Ball and Moeller “Re-Inventing the Possibilities: Academic Literacy and New Media

For this week’s text, I’m having a difficult time with analyzing it very critically and I think this has a few reasons. 1. I have a very particular process with reading that I need to engage in order to take up the text’s concepts, ideas, and issues to the best of my ability and a huge factor in that process is reading off of paper instead of a screen. I found it really difficult to fully engage with the text because I couldn’t annotate in the margins and interact with the text in the way that I need to. This is really interesting to me because Ball and Moeller discuss how digitally designed new media, multimodal texts are meant to encourage more reader engagement and meaning-making, however, I’m not convinced of this. While I understand that having hyperlink, comment boxes, and other various digitally gestural modal aspects, I’m not sure that this makes it *more* engaging or even makes it beneficially engaging because the designer deliberately planned the areas and aspects of the composition that the reader is *meant*  to interact with. Therefore, I’m suggesting that this kind of interactivity is taking agency away from the reader to a certain degree, because the interactivity was planned out by the designer. Whereas, with traditional print-text, the reader is allowed to make any comment to the text she wants in order to decipher and make meaning of the text. I understand that these are two *very dissimilar* kinds of interacting I also understand that the kind of interactivity that is “allowed” or possible in analogue or digital print-texts feels more engaging and meaningful to me as a reader. I feel like this difference in reading is a huge challenge that most instructors of English don’t want to have to deal with so new media and multimodality is pushed to the backburner because instructors are already so over worked. So then, how can we help to better prepare instructors to learn these new skills and literacies?

2. Another reason I had an issue reading this is because the text jumped around a lot through hyperlinks. Ball and Moeller emphasized this “forking and linking/jumping” as an affordance of designing and reading these texts; however, I’m not convinced that “forking and linking/jumping” is always be a strength of these kinds of texts. How can “forking and linking/jumping” be a constraint of these texts as a designer and a reader? And on the other hand, how can “forking and linking/jumping” be an affordance to a designer and a reader? I feel like this text brought about more questions than answers for me, so I apologize for the whirlwind of questions, but I feel as though I would be remiss to not ask them because I feel confident that this is the direction that our department and pedagogical materials are heading. In fact, I think that our departments and pedagogical materials *need* to head in this direction in order to adapt to our students’ realities.

Discussion questions:

1. I found this text interesting and really circular insofar as, the hyperlinks the authors would put into the text would bring your to different nodes that were further down the index list. While I think this was the point of their text, I also think that this is an embodiment of the meaning-making tools and commonplaces they discuss and investigate throughout their text. They talk about commonplaces and topoi as means to “fork and link/jump” in the theorizing commonplaces section and while I know that they’re practicing that concept throughout this piece, I’m still confused on what it means to “fork” and what the compositional goal of forking is. I understand it as using a hyperlink to “fork” a concept into two or more tangential concepts in order to complexify readers’ understanding through interactivity and non-linearity. Now that I type this out, I feel a bit more comfortable with my understanding of topoi and commonplaces as forking; however, I am still a bit confused on how *else* forking and linking/jumping can be accomplished without using hyperlinks. In order to achieve this non-linearity in a multimodal text (either digital or analogue) does the designer *always* have to use hyperlinks? Is there any other way to achieve this rhetorical affect/strategy? I’m curious about this, because I worry that teaching these concepts in an FYC class can become easily formulaic.
2. My reading response dealt a lot with my own struggles with reading and taking up the piece because of its medium. It’s my understanding that in order to be a better designer of multimodal new media texts, we have to be better readers of multimodal new media texts texts. So then how to we re-teach outselves to be better readers of this new literacy(ies)? In order to effectively teach my students the skills, I have to be able to know and practice the skills, but I am a bit at a loss of how to re-teach myself how to read on a screen.