Shane A. Wood

Reading: “Re-inventing the Possibilities,” Ball and Moeller

English 998, Multimodality, Multimedia and Digital Rhetoric in Composition

First, the layout and design of this site / text isn’t very accessible, clean, functional, aesthetically pleasing, etc. Most of the time, I was distracted. It kind of looks like it was created in the early 1990s. If this is going for any visual appeal, it effectively failed. I’m not 100% sure, but I’m assuming all my students’ websites will look a lot better than this does. Alright, alright, alright, I’ll stop poking fun at the visual aesthetics (or atrocities) of this journal / site. Ball and Moeller write, “The texts that a university produces—from faculty and students—would be more reliant on the meaning-making strategies from all modes of communication, rather than being stiffly situated within the domain and logistics of written text.” This is a common theme in the literature that we’ve read: critique the traditional way of composing, understand texts, and move towards a concept that embraces various modes of communication. Multimodality affords us the opportunity to make meaning in new ways – ways that aren’t constrained by the alphabetic text. I feel like I (or we) say that almost every week.

One thing that I found problematic is their suggestion to change / switch terminology. They write, “To accommodate a new rhetoric of new media, we suggest that terms such as element, designer, and wow should replace traditional uses of paragraph, writer, and assessment.” I get their perspective, but I think changing terminology is a large task (which would be a huge shift in a paradigm and would need others to support and encourage it) that, ultimately, is running in circles more than anything else. I also don’t understand their reasoning in changing the terminology, or how they came up with those terms. For example, I have no idea what “wow” means or why it would be inserted instead of “assessment.” Did I miss something?

They situate topoi and commonplaces by writing: “In sum, for us, topoi signify the material and form that an argument in new media texts, while commonplaces signify the orienting experiences or modalities which serve to anchor or reference a reader within the often disorienting experience of navigating and making meaning from a new media text.” Students read texts differently and get to choose what they’re gaining from their perspectives in their situations and those situations influence how they make meaning. I’ve been thinking about the discussion during the teacher workshop about course goals and outcomes and program goals and other things passed down from the people in administration, and I was wondering how those goals and outcomes dictate what “meaning” we try to decide for the students. How often are there genuine commonplaces of negotiation? Do students have a place to negotiate the texts they read, or are we assigning the texts? What does negotiation look like and is it “pure” in our classrooms, or is it always possessing a hidden agenda?

Question: I understand the definition of “commonplaces,” or spaces where readers and texts can come together, but I don’t get where these places “are.” What isn’t a commonplace? Our classrooms are commonplaces, right? Students and teachers and texts come together to make meaning.

Question: Then again, can our classrooms even be “commonplaces”? Or are we (as teachers) always constructing things as we want them to be without the voices of our students? Multimodality may allow students to choose what they want to be included or excluded, but even that is based on an assignment we designed for them to participate in.