Jody Shipka *Toward a Composition Made Whole*

Introduction and Chapters 1-3

1. In her introduction, Shipka talks about the English community’s unease with embracing the “new, technological changes” (5). She cites scholars’ fear that written discourse will be tossed to the wayside because of the prevalence of multimodal, visually rhetorical texts that have pervaded both everyday and academic life. Shipka counters this fear by problematizing the notion of written discourse by saying that writing can be both the “writing-as-a-thing” (i.e. written “products”) and—what I’m calling “writing-as-a-thing”—writing as a complementary thought process and we need to research and investigate each kind in our field (82). However, I am still left wondering if the other scholars’ fears are still valid. **How can we approach writing/composing and all of its diverse uses, manifestations, productions, distribution and circulatory channels without losing sight of our students’ expectations to learn “professional” and “correct” writing skills? I guess what I’m asking can we pedagogically balance all of the complexity that new media, multimodality, digital, and analogue literacies (on top of all other kinds of pedagogies we find significant and interesting) without *some* important aspect(s) getting neglected? How can we effectively scaffold all of this complexity for our students?**
2. Question number 1 then leads me into my second question. In chapter 1, Shipka discusses the mid 20th century scholarship that was working to figure out what a “traditional Freshmen English program” consists of (23). What I find interesting about this issue/discussion is that it seems to have pretty similar concerns that the rhet/comp translingual scholars have insofar as, both groups are concerned with how language socially functions for our students as individuals, for our students of meaning-makers, and for our students as social participants. This concern of language’s roles was (and still is?) seen as the “’unified content of the [English] course’” (Downs and Wardle 331; Shipka 24). Shipka then continues to discuss how the “communicative process [needs to be approached and studied] *as a dynamic whole*” (emphasis in original; 28), **which—while I agree with Shipka—makes me wonder how we can practically approach this hugely complex task in our own classrooms with thoughtful, pragmatic, authentic, academic, and complex composition projects. How can we challenge our students to make dynamic, sophisticated, multimodal, re-mediated writing goals when there is so much at stake for our students to learn technical communication skills they can take into their professional futures?**

Shipka’s book—thus far—has me incredibly excited because I agree with her teaching goals of instructing our students to complexly question written and spoken discourse purposes, processes, practices, and circulations. I think that Shipka approaches communicative practices and processes with an incredibly sophisticated sense of depth, but with my excitement comes apprehension and concerns. My concerns lie in the realm of our students’ expectations, their other academic needs, their social identity, individual identity and their professional needs. In chapter 2, Shipka delves into meditational approaches to writing process and practices, wherein she cites that while meditational tools can (and often are) a site for agency, they are also “differentially imbued with power and authority” much like all communicative practices (47). She then goes on to cite Bruno Latour’s notion of “overflow,” which is a notion of communicative practices and interactions are “’overflowing in all directions,’ making it virtually impossible for our analyses to start (or stay) anywhere that can be said to be truly local” (49). This brings me to my point—finally. Since discourse (written, spoken, gestured, heard etc.) is a wildly—seemingly infinitely—complex process that is always “overflowing in all directions,” how do we anchor these abstract concepts when teaching our students? Do we always relate it back to them as composers and discursive actors? Is that too invasive? I know there is no “right” answer to these questions; however, to me, this is a moral issue because if we are charged with teaching students about languages’ roles, we are then charges with directly affecting students’ worldviews, self-perceptions, and perceptions of reality. That’s a huge honor and responsibility that I worry about when so much is at stake for our students’ languages and identities.