Book Review

Non-Discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition
Author: Joddy Murray, PhD
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Jessica Safran
Illinois State University

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Non-Discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition is an in-depth and reliable book for those in academia, especially those in composition, as well as those who are interested in multimodality and non-discursive rhetoric. In his book, Joddy Murray explains the technological advances that have the potential to create new languages that are different from the spoken and printed word, such as graphics, photos, images, hypermedia, film, typography, and other modes of expression. Murray posits that these modes require their own theory of language and symbolization that contain emotion, ambiguity, simultaneity, and multiple layers of meaning. He also asserts that everything is multimodal: print-based words, symbols, and various pictures and images.

Murray’s strong introduction portrays his theory of non-discursive (image-based) rhetoric and how it is suited for the composition classroom. Every piece of communication has rhetoric at its heart, and according to Murray, students must learn how the imagination is required for logical, reasoned, claim-based arguments (p. 1). Therefore, he asks the question of how teachers teach these things when most rhetorical training focuses on discursive (word-based), print-oriented rhetoric (p. 1). Murray also makes the claim that language is much more than words. Language, according to Murray, includes non-discursive forms of meaning-making, such as images, but especially emotion. Emotion is integral to inventing and composing, as Murray considers the purpose of his theory to be how we want people to feel while they are learning. Murray also highlights the connectedness between cognitive processes and development, and production, as well as imagination. Overall, he makes the astute and impressive claim that this book exhibits this very “will-to-symbolize because within, before, and among all of the discursive language in this text are images within my own mind/body, and these images indicate a clear direction toward a composing model and a writing theory” (p. 55). This thorough introduction leads the reader into five chapters that contain information on multimodality, symbolization, multimedia, and pedagogy. It is through all of these individual chapters that Murray’s goal, of making those in academia at ease with incorporating image into composition, as well as demonstrating non-discursive rhetoric’s significance in the composition and pedagogy community, comes to life.

In Murray’s first chapter, “Non-discursive Symbolization,” he begins to establish a problematic theme that identifies how language is the sole vehicle for the communication of ideas and the main way in which textual production is theorized. Murray, after problematizing this assertion, claims that terms such as “discursive” and “non-discursive” allow for another way to discuss language, or rather, symbolization. According to Murray, this understanding of discursive (word-based) and non-discursive (image-based) elements, within a composition classroom, will allow for a more integrated view of composing; one that encourages the powers of imagination not just for creative writing, but

E-mail address: jmsafr@ilstu.edu

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also for a logical, reasoned, claim-based argument, in addition to the acknowledgement of the value of emotion (p. 13). Murray supports his claim that it is not only the written word, or even language, that allows for communication, as he brings in theory from Suzanne Langer, Ernst Cassirer, Lev Vygotsky, Volosinov, and Bakhtin. Murray highlights Langer’s, Cassirer’s, and Ann Berthoff’s theories of language, as he explains how their views allow for language to be seen as non-discursive, as well as discursive. Toward the end of the chapter, Murray posits that the significance of the centrality of image to language is that image must be of “fundamental consequence to both discursive and non-discursive text” (p. 50). This assertion leads the reader from background on multimodality to an in-depth look at non-discursive text in the next chapter.

In “Non-discursive Symbolization, Image, and New Media,” Murray explores the image as a component of the non-discursive text. This, according to Murray, is significant because the image is the most important compositional element in creating a multimodal text, because it can access something other than discursive meaning (p. 57). He continues to look at the necessity of linking image to emotion, and emotion to language, as this will allow for language to connect to a way of thinking that allows for image to be connected to discursive texts as well. In this chapter, Murray provides some of the work that has already been done regarding image and visual rhetoric in composition. However, he also provides his own additional views, as well as his non-discursive theory, that adds to this scholarship. One of his arguments is that images are not viewed as significant sources of rhetoric and meaning-making, but are considered supplements in composition, or as a means to interpret written texts. Murray argues that within these views, image is used merely as illustration or ancillary material to printed text, and that this misses the point altogether because image becomes merely a visual accompaniment intended to increase comprehension and “not a viable mode of symbolization itself” (p. 63).

Murray builds from his second chapter to his third, “Affect and Image—Neuroscience and Symbolization,” as he makes the argument that image and emotion, as well as composition, is made via our cognitive development and processes. Murray asserts that the non-discursive, image in particular, most directly carries meaning through its connection to our emotion and the affective (p. 83). Murray establishes his argument by touching on how the fields of neuroscience and philosophy have come to their conclusions regarding the connection between emotion and image, which results in the display of the connectedness between image and cognition, as well as emotion and the brain/body. This is significant to Murray’s overarching claim, as he demonstrates how those who are capable of composing in multiples modes can reach more audiences, and how those who compose with image also understand how to teach an audience (p. 111). He ends this chapter by making the claim that there is a centrality of image in the brain, which demonstrates a connectedness to consciousness, “present-future” plans and intent, as well as emotion.

Murray then explains how students should be privy to composing in digital environments, and how students must not be ignorant to non-discursive rhetoric, in his fourth chapter, “Non-discursive Textual Production and Multimedia.” He posits that multimedia should not be an element that is left out of composition classroom activities and assignments. Murray also offers a composing model that provides theories of image and imagination, language, and consciousness that is applicable to both writing instruction and theory. His theory of non-discursive writing is made up of the following: the will-to-image, will-to-improvise, will-to-intuit, will-to-juxtapose, and the will-to-integrate. These theories provide a foundation for the making of “what is within a world of becoming” (p. 141). Overall, Murray’s composing model acknowledges the role of image, emotions, will, and consciousness in the writing process, but it also centers on them (p. 151), and it does not require discursive text. According to Murray, all texts are multimodal.

The idea of incorporating multimedia and multimodality in the classroom follows into Murray’s fifth and final chapter, as he attempts to answer the question of how we teach our students to appreciate non-discursive rhetoric while composing multimodal texts. One way to do this, according to Murray, is by encouraging students to compose in various textual modes, and through non-verbal means, such as pictures, words, colors, drawings, and sounds (p. 164). His main argument in this chapter is that students should be encouraged to compose multimodal texts, allowing them to step outside of the alphanumeric, linear texts that they are required to create in many composition classrooms. One way to do this is to help make them comfortable with the concept of image, and by teaching them how and why images work in rhetoric, how to read images, and how to compose with images (p. 171). Teachers can also establish this by exposing their students to multimedia outlets and options for their work, such as websites, wikis, as well as other computer-generated works. Murray also posits that prompting students to compose in various modes allows them to teach varying audiences.

Murray is very familiar with the writing practices of composition and multimodality. An associate professor of Rhetoric and New Media, Murray is interested in language, specifically its connection to multimedia text, ambiguity, and
the architecture of non-discursive language. He also explores the relationship between image and emotions, especially in terms of invention, image studies, and writing pedagogy. Murray demonstrates his firm grasp on non-discursive rhetoric and concepts of multimodality in *Non-Discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition*, and it is through his knowledge of non-discursive rhetoric and multimodality that he effectively provides an authoritative explanation of image being the center of meaning-making, emotion being relevant to composition, and the importance of making students privy to, and encouraging the composition and assessment of, non-discursive texts. This is a book that provides a fresh perspective on composition, leaving the reader feeling comfortable with image in composition and non-discursive rhetoric’s imminent impact on the composition and pedagogy community.