Review of *Transient Literacies in Action: Composing with the Mobile Surround*

By Stacey Pigg, 2020. The WAC Clearinghouse/University Press of Colorado. [ISBN: 978-1-64215-101-5 (PDF, free download); 978-1-64215-102-2 (EPUB, free download); 978-1-64642-144-2 (paperback); https://wac.colostate.edu/books/writing/transient/. 180 pages.]

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The rise of networked mobile devices over the last decade has prompted varied responses. Stacey Pigg's *Transient Literacies in Action: Composing with the Mobile Surround* pushes against determinist claims of new technologies bringing forth a new literacy crisis by tracing how students engage with networked mobile devices during several different composing processes. Pigg examines how such tools lead to new forms of practical literacies, which she calls transient literacies, that allow students to navigate the information influx of our current networked information landscape without feeling overwhelmed. Pigg defines transient literacies as "a practical knowledge that supports composing with networked mobile devices in everyday life" through "the arrangement and movement practices" that occur when composing amid mobile devices (p. 11). The use of "transient" in transient literacies points to the nature of the ever-changing composing environments where mobile composing often takes place.

Using an "embodied materialist grounding," Pigg's book focuses on two transient spaces (i.e., "spaces to be moved through rather than dwelled in"): the Technology Commons at the University of Central Florida and the Gone Wired Café in Lansing, Michigan (p. 19). Though geographically distanced, these spaces share similarities, making them ideal field locations. Both spaces exist on "highly traveled pathways" and invite interactions between users. Further, the Technology Commons and the Gone Wired Café demonstrate a relationship to "social, technological, cultural, and organizational arrangements" worth studying (p. 23). Over six weeks in each location, Pigg engaged in observation and interviews with participants.

By examining how users navigate these spaces concerning proximity, orientation, attention, materials, interaction, and sequences, Pigg analyzes how users enact transient literacies to shape their composing processes and environments based on available resources. *Transient Literacies* argues that to fully understand how students compose with networked mobile devices and environments, scholars must move outside generalized concepts of attention and distraction, recognizing how students shape their composing processes in various spaces to mitigate the effects of information overload.

In chapter 1, "Introducing Transient Literacies in Action," Pigg outlines the scholarly conversation within composition and digital rhetoric regarding how networked mobile devices have shaped students' composing processes within the composition classroom, highlighting an ongoing tension caused by works like FRONTLINE's *Digital Nation*. This 2010 documentary utilizes the voices of

educators to depict students as "Distracted by Everything" (p. 3). Recent scholarship in rhetoric and composition studies that focuses on the relationship between materiality and composing, Pigg argues, can be helpful to combat these cynical, determinist conceptions of networked mobile devices. *Transient Literacies* works to "describe the links between composers and their worlds," particularly concerning how environments and the available materials within them (resources, both human and non-human), as well as the infrastructures that structure them, work to shape one's composing process (p. 5). She presents a refreshing approach to networked mobile devices and composing, combatting the cynicism regarding technology without falling into the trap of utopian idealism. Throughout the book, Pigg presents both the affordances and potential limitations of composing with networked mobile devices and within transient spaces. Further, her use of anecdotes of her time in the spaces included in the study and with participants allows readers to see composing through the participant's eyes as it happens. The stories provide a break from the more theory-heavy chapters and a glimpse into the reality of navigating massive amounts of information as a student in the 21st century outside of the classroom setting.

Chapter 2, "Sharing Resources in Places We Move Through," explores the spaces where transient literacies occur, explaining that traditionally thought of public spaces are rapidly being replaced with transient spaces, which are meant to be "moved through rather than dwelled in" (p. 29). Introducing the concept of common spaces, also commonly referred to as third spaces, Pigg decenters ideas of shared social environments as public spaces, as networked mobile devices have altered how individuals occupy their environments to do work. Focusing on two transient spaces, Pigg outlines the structure of the Technology Commons and Gone Wired, showing how environments and materials, including shared resources, shape how visitors interact and compose through such interactions. Pigg concludes the chapter by highlighting the potential downsides of mobile networked composing within these common spaces, stating a need for new strategies to navigate the contemporary commons (p. 57). Pigg's concept of transient spaces has become increasingly salient since the book's publication in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic has led to more individuals working and composing in what Pigg refers to as common and transient spaces. As such, her discussion regarding the importance of understanding student attention and composing processes with mobile networked devices outside of classroom spaces has the potential to guide instructors and administrators alike while attempting to navigate questions of student attention, workflow, and space in these unprecedented times. Viewing certain spaces as transient or common through Pigg's lens also draws necessary attention to the impacts of the material—both human and nonhuman—on the composing process, an increasingly common theoretical framework within the humanities (ecological models, posthumanism, new materialism, etc.).

Chapter 3, "Orienting to the Mobile Surround," focuses on the environments and surroundings in which networked mobile composing takes place, paying specific attention to how these material surroundings, both explicit and implicit, impact the composing process. Throughout this chapter, Pigg attempts to parse how various individual experiences intersect or interact with mobile surroundings. Pigg proposes a concept of composition as "an ongoing collaboration between writers and surroundings," drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed and Lucy Suchman to present a four-part heuristic framework (materials, proximities, interactions, and sequences). Breaking the mobile composing process into these four categories allows for a more complex, dynamic understanding of composing in transient spaces with mobile devices. Readers can adopt Pigg's framework in their research to trace the composition process in transient spaces. Pigg concludes this chapter by discussing the "dimensions of materiality" (production, circulation, and personal) and "dimensions of interaction" (interpersonal sociability and attention), concepts useful to better understand students' composing process and design spaces more conducive to these processes. By recognizing

how various human and non-human agents interact within transient spaces, one can see the material impacts locations have on composing.

In Chapter 4, "Composing Social Potential: Ambient Sociability and Mediated Contact," Pigg pushes back against conceptions of mobile device usage as linked to social isolation, introducing the concepts of sociability and ambient sociability to suggest alternative ways mobile users navigate interpersonal engagement. Ambient sociability attempts to account for a shift from contact to potential in which "potential social interactions abound" rather than being expected, particularly in the environmental contexts of common spaces in which "social potential always occupies a background amongst other foregrounded potential" (p. 27). The negotiation of "the interplay among salient social actors and those that fade into the background is central to information management practices," which, according to Pigg, remains essential in the practice of transient literacies. Through the stories of Micah and Sal, two of the study's participants, Pigg discusses how the students may be read as disengaged from their surroundings, but reveals the complex ways the students assemble and navigate their composing environments, moving through cycles of monitoring, contributing, and disengaging which allow them to move through various interactions across time and space. Rather than being disconnected entirely, those who compose with networked mobile devices enact transient literacies to move through the composing process and orient themselves. Pigg's acknowledgment that composing with mobile devices in transient spaces involves a cycle of attention works to break from narratives that may be harmful to those who do not compose linearly. This acknowledgment challenges normative ideas of attention and productivity, a much-needed intervention, and provides tools for those invested in student composition to understand better the realities of the composing process outside of the classroom.

In Chapter 5, "Attention as a Thing Composed," Pigg discusses the role of attention within her transient literacies framework, returning to the discussions of attention and distraction raised in previous chapters to further challenge deterministic views of technology. Viewing attention as a thing composed rather than a pre-existing state of cognition, Pigg examines students' attention sequences, demonstrating how these students navigate various environments and interactions to create what she calls thick interactions, using the time and resources available to them to make their composing process as efficient as possible. The chapter urges scholars to move outside the classroom to fully understand how networked mobile devices impact students' attention in the composing process. Classrooms, Pigg argues, do not provide the best environment to study students' attention as such spaces represent and encourage ideals of perfect engagement. Perfect engagement, Pigg explains, often occurs, or is expected, within classroom spaces that heavily regulate student attention and productivity through forms of enforcement and incentivization. By analyzing students' attention sequences in spaces outside the classroom, one can better understand how students navigate various materials, interactions, and orientations to compose attention in practical ways within spaces that promote networked mobile composing.

Chapter 6, "Reorienting to the Realities of Mobile Composing," connects Pigg's argument for transient literacies to larger conceptions of composing as transient and transitory. Transience did not emerge with the introduction of mobile composing devices, Pigg argues, but these devices have drastically increased the amount of information one must navigate during the composing process as they "expand[] the surroundings composers can easily reach in transient locations" (p. 135). She highlights the increasing need for transient literacies and new scholarly understandings of attention and sociability in the presence of mobile composing devices that acknowledge "a conception of composing based in bodily rather than cognitive intention" to understand better the affordances and challenges of such devices within and outside the classroom space (p. 136). Alongside presence, Pigg positions attention as complicated, stating, "students in this book use layered spaces in time to expand the scene of their learning," creating the thick sequences she references in chapter five.

To conclude, Pigg connects her discussion to the need to understand how new technologies and composing devices become integrated as very real, material, influential aspects of one's composing process which introduce countless potential interactions. A failure to recognize this is a failure to recognize the true complexity of composing in a highly connected, networked world in which composing can happen anywhere at any time. She urges readers and scholars to change their orientation to networked digital composing to account for how mobile composing complicates notions of sociability, attention, and the composing process, inviting them to engage with students whom she points to as "new faces of academic, professional and community literacies today" (p. 159) to learn with them and incorporate transient literacies in practical and meaningful ways.

Transient Literacies presents a necessary and overdue shift in thinking about attention and composing in today's information society. By focusing only on laptop computer use, however, Pigg leaves out a large population of student writers who rely on the use of smartphones or tablets to do the majority of their composing. Though the use of such devices may be out of the scope of Pigg's study, it is crucial to garner a broader understanding of students' composing practices with various mobile devices, especially when devices like mobile phones are used in dynamic ways in an information society. Pigg's study leaves space for future scholarship to expand upon her methods, provide glimpses of other transient spaces outside of the two described in her book, and account for a variety of mobile device use.

Pigg's call to alter previous deterministic conceptions of networked mobile devices in the composing process and view composing through a lens of transient literacies is crucial to work done within composition classrooms at the university level. Today, students rely heavily on mobile devices, whether iPads, laptops, or even smartphones, to access resources, navigate information, and engage in interactions of various kinds that shape their composing processes. To better understand these essential processes serves only to aid in creating classroom spaces that work with our students' existing composing processes rather than against them. Pigg's *Transient Literacies* presents a compelling and necessary analysis of how students compose and provides a pathway for future research.

Reference

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