

*[intro to "Rebel Girl" by Bikini Kill]*

Anne: This is Anne Mooney...

Kate: ...and Kate Artz...

Danah: ...and Danah Hashem...

Anne: ...and we're going to be talking about transmodality and its importance to composition studies.

*[music fades out]*

Danah: So, we want to open with a question about audiences and composers and how they can both benefit from creating compositions with various access points and varied perspectives. Given that, how does transmodality help facilitate communication in an increasingly globalized world? So really what--Kate, both your and my responses had a lot to do with technology--

Kate: Uh huh

Danah: --and technology is governing the way that we communicate now, and that's part of what makes communication such a globalized phenomenon at this point. And so because we're communicating predominantly with technology, there are all these tools that not only allow unprecedented means of communication, but kind of fundamentally change what communication looks like--

Anne & Kate: Mmhmm

Danah: --and I think that has introduced all these new modes and combinations of modes in a way that makes transmodality kind of a critical component of contemporary communication.

Anne: Right

Kate: I think the idea of, you know, globalization and--particularly as it relates to digital tools and the internet and whatever, you know, you're not just--it's not like translating, say, a novel into another language for a particular market in a particular country.

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: You're really--when you're putting something on the internet, it's really opened it up to basically anyone anywhere--

Anne: Right...

Kate:--virtually, I mean it's, you know--obviously there are still some limitations. So transmodality, and moving outside of language, and using modes in different ways to communicate,... it really can help reach a global audience, in a way that is really difficult to do with just alphabetic language.

Anne & Danah: Mmhmm

Anne: But I think the thing too about language is, even if you don't have the--even if you do have the ability, right, to speak a different language and you can translate in that way, it's still so cultural--

Kate: Mmhmm

Anne: --right? Like, I might be able to say in English things in past tense or plurals, but I can't do that in other languages. Or there are just certain words, like in some languages "love," you might have five different words for love, for different kinds of love, but in English you only have one. And so with different modes, you can try and translate that more meaningfully than just a word that encompasses so much, like love. Or you might be able to show it through an image, or through a video, or have sound effects that really exemplify what you're trying to say with that, whereas you can't do that in a certain language, so you might be able to reach more people that way too.

Kate: Yeah

Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: It really makes me think of, um, the example that you brought--as far as the aspect of culture, the example that you had brought up before about, um, was it *Pride and Prejudice*?

Anne: Yeah, um, when I first--when I was in high school I decided to read *Pride and Prejudice* just on my own, for fun, and--

Kate: 'Cause you're a nerd...

Anne: Right, exactly!

[all laughing]

Anne: --and I had already seen the movie, and so I had seen, like, I'd actually be able to visualize that really weird cultural norm of calling your husband by his last name--

[Kate laughing]

Anne: --which I did not get at first, but the movie helped me figure it out.

Danah: Right

Anne: And so when I read it, I was able to be like, ok, this is her husband, she's talking to him, this isn't like a servant talking to her, you know, whoever she works for. Whereas I had a friend who hadn't seen the movie, and she was so confused when she started to read it that I had to walk her through who everyone was. So it really made it so that the text was more meaningful for me, whereas for her it was really hard to gain any meaning from it without that visualization of what was going on.

Kate: Yeah

Danah: Right. So the visual cues kind of removed some of the cultural barriers to your understanding...

Anne: ...exactly.

Kate: And I think one of the things that's so interesting about that is that it's not a language barrier there...

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: ...you know, it's in English, the original text is in English, so it's not a language barrier--it really is a cultural barrier...

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: ...and so I think that's an important aspect of transmodality, that when you're engaging multiple and different modes, um, with the same piece, you know, when you are translating a piece from one mode to another, so you're engaging, like, different modes in different configurations, um, you are hitting on so many different--of these different entry points, which is really what we're talking about--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--is how multiple entry points, um, are so beneficial and transmodality really supports that, and can help you get all that, like, rich cultural contextual information, um, that can be hard to get otherwise.

Danah: I think that might be a really good point to jump off into our next question

Kate: Mmhmm

Danah: ...which is: how does transmodality help serve diverse audiences and authors--and here we're thinking about people with different educational background, genders, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, all kinds of different consumers of compositions--and how all these multiple entry points that you're talking about can make compositions accessible and meaningful to a much wider array of people.

Anne: There are certain people who just can't afford to go see a live performance of a drama, and so being able to see it on the screen in front of you-- you know, being able to watch it on TV, or take it out from the library, or read it if you want to-- it allows more people to interact with a text that might have a lot of important meaning into it that otherwise they just wouldn't be able to.

Kate & Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: This is kind of making me think of this example that--I don't know if this is a crazy example because it's off the top of my head--but almost looking at the reverse of that, and instead of looking at these sort of typically canonical, um, sort of perceived as high culture--

Anne & Danah: Mmhmm

Kate:--um, texts and translating them for, um, you know, people who might not have access to that, you know, um, lower economic status or whatever, um, but sort of looking at a reverse of that [*laughing*] um, I'm thinking about *Hamilton* actually--?

Anne: Yeah

Danah: Yup

Kate:--the musical *Hamilton*, and, you know, incorporating rap and hip-hop music into, you know, a Broadway musical, and something that is more considered--typically considered this sort of high culture--

Anne: ...more high-brow, yeah...

Kate: Yeah, and sort of, um, placing that in a context that it can be accessed and appreciated by a different group of people than are the typical audience for that.

Anne: Yeah

Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: I think that's a really interesting, um, approach to how, you know, multiple access points and reconfiguring something--

Danah: *Hamilton* is a great example because I think, that's a really good example of someone composing in a way that really reflects their own individuality--

Kate: Mmhmm

Danah:--their experiences, their interpretations, and I think by doing that, they create a composition that people with an even wider set of experiences and interpretations and backgrounds can interact with, and so something that I love about transmodality is that it, it promotes self-expression in a really individualized and unique way--

Anne: Yeah

Danah:--and it kind of encourages and capitalizes on our own individual, unique approaches to interpretation which, when you're talking about diverse audiences and all these different backgrounds, there's really, when you think about it, this wealth of untapped resources that, you know, transmodality kind of opens up, and, and allows us as composers, but also as consumers of compositions, to be able to benefit from.

Anne: I think that's a really good jumping off place to talk about accessibility and disabilities, and how these multiple modes and entry points can really enhance who can interact with these texts. So I guess the question I would raise is, how can transmodality apply more specifically to accessibility and disability issues?

Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: Yeah, I think, I mean, accessibility is definitely one of-- I mean accessibility specifically as it relates to disability, um, and not just accessibility in a, in a, global or cultural kind of context--um, it's definitely one of the areas I think that people are the most accustomed to the idea of transmodality and the concept of, say, creating a written transcript, um--

Anne & Danah: Right, right

Kate:--for, um, an audio piece or a video piece, um, I think that's sort of, uh, the type of transmodality that most people would think of.

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: The problem with that, and the problem with accessibility in general that happens a lot, um, when you're trying to make a text accessible for someone with, you know, with any potential disability--and there's a lot of different interpretations of what disability might be and what barriers there could potentially be to a person accessing a text, but--um, too often it's, you know, it's an afterthought, it's a technicality or a requirement; the modalities of the original text often were chosen for very particular reasons, whereas a transcript or some other accessible document is usually, you know, uh, dictated as it has to be this format, it has to be this...

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: ...and it's not necessarily chosen, uh, deliberately and purposefully. So, I think thinking about transmodality as an important skill, as, um, you know, something that needs to be done thoughtfully as a composition in itself--

Danah: Mmhmm

Kate:--um, is a way of really making accessible texts something that's really valuable and rich and meaningful...

Anne: Right, I'm thinking of our work "Navigating the Soundscape: Composing With Audio," and when I created the transcript for my audio piece, there were a lot of specific things in my audio piece that--it just wouldn't have been as meaningful if I didn't include those in the transcript; thinking of the tone, of the fact that I was crying at some points--

Danah: Mmhmm

Anne:--those were really important to the meaning, and so it was really important to me to make sure that I put those in my transcript, so that someone who may not be able to hear the original piece could still get all of the same meaning from it and really engage with the text in nearly the same way, as close as possible to the original text.

Kate: Absolutely

Danah: Mmhmm. And I'm thinking a little bit too, Kate, of an example that you gave earlier is, you know, when you think about translating something from one language to another, you would never think about just plugging it into Google Translate and then assuming it's ready to go--

Kate & Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--you know, you would take a lot more care to make sure that the lingual translation is something that honestly reflects the original. And I think the same is true when you're talking about creating an accessible version of a document; it shouldn't just be a 'here let me plug in and spit out what I perceive to be a verbatim duplication that's easily accessible'--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: Yeah

Danah:--there needs to be some thought and creativity and honest-to-goodness composition that goes into that.

Kate: Yes

Anne: So thinking about transmodal texts as a scholarly creative endeavor, right? There is this concern with copyright...

Danah: Right

Kate: I think--

Anne:--if you don't--

Kate: *[laughing]*

Anne:--own it, you know, how do you reproduce it? Um, so I guess my question would be, does transmodality subvert a culture of copyright and intellectual property?

Kate: Yeah, I think this is sort of one of the more... controversial aspects *[laughing]*--

Danah: Agree.

Anne: Yes... *[laughing]*

Kate:--of this, uh, issue...

Danah: Agree. It is.

Kate: I think, yeah, I mean obviously... the biggest issue comes up if you're talking about transmodality and you're comparing it to translation, obviously there's an issue that comes up with translation when the author and the translator are not the same person--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--um, that's less likely to occur, I think, with transmodality; more often, we're talking about an author composing, um, sort of recomposing--I feel like I'm going to keep using that word--recomposing their own work--

Danah: Right

Kate:--in a different mode.

Anne: And I think it's probably important to just note, that is the case for us--

Kate: Yeah, yes

Anne: --we are recomposing, this is not us taking someone else's text--

Danah & Kate: Right. Yes.

Anne:--and translating it to a different mode, this is us doing it to our own work, I think that's, you know--

Kate: Yeah, absolutely

Anne:--important to mention.

Danah: So we're both author and translator in this context.

Anne: Yes.

Kate: I think one of the things that we've sort of hit on, and maybe this is sort of veering off topic somewhat, but, uh, in some of our discussions about this is, um... the idea of intellectual property, um, and copyright, and these sort of more rigid ideas, versus this concept of being respectful to the original author and respectful of their experience, and their intention, and that sort of thing. And I think those things are still really important, um, if you are functioning as a translator, um, whether it's transmodal or translingual or whatever it is--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--I think it is really important, um, to make sure that you're staying, uh...you're continuing to be respectful of the original author and, um...

Danah: I think you're touching on... I think you're circling around--

Kate: Yeah

Danah:--all the really complex important issues that surround the idea of copyright as it relates to transmodality--

Kate & Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--because, like you said, we're sort of thinking of transmodality as a form of translation between modes, but the tricky thing, and we've talked about this, is that translating between modes involves a really high level of adaptation, potentially higher than translating from language to language...

Kate: Mmhmm

Danah: ...so when you're talking about adaptation blended with translation, which are all things that are gonna come up when you're talking about transmodal composition, I think your issues around copyright become really complicated, because like you said, you really want to respect the author's intent and you don't want to do any kind of violence or disrespect to a work that is--or a testimony that they've created, but at the same time there is no real way to completely duplicate the quote-unquote meaning--

Kate & Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--of their work.

Anne: I think something we keep bringing up is access, right?

Kate: Yeah

Anne: And that makes me think about technology, and how technology can interact with our access to these different modes. Um, so I guess the question would be, how does technology expand the possibilities, or create new possibilities, for transmodality?

Danah & Kate: Mmhmm

Kate: I mean, I think that's sort of, uh, the direction we're starting to go, is this idea that, you know, there are so many different ways of accessing information today-- like it's... so many modes are so accessible to anyone with access to a computer--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--and, um, while certainly--

Anne: Or even a smartphone--

Kate:--yeah! Oh yeah, to any, you know, internet capable device--

Anne & Danah: Right. Right.

Kate:--which a lot of people do have access to, certainly not everyone, but a lot of people, um, do have access to one way or another. And, actually, it makes me think of when I was in high school, um, in the 90's [*laughing*]--

Danah: [*laughing*]

Kate:--and I did a project for a class where we had to, um, make a short video, and we had to borrow a large video camera--

Danah & Anne: Yup. Mmhmm.

Kate:--from the school and go out and film our, our pieces, and then we had to go to the AV room at the school--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate: --and use this wall of equipment to edit the tape that we had recorded on. Like edit the physical tape, and, you know, and it was this whole long process and it's just, it's crazy now that, you know, that wasn't that long ago--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--and now, I can take my phone that I have in my pocket every day and shoot video anytime, anywhere I want and edit it right there--

Danah & Anne: Yeah. Right.

Kate:--on my phone, like it's such a different--

Anne: --and, on that same device--

Kate:--and publish it--

Anne:--publish it, right--

Danah: Right

Kate:--publish it to the internet where anyone anywhere in the world could potentially see it. It's such a different context, it's... we have so many tools accessible to us now that we didn't, you know, not very long ago.

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah: And I think it's not even just the tools--because obviously the tools are a huge piece of it, not only do the tools enable compositions that used to take a really long time and a lot of difficulty and a lot of money and equipment, they also enable new combinations of modes--

Kate: Yeah

Danah:--that, you know, we haven't even thought of, but in addition to the capabilities, I think it's also the, kind of, cultural predisposition that we have to interact with these new modes--

Anne & Kate: Mmhmm

Danah:--because we're talking about social media, where everything is--

Kate: Yes

Danah:--Instagram: caption, image interaction--

Kate: Yeah

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--Facebook: video, caption, commenting--

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--we're very used to dealing in these multimodal, mixed transactions. And so now that we have the ability not only to create these modes--these compositions in all these different modes, publish, share--but also this extreme comfort and flexibility already working with them--

Kate: Yeah, yeah

Danah:--it's really kind of... it's, it's created almost it's own language--

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--that I think it's really important to start becoming fluent in.

Kate: Yeah, we definitely have a much more, um, expanded sort of a digital and multimedia literacy in our culture--

Anne & Danah: Mmhmm

Kate:--now. We're so much more accustomed to consuming these multimodal texts, um, so I think that transmodality makes more sense now, um, than it has in the past because it certainly is much more easy to make a, to be transmodal, to translate a text into different modalities, because you have so many at your disposal. Um, but also I think it is something that is, um, more, uh, likely to be well-received--

Danah: Yeah

Kate:--and understood by audiences that are so accustomed to dealing with a wide variety of media.

Anne & Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: I think it's, it really is an appropriate time to incorporate more transmodality for that reason.

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah: Which is a pretty neat segway--

Kate & Anne: [*quiet laughing*]

Danah:--into our next topic, which is pedagogy--

Kate: Ah, yes

Danah:--and why it's important to teach transmodality and bring it into the classroom with contemporary students.

Kate: Yeah, absolutely, I mean, all the same points. And I think one of the most significant things about transmodality is that it's not necessarily about composing with this mode or that mode, or with this tool or that tool or whatever it may be, it's the trans- part that's significant--

Danah: Yup

Kate:--it's, it's the moving between these different kinds of modes--

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah: Right. And I think in a classroom assigning projects around transmodality just inherently, inexplicitly build that fluidity and that adaptability that you're talking about.

Anne: And I think, you know, teaching students to create transmodal texts, it allows their quote-unquote voices, right--

Kate: Yeah

Anne:--to be quote-unquote heard--

Kate: [*laugh*]

Anne:--by so many different people; they can interact with, you know, their text in so many different ways--

Kate: Yeah, I love that point and I love, in general, the idea that, you know, students' voices and the voices of young people are valuable--

Anne: Mmhmm

Kate:--and important and, you know, they're not just practicing for being real people later--

Anne & Danah: Right! Yeah.

Kate: [*laughing*]

Kate:--you know, what they compose now is also important.

Anne & Danah: Mmhmm

Kate: And- so helping them do that in a variety of ways - and it's not so scary and intimidating and unfamiliar when you really break down what it is, what it is you're actually doing and get past some of these terms--

Anne: Right

Kate:--that may seem...intimidating.

Danah: And, and I think as a sort of caveat to that point, I think it's good for it to be a little unfamiliar--

Kate: Mmhmm

Danah:--because if we're teaching adaptability and we're teaching fluidity, a critical part of being able to operate in unfamiliar realms is, is that you be comfortable not totally knowing what's going on and--

Anne: Comfortable being uncomfortable

Kate & Anne: [*laughing*]

Danah: Right! Comfortable being slightly confused by what's happening, and I think modelling that as a teacher, and you know--

Anne: Mmhmm

Danah:--being ok and being very open and transparent with your general confusion, but willingness to play and to experiment--

Anne & Kate: Yeah. Mmhmm.

Danah:--and to compose with new tools is such an incredible lesson, and that's where, you know, as accessible--as seemingly accessible as transmodality is, I think there is a sort of complexity to it that we should embrace--

Kate: Yeah

Anne: Absolutely

Danah:--and be very open to.

Kate: Yeah, and I think that's a great way of approaching it, that's sort of like 'let's figure this out together'--

Danah & Anne: Yeah

Kate:--between the teacher and their students, and so it's not like 'this is how you do it, here are the steps'--

Anne: Right, right

Kate:--and this is what you're going to start with, and this is what you're going to end with. I think even if you've done it a thousand times, even if you do it a lot, it's always going to be different--

Danah: Yeah

Kate:--and everyone's experience with it is going to be different. So I think taking that sort of exploring and playing and experimenting approach to it is so appropriate.

Danah: Mmhmm

Anne: Yeah, and I think just valuing and respecting transmodal compositions is really empowering as a teacher, because you can teach your students to go out, as consumers, and find transmodal texts that will help them interact with perhaps more difficult texts--

Danah & Kate: Right

Anne:--which is really important. I mean, I'm thinking about like, the *Pride and Prejudice* example from earlier--

Danah & Kate: Right. Yeah.

Anne:--having students understand that it's ok, it's a scholarly endeavor to go and find a transmodal version of this text--

Kate: It's not cheating [*laughs*]

Anne: Right--

Danah: It's not cheating at all--

Anne & Kate: --right--

Danah:--and it's really respecting your individual approach to a composition.

Kate: Mmhmm

Anne: Right, exactly.

Kate: Yeah, and it actually is really capitalizing on that idea that we talked about, that um, you know, that we have this wide array of sort of digital media lit--not just digital, but multimedia literacy--

Anne:--that transmodality has existed before any of these digital tools did--

Kate: Right

Danah:--and we have this huge legacy of transmodal resources to draw from, but that also there are all kinds of contemporary transmodal resources that are being produced now that are not digital.

Anne: You know, I think we brought up a lot of great points, and these are points that we need to continue to explore--

*["Rebel Girl" begins fading in]*

Anne:--because we want to continue to emphasize transmodality's importance in our futures, our lives, and our work.

*[music gets louder]*

Anne: Yeah! Boo-yah!

Kate: Yayyyyy we all did it!

Danah: Wooooo!

*[clapping and laughing]*

*[Music: "that girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood..."]*

*[music cuts out]*