*Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres* Bowen and Whithaus (Intro, 1 & 3)

Reading Response:

A common conversation heard among composition and FYC pedagogy scholars is there are audible concerns regarding the critical and ethical usages of new media and multimodality. While, I understand the stakes of this issue, I am a little fatigued in hearing it because I feel as though instructors don’t employ a massive curricular change without first analyzing its affordances and constraints; but then again I may simply be naïve in thinking this way. Bowen and Whithaus echo this conversation in their introduction, “[w]e cannot talk about multimodal composing and production without understanding the ethical considerations of this production as creating particular spaces for meaning making. The tools and technologies we use cannot be separated from their social and historical practices across time and space (Wysocki 2005)” (8). I find myself immediately agreeing with this statement, but I’m unclear as to why it’s regularly echoed in scholarship regarding multimodality and literacies for the simple fact that it seems obvious. How are we supposed to teach students to be critical users and citizens without being critical theorists and instructors ourselves? I find it to be a redundant argument that crops up a bit too often for me to ignore it.

I can see how this conversation of ethical and critical usage is a springboard for other critical frameworks within this scholarship, though. I’m glad to see that multimodal theory is commingled with genre theory because I believe that this coupling has great teaching affordances and potential especially regarding Shipka’s chapter. Shipka delves into this idea when arguing that, “multimodality is not some special feature of certain texts, objects, or performances, but a ‘routine dimension of language in use’ (Prior 2009)” (74). This “bottom-line” of her argument resonated with me because it makes me critically think about the pervasiveness of modality, which means that modality and multimodality are socially situated insofar as, they are situated in genre because genres are similar social forms as well as content. Therefore, multimodality needs to be understood through a social lens as well. I feel like there is a lot of stuff here to unpack about this notion of multimodality as conflated with genre, but I am ultimately wondering how closely coupled genre and modality are. Can they truly be discussed as singular concepts or are they interdependent? Is modality ideological in similar ways that genre is ideological? Is modality meant to shape social interactions and cultures?

Discussion Questions:

1. I found Ball’s chapter a bit frustrating only because she kept describing herself as underwhelmed (or experiencing “wowlessness”) by her students’ multimodal documentary projects. I’m a bit confused on what her expectations were for this project. What did she want them to accomplish? Does setting up these kinds of expectations of “radical” usage fair for our students that are learning new technologies in a complexly rhetorical way? Can these 5-paragraph documentaries be seen as transfer too, or not at all?
2. I’m hoping this opinion I’m about to share isn’t based on a biased opinion. But I’m not sure that Shipka is giving Devitt enough credit for choosing the genres that students learn in FYC. I think that—yes—students need the freedom to choose and rhetorically investigate the genres that they find interesting in order for them to engage; however, I also think that students *especially* FYC students, need that initial guidance to set academic expectations in order to teach that “hidden curriculum,” which I understand as the notion of teaching students how to *do* college. Is this overstepping my bounds as an instructor? Is this a fair criticism of Shipka or is my criticism of Shipka valid?