Composing assessment in the multimodal classroom

James Lamb, Monday 15 June 2015

Introducing multimodality

- Multimodality is in its infancy as a research discipline, growing in significance alongside, and as a product of, recent advances in digital technology (Kress and Selander 2012)

- Emerged as a research discipline in 2001 through the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen, who drew on earlier work by Halliday in social semiotics (1978, 1985)

- Is concerned with all the resources that communicate meaning, all of which have their own 'special powers and effects' (Kress 2005, p 7)

- The is no single taxonomy of modes. At the same time new modes might continue to emerge alongside technological advances (Bateman 2008)

The scholarly multimodal tradition

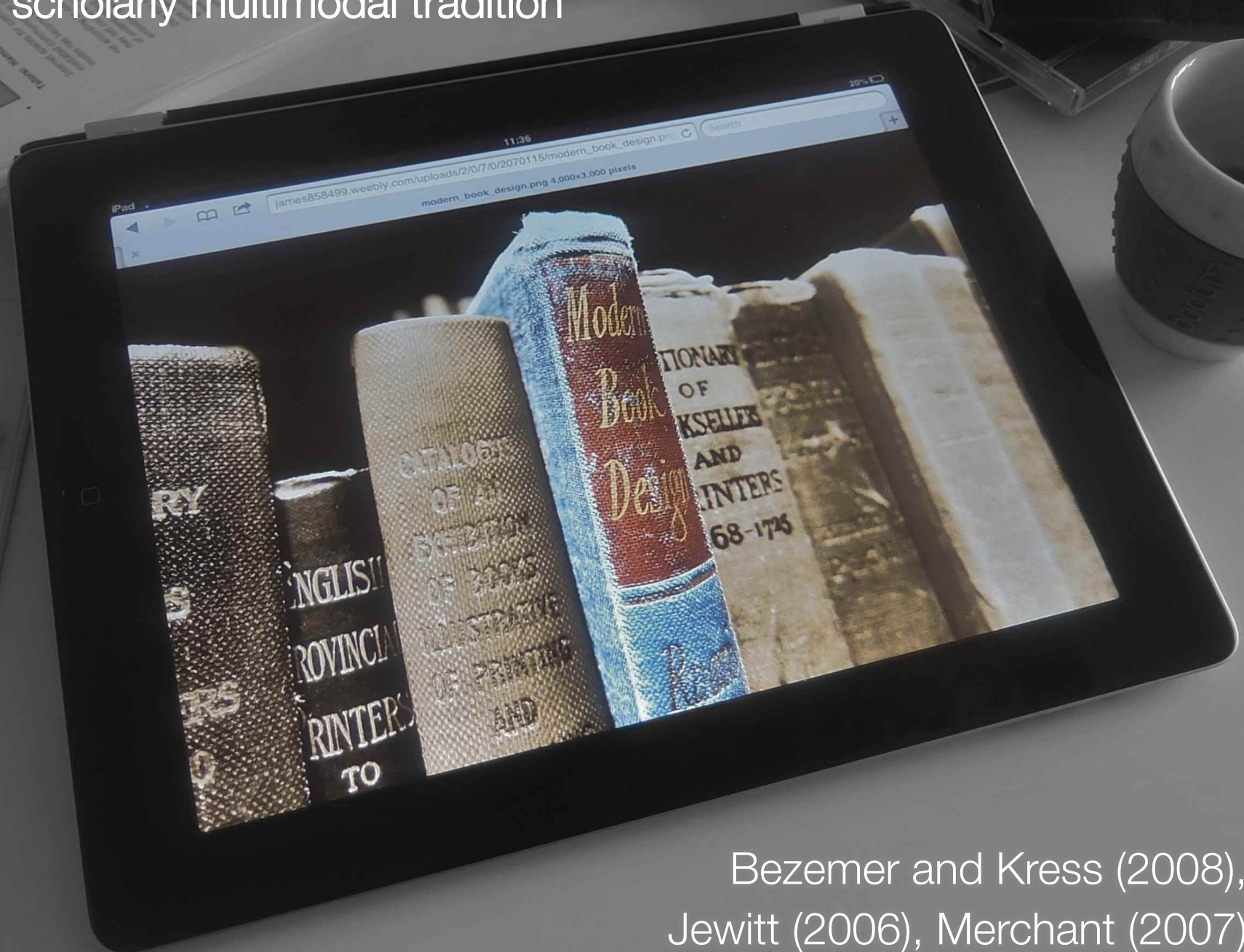SCRIPTORIUM MONK AT WORK. (From *Lacroix*.)

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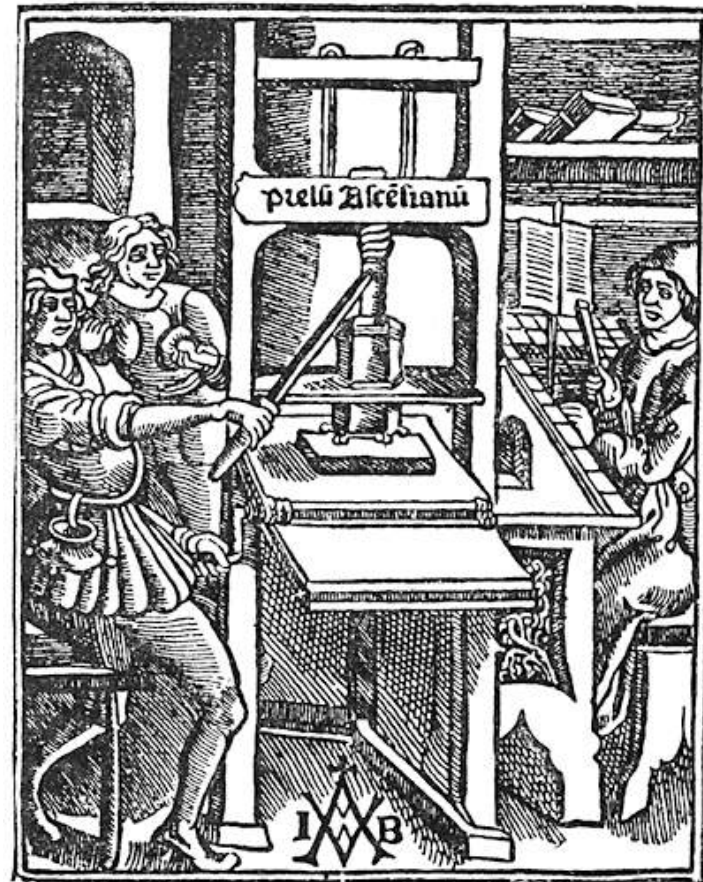
Images from Wikimedia commons

(Eisenstein 1979), (Febvre and Martin 1979), Ong (1982)

The scholarly multimodal tradition

Bezemer and Kress (2008), Jewitt (2006), Merchant (2007)

"Multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communication forms people use – image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on – and the relationships between them."
(Jewitt 2009, p 14)

With the permission of students and staff from the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA) at The University of Edinburgh
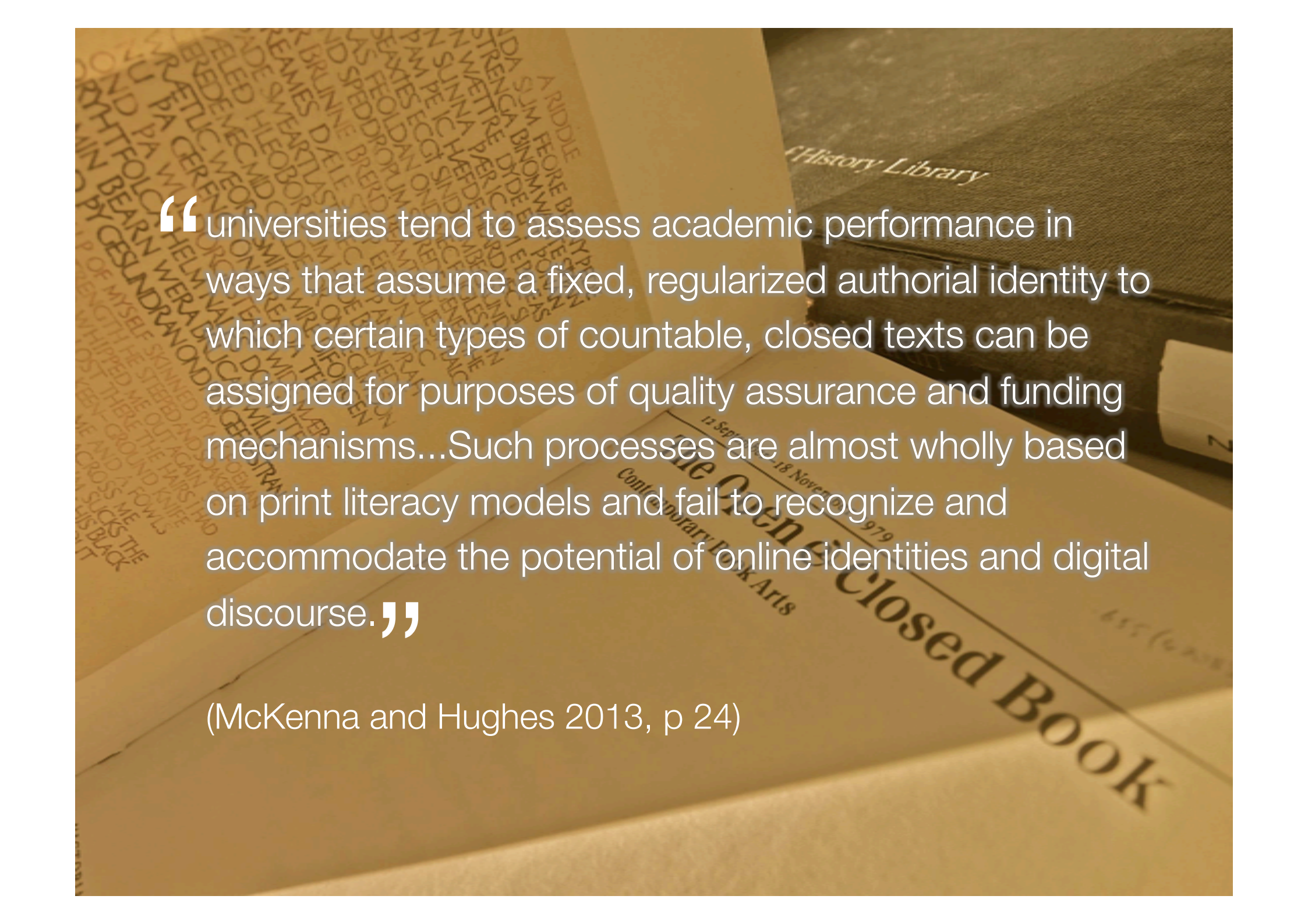
The digital and multimodal classroom

- We have at our disposal the means of production to share information in a growing array of ways (Jewitt 2006), allowing for the complex and imaginative representation of academic ideas (Bezemer and Kress 2008, Landow 2006).

- With years of immersion in digital environments, students can call on a range of technological resources in the communication of knowledge (Carpenter 2009, Jewitt 2006, Land 2011)

- We see in our universities the emergence of a new digital scholarship where established notions of authorship are contested (Fitzpatrick 2011) and literacy itself is reconceptualised (Goodfellow 2011).

Multimodal assessment on the margins

- In their study of the digital practices of students at three UK universities, Lea and Jones (2011) found a reluctance to move away from established notions of presenting knowledge.

- McKenna and McAvinia (2011) argue that Web 2.0 spaces often promote a continued attachment to essayistic linearity.

- Research by Lea (2013) found that assessment rubrics rarely made explicit reference to the range of meaning-making and textual practices that students used in the construction and representation of their ideas.

- O'Shea and Fawns (2014) call for greater attention to how multimodality can shape assessment and feedback.

"universities tend to assess academic performance in ways that assume a fixed, regularized authorial identity to which certain types of countable, closed texts can be assigned for purposes of quality assurance and funding mechanisms...Such processes are almost wholly based on print literacy models and fail to recognize and accommodate the potential of online identities and digital discourse."

(McKenna and Hughes 2013, p 24)
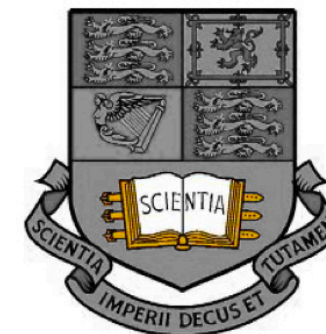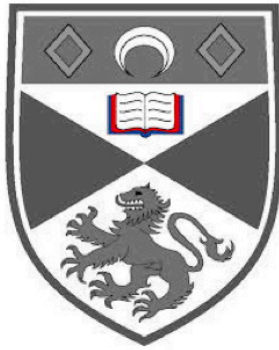
see Bayne (2006) and Land (2011)

Multimodal learning in digital environments

Multimodal learning in digital environments

" The idea of the blog is to use it as an online reflective diary – a place where you bring together your various threads of investigation and thought. The blog is intended to be a record of your thinking and development, not a neatly finished 'place of arrival' – the main requirement is that you use it in an open and reflective way. "

" Communication style and multimodality

- Is the style of the weblog vivid and personal?

- Are the ideas discussed well-structured and well-argued?

- Are sources cited – either conventionally or via links?

- Does it make creative use of the weblog form via inclusion of image, media and linkage? "

Assessment, feedback and multimodality

- Blog as dialogue including conversations and active engagement with assessment criteria (see for example Keppell and Carless 2006)

- Opportunity to experiment in a risk-free setting (see for example Black and Wiliam 1998) and the opportunity for a 'low-stakes practice on assessable work' (Hounsell et al 2007, p 4)

- Different components of the course were constructively aligned (Biggs 2003), from learning outcomes, assessment criteria, formative assessment and summative assessment

- Closing the gap between student and tutor understandings of what represents high quality work (see for example Gibbs and Simpson 2004/5)

Assessment, feedback and multimodality

" The new media make it possible to use the mode that seems most apt for the purposes of representation and communication: If I need to represent something best done as image I can now do so, similarly with writing. "

" Equally significant now is the aptness of fit between mode and audience. I can now choose the mode according to what I know or might imagine is the preferred mode of the audience I have in mind. "

Kress (2005, p 19)

Assessment, feedback and multimodality

I see your video and I raise you this.
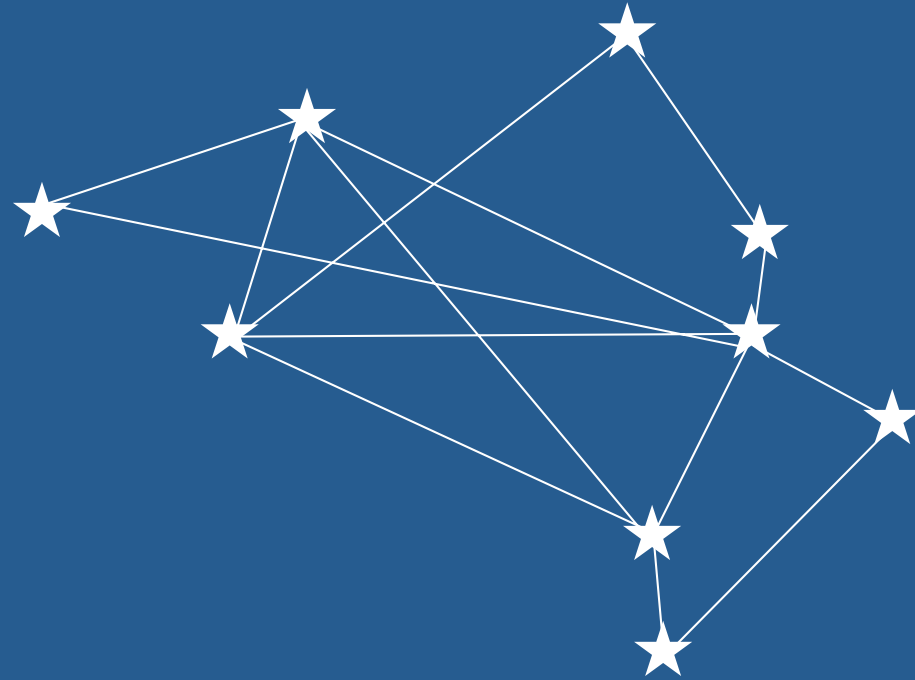
By Katherine Firth 54 days ago Comments (1)

Second Life, video, flying octopus, Daft Punk

Featured work with permission of the author Katherine Firth

Assessment, feedback and multimodality

Featured work with permission of the author Graeme Hathaway

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Crit Room 2

1. Should our assessment practices evolve to allow for new ways of constructing and communicating academic knowledge?

2. What are the implications for us as markers when students submit assignments that look beyond text as the sole or significant means of representation?