DMAC prioritizes novice identity on the imperative that doing digital work in classrooms and in the profession can’t wait for experts. Novices bring excitement, curiosity, and productive worry to the institute experience, valuable assets for innovation and site-specific adaptation.

5. Intensity (Boyle)

“No regrets.”

Those are the first words I remember Cindy Selfe saying as DMAC opened in the summer of 2008. An announcement that both put me at ease—relieved the pressure to do everything right—and forewarned that I was going to experience something like Las Vegas. As she explained, “no regrets” meant that we novices (as Laura Micciche defined it) should not get anxious about *taking it all in*—after all, it was impossible. The two-week institute was *designed* to be too much, not unlike the *too much* one might find in Las Vegas.

I know it seems an unlikely comparison, but DMAC and Las Vegas operate through similar affective structures. Both are bathed in bright, flickering lights; both resound with noise and carefully crafted sonic compositions; both are filled with quick, rapid-fire activities. Both involve gambling too. While we might not place chips on tables in Denney Hall (the primary site for most DMAC activities at Ohio State University) with the hopes of multiplying our money, we are encouraged to take risks. Instead of bank savings accounts, each participant risks time, energy, and emotion that goes into composing new works with unfamiliar tools. These new works often fail to reach the maturity our everyday products achieve with far less investment. Just like Las Vegas, we seemingly put in more for less.

We typically think of Las Vegas as an overwhelming place without substance or center, an ever-expanding surface where one leaves with less than one brought. Against this standard interpretation, however, [Jeffrey Nealon \(2012\)](#) proposed Las Vegas to be more representative of our times because in this place “you don’t so much *consume goods* as you *have experiences* where your subjectivity can be intensified, bent, and retooled” (p. 31, emphasis in original). In this sense, DMAC—in its capacity as a training program—is a lot more like Las Vegas than we might immediately recognize.

Not unlike Nealon’s Las Vegas, DMAC is less concerned with its participants consuming a product than it is with offering an intense experience that can help “bend” and “retool” our subjectivity. Much of the scholarship we read in *Computers and Composition* (and other related scholarship) speaks to the importance of developing literacies that rely on conscious, reflective, and critical attention to the strategies of multimodal writing, but DMAC’s effectiveness works along an alternate, companion mode. Not afforded to DMAC is the long span of time necessary for discussing the politics of multimodal literacies. Instead, DMAC offers quick introduction to and rapid practices in audio/video capture and editing, communal blogging, and visual/aural design (among others). This tactical experience leverages what [William Connolly \(2002\)](#)—surveying the effects practicing with an array of media and genres had on neural structures—argued were key to creating new subjective capacities:

To work on an established sensibility by tactical means, then, is to nudge the composition of some layers in relation to others. You work experimentally on the relays between thought-imbued intensities below the level of feeling and linguistic complexity, thought-imbued feelings below the level of linguistic sophistication, images that trigger responses at both levels, and linguistically sophisticated patterns of narrative, argument, and judgment. (p. 106)

Expanding from Connolly, I call this alternative mode of professional training a “pedagogy of intensities.” This pedagogy seeks to intensify relationships that include—but that cannot be reduced to—what can be known or explicitly mapped out. Such a pedagogy echoes both [Jenny Edbauer Rice \(2008\)](#)—who argued for rhetoricians to attend to “mechanical” relationships by immersing themselves with available tools and media—and [Kevin Leander and Gail Boldt \(2013\)](#)—who recognized that literacy practices were embodied as “ongoing series of affective intensities” (p. 26).

As “no regrets” implies, the abundance of possibilities available for DMAC participants offers multiple professional development experiences through experimenting with new practices in a short period of time. This overload of multimodal composing experiences replicates, in some ways, the “immersion” approach of some second language programs. Immersion programs (to speak in a general way) intensify education by leveraging the mundane and minor social interactions alongside the more explicitly major pedagogical teacher-student dynamics. This intensification, a recognition of the multiple arrays of possible pedagogical interaction, is itself intensified when we consider the distributed and embodied aspects of multimodality (cf. [Arola & Wysocki, 2012](#); [Fountain, 2014](#)). Clearly, our brains are engaged, but so too are our bodies—from our fingers clicking on keyboards to our ears wrapped in headphones.

If we were to entertain my claim of DMAC offering a pedagogy of intensities, we would include our embodied interactions with and through media as available means through which we bend and retool our composing capacities. This point is not unlike the kind of ongoing practice Melanie Yergeau advocated for issues of access. Speaking toward embodiment, [Gunther Kress \(2000\)](#) stated in one of the regularly read texts of DMAC that “[m]ode and materiality, through their close relation with the body’s means of taking in information, and its possibilities of engagement with the world more generally, have wide repercussions for the issue of subjectivity” (p. 187). More recently, [N. Kathryn Hayles \(2012\)](#) echoed Kress when she favored the concept of “technogenesis” or “the idea that humans and technics have coevolved together” to explain how media environments shape our cognitive capacities through embedded and extended cognitive structures (p. 10). In both accounts, we are reminded that neither linguistics nor signification alone comprises the whole of multimodal composing. Learning multimodal composing includes intense interactions *with* those media as a way to incorporate the capacities of multiple media.

Such interactions and designed intensity for professional training and development need not only be left to the sole summer experience DMAC occupies but also can be exported to other avenues and spaces as well. How might these intensities offered through “too much” be used in traditional semester-long courses? In mentoring relationships? In one’s own research and teaching? The underlying ethos of DMAC—and of a pedagogy of intensities—is to leverage intense experiences to refigure our habits and practices for and through multimodal composing. It is not to be a distinct operation, but is designed to be open and shared. To be blunt: if what happens at DMAC stays at DMAC, we would—contrary to Selfe’s opening words—regret it.

6. Assemblage (Morris)

In their preface to *Digital Writing Assessment and Evaluation*, [Heidi McKee and Dànienne Nicole DeVoss \(2013\)](#) wrote that “much of the assessment and evaluation occurring in classrooms and institutions today is engaged by instructors with little or no formal experience with digital technologies.” Even though instructors may use digital technologies in their work and teaching, they lack the expertise that allows them to fully teach and assess student digital work, encountering multimodality in some ways as novices, like Laura Micciche described here. McKee and DeVoss’ sentiments are further echoed in [Cindy Selfe’s \(2004\)](#) claim that “many Composition faculty realize they can offer only limited help to students who read new media texts; and they cannot help students who want to compose such texts” (p. 89). Before attending DMAC, I was one of those instructors, unconfident and unsure of how to best use technology in the classroom and in my work. I came to DMAC wanting to plan a digital composition class for which I lacked the experience, knowledge, and resources that would let me effectively teach my students. After being immersed in the institute and using the technology first-hand, *many, many* DMAC participants—myself included—leave better equipped to challenge these perceptions of the inexperienced and/or technophobic composition instructor.

To better understand DMAC’s role as a best practice professional development experience, one that leads to better prepared and more confident digital instructors and scholars, I draw from theories of assemblage. An assemblage, as I describe it here, has the potential to challenge notions of authorship, intellectual property, and creativity by offering the potential to combine (found) materials together to generate new meanings. DMAC enacts a theory of assemblage by asking makers to compose collaboratively, use already existing materials for different purposes/contexts, and experiment with proliferating new meanings (rather than codifying meaning or combatively setting up a hierarchy of meanings).

[Jane Bennett \(2005\)](#) used assemblage to highlight the “distributive and composite nature of agency” (p. 446). She selected assemblage over terms like *network* to explain the 2003 North American electrical power grid blackout, seeing

this term as more representative of the relationality between human and nonhuman actants that led to the blackout. She defined assemblage as:

a material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remained in sufficient proximity and coordination to function as a flowing system. The coherence of this system endures alongside energies and factions that fly out from it and disturb it from within. (Bennett, 2005, p. 446)

Bennett's fluid view of agency is a useful way to characterize DMAC's composite parts. DMAC is a grouping of people and technologies whose interactions lead to the production of new knowledge. One of the ways participants learn at DMAC is through hands-on use of technologies like cameras, audio recorders, computers, software like Adobe Photoshop or Apple iMovie, and digital spaces including the web. Using the technology is just as important as interacting with the other participants; the conversations that take place, as Stephanie Vie discussed in her section, resonate and continue beyond the institute itself. Because DMAC involves multiple workshop leaders and opportunities for large and small group work and conversation, participants learn from multiple agents (including one another), and knowledge is not distributed from the top down.

Assemblages can also become a way to rethink how we remix and repurpose texts, exposing the materials of digital composing. Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber's (2007) discussion of remix, originality, and plagiarism centered around re-seeing remixed texts as assemblages rather than derivative works as uncreative forms of plagiarism (p. 376). They defined assemblages as "texts built primarily and explicitly from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context" (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007, p. 381). Though Johnson-Eilola and Selber were discussing remixes, DMAC participants create assemblages in a similar way. While participants begin certain projects with the same instruction and stock texts, composer's novel interactions with memories and tools make them see those projects or concepts as new. For example, one of the given assignments is to create (either in groups or individually) a 60-second concept video. My cohort was given the term multimodality as our inspiration, and each project represented the term in a completely new fashion. Though the goal and the instruction were the same, it was through building with and from one another, along with our own experiences and background, that new knowledge and ways of seeing were created. The material provided at DMAC gets repurposed as participants take with them the resources they need. These remixed texts further challenge ideas of single authorship, as authorship at DMAC is positioned as distributive. For instance, although the digital composition class I ended up proposing was my own, the website came to life because of Ryan Trauman's Wordpress workshop; the assignments grew from DMAC's "Concept in 60" video and audio assignments; and the course content and theme were shaped by comments from the gallery showcase of projects on the final day.

Beyond changing the way I thought about digital instruction, DMAC's assemblages also changed how I experienced the ethics of digital composition: I began to see the importance of collaboration, learning alongside others, remixing, and finding new ways to deliver a message as necessary components of creating digital texts. These practices became integral to my teaching going forward. I left the institute with ideas for digital scholarship and a professional website, as well as concrete plans (and a course website) for my digital composing class. While I took my experiences directly into my classroom, others used their experiences to add to computers and composition scholarship. For instance, Kathryn Perry's (2012) *Kairos* Disputatio video "The Movement of Composition: Dance and Writing" is just one example of the born-digital scholarship that came from my particular DMAC cohort.

What makes DMAC different from other professionalization opportunities is the immersive and interactive experience with top scholars in computers and writing, combined with a collaborative environment and time spent actually using the technologies and resources. Understanding DMAC as an assemblage means understanding the reverberation of the institute out into an unpredictable space beyond it. It's not possible at the time to see how DMAC's energy fully re-manifests in classrooms, curriculum, and scholarship. Because an assemblage results in the creation of something new through existing parts, DMAC's "flowing system" grows as participants return to their home institutions and compose anew (Bennett, 2005, p. 446).

7. Community (Smith)

In June of 2010, Joe Harris and I were in a backyard in Ohio talking about books. We weren't just talking about books; we were also waiting to watch the collection of "Concept in 60" videos that we—along with all the other DMAC participants that year—had spent the weekend producing. During the conversation, we discovered we had both

recently read Ander Monson's (2010) *Vanishing Point: Not a Memoir* and were thinking about its relevance to our work at DMAC and to digital writing more generally.

For the unfamiliar, Monson's book operates on a kind of logic of excess. While it has the appearance of a traditional memoir, the reader soon learns the book consists largely of snippets from other memoirs past and present. Further, the paperbound book version of *Vanishing Point* is only a partial text, with the other parts found on a companion website. Less restrained by time and not limited to static images and alphabetic print, the website presents a very different memoir than the codex alone. Monson "links" from the printed book to its digital extension through the use of glyphs—well, one glyph to be precise: an italicized dagger (†) superscripted and appearing after particular keywords. When followed on the website, the daggers refer to other texts, links, and digital ephemera that can be revised and added to indefinitely. As [Monson \(2010\)](#) noted, the dagger represents:

[an] instance of redirect, a bubbling-over instance, where, for one of many reasons, I have more information, a further reflection, more thinking on the subject that has either gone on past the boundaries of the *object, the fixity* of the book, or is continuing to evolve. (p. 2)

In this way, *Vanishing Point* is rhizomatic—a material representation of the book as machinic assemblages and a kind of vigorously layered experience akin to the intensity Casey Boyle described in his section of this article.

Perhaps because it was still fresh in my memory while attending DMAC, *Vanishing Point* became a kind of point of entry for me—a way to orient myself to the theory and practice I was immersed in for those weeks in Ohio. And just as Monson's text extends to both a codex and the web, DMAC demonstrated one can teach multimodal composition without necessarily having to choose between particular modes—print vs. digital, image vs. text, narrative vs. argumentation, etc. Rather, it's about affirming *all* modes of composition and, in this sense, composition itself. Just as [Elizabeth Daley's "Expanding the Concept of Literacy" \(2003\)](#), a key text during DMAC that year, made obvious, we were going to be working with ways to expand literacy, not replace it. For me, this was a relief. My relationship to the community of computers and composition as I perceived it had, until DMAC, been marked by a kind of ambivalence stemming from larger cultural and medial anxieties. Given this, it is little wonder my final DMAC project focused on the relationship between nostalgia and remediation.

I had driven to Columbus that June half-expecting an induction into a community that would be something between a religious conversion and a gang initiation. Thankfully, that didn't happen. What I did leave with, however, was an enriched sense of how a rhetorical approach to technology *bubbles over*, to use Monson's phrase, into the computers and composition community itself. Rather than prescriptive or value-laden approaches, DMAC offered the time and space to negotiate how I might fold multimodal composition into my own pedagogical and scholarly practices. In this way, DMAC echoes [Harris's \(1997\)](#) concerns regarding students' approaches toward the academic community in *A Teaching Subject*: "The task facing our students... is not to leave one community in order to enter another, but to *reposition* themselves in relation to several continuous and conflicting discourses" (p. 105). In this sense, my experience at DMAC was less about being invited to participate in a pre-defined community than it was about learning a rhetorical orientation—toward technology, toward language, and, finally, toward community itself.

This learning is done in several ways. Most notably, perhaps, is by giving participants opportunities to practice the technologies together in an environment privileging experimentation over mastery. In this way, DMAC allows a community of practice to emerge over the course of the two-week institute as participants learn to work together through the contingency technology demands. Case in point, while working toward my final project using the Sophie 2.0 book platform, I realized—as did many of the participants that year—a crucial update was going to prevent me from using the software any further. Rather than abandon my original idea altogether, many of us worked closely together to reimagine and remediate our projects in different platforms. In many cases, losing the generic assumptions of the book—even a multimodal Sophie book incorporating dynamic textual movement, external links, audio, and video—allowed our projects to become something they otherwise would not have. Such examples are, for me, the very substance of DMAC as a community. Again, thankfully.

8. Participation (Blankenship)

"To learn to think through doing and to have someone lead me through the 'doing' technology."

—DMAC 2008 participant, on what she hoped to gain by attending

The above scholar-teacher's response to the DMAC participant survey captures what many of us who have been part of DMAC may say is one of its most important takeaways: not only learning the theory behind multimodal composing but also actually *doing* multimodal compositions—in many cases the very kinds of assignments we ask our students to do (personal communication). I focus on the keyword *participation* in this reflection to highlight the rich kinds of knowing we experience by doing assignments along with students and by engaging in the kinds of multimodal composing we believe are so valuable in 21st-century composition work.

In 1975, Jim Corder wrote in “What I Learned at School” about his experience of actually writing the papers he asked his students to complete. Engaging with the assignments gave him greater perspective on his role as a writing teacher that he hadn’t been able to see from his role as a scholarly writer in his own research. In a similar vein, E. Shelley Reid (2009) wrote about the importance of asking graduate students in TA training courses to compose assignments they’d ask students to write. Reid argued:

writing pedagogy classes need to provide writing experiences that allow students to experience productive, guided difficulty in writing—and thus to become true learners in the field. Working through these difficulties within a supportive environment will increase teachers’ empathy with students. (2009, p. W198)

In graduate courses, most graduate students don’t get the kind of hands-on, reflective, workshop model experience of peer-editing and revising work we ask of students in our composition classes, whether in alphabetic text assignments or those engaging with multiple modes of composing.

More closely related to multimodal composition pedagogy, Jason Palmeri (2012) noted that despite the tendency to read seminal work in the field of composition studies through the lens of alphabetic text production, canonical scholarship such as Janet Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* contains calls for writing teachers to compose in multimodal ways beyond alphabetic text along with their students. Palmeri (2012) pointed to Emig’s arguments about the value of invention and composing work using a variety of modes beyond alphabetic text for secondary level teachers—an argument that holds true at the college level.

Enter the rich history of the DMAC model, which asks of participants that they invent, compose, and revise multimodally in a hands-on, intensive setting. As Laura Micciche pointed out in her novice section, “handling media—literally putting one’s hands on it—is part of instruction.” One of the best aspects of the DMAC model is the time it allows writing teachers to experiment with new technologies to compose with sound and visual images along with, or even exclusive of, alphabetic text. The kind of play—and failure—that accompanies the DMAC model gives participants a good deal of empathy with students who are learning new technologies and composing in ways that may be familiar to them as consumers of multimodal texts but that they may never have encountered in their college classes.

Although we may think of participation as something students do in our courses, recent work on the concept raises questions about what we mean by the term, how (or if) it should be assessed, and the kinds of participatory acts for which we as instructors may be responsible (Critel, 2012). It’s important for writing teachers to participate in the composing work of our courses—to be writers ourselves and, equally important for those of us who incorporate multimodal assignments, to use various modes to compose and to practice (and fail) along with students.

For example, after attending DMAC in 2009, I kept a writer’s journal of my experiences as I composed assignments along with my students in a digital writing and rhetoric course at Miami University. One was an audio podcast I assigned for the first time after composing an audio essay about my literacy learning at DMAC. The experience of working with audio editing software and composing my audio essay assignment along with my students helped me better anticipate their questions and encouraged me to assess their work in a more informed way. I gained new kinds of technological literacy working with recording equipment and software, but maybe more importantly, I gained *experiential literacy* after feeling the frustration and excitement of recording myself reading a story I’d written for the project, and then listening to my literal and figurative voice embodied in a digital artifact. I experienced the frustration and satisfaction of remixing multiple layers of sound such as music and voice tracks to compose in an entirely new genre, an experience fundamental to the ethos of DMAC, as Caroline Dadas explained in her assets piece.

We’re more likely to take risks and realize the benefits of incorporating multimodal assignments in our teaching if we’ve had experience trying, failing, and succeeding with such composing ourselves—a model of hands-on participation DMAC has embraced and passed along to countless writing teachers across the U.S., and hopefully one we’ll have opportunities to model in our own local settings and with our own students.

9. Putting the key words and concepts into conversation: Some conclusions

Williams (1983) wrote of the keywords he identified and used to explore culture as being related “in two connected senses: they are significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought” (p. 15). We find our keywords to characterize the professional development culture of DMAC in similar ways. They are binding in that they explicitly describe apparent values for DMAC, and they are also indicative as they implicitly create values through activity.

Like Williams too, our keyword choices are significant. Each participant selected his or her own keyword based on its importance to that author. And each participant’s discussion of a keyword reflects how one seemingly simple word—access, assemblage, assets, community, conversations, intensity, novice, or participation—in fact operates as a threshold through which we step and discover a fuller, richer exchange that awaits. Our keywords illustrate the values DMAC has held for us. Similarly, our keywords continue to resonate and create values as we enact them in our own local contexts.

That our keywords work in a similar fashion to Williams’s—as both a demonstration of values as well as a creation of them—gets to the heart of the aims and outcomes of a professional development program. An occasion like DMAC has to identify but also inculcate certain values that will then be adopted and adapted differently. In each of these processes, we participate in intense communities, concerned with access to and for assets: we assemble as novices and converse in circulation. Like the related dynamics of keywords, we circulate our keywords as shared values when we attend, practice, and depart from DMAC back to our own institutions to replicate that cycle many more times. The success in professional development is best demonstrated not as single lines on CVs for an individual participant, but by how those values spread out and pollinate other institutions. *From many, many.*

When thinking through DMAC’s *ethos of many*, we are reticent to place too much weight on any one of our keywords. The same goes for DMAC as well. Sure, DMAC is an attractive site for professional development for its well-respected faculty and organizers, but perhaps its effectiveness thrives because its key concepts circulate and interact productively without claims of expertise or ownership. As such, we do not claim our own keywords to be final or definitive. While each of our keywords demonstrates for us certain values and experiences vital for professional development, DMAC and related professional development institutes would offer these and more. Indeed, we invite our readers to exchange, elaborate, combine, add, and contest our keywords anew and keep these values in circulation.

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