Anne Wysocki’s *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*

Introduction and chapters 1-3

In chapter 1, Wysocki brings up a significant and overlooked aspect of the materiality of texts. On pages 12-13, she discusses the notion of the materiality of texts as identity influences. I wanted to spend some time here fleshing out this idea. Wysocki explains, “[w]hat is open to question is the quality of connection between object and identity…” (12). This struck me because she’s suggesting that not only the content of the texts has the ability to form/influence a reader’s identity, but the mere materiality of the object, too, has the ability to form/influence one’s identity. This notion really reminded me of Peter Medway’s article “Fuzzy Genres,” insofar as, he argues that a physical, textual object that looks the same as other textual objects can be considered a genre because it’s forming the identity of those who have the material text, despite having dissimilar content. Regarding Wysocki’s observations then, this—to me—is fascinating because it helps me understand the formation of a social identity a bit more in that the visual presence of a material text holds as much value and ideology than the text’s content. So the visual observation of a certain material object is “enough” to shape the user’s identity.

So our students’ experiences with texts and the texts’ materialities embody values and ideologies that shape our students’ opinions, experiences, and—therefore—identities because of the weight of visual (and, in my opinion, economic) rhetoric. The significance of materiality (and material rhetoric), then, is an incredibly subtle mode of sociocultural influence on the owner/reader/user of material texts. For instance, a student who learned how to read, understand, and investigate texts through only digital means has a far different identity than a bibliophile because of the dissimilar material embodiments and realities that their respective texts express. The very digitally literate user would most likely value speed, technological advancements, news websites, web forums, etc. because her lived material experiences embody certain values of continual growth and connectivity. Whereas, the bibliophile would most likely value material rarities such as 8-trakcs, vinyl, magazines, newspapers, detailed processes (like brewing their own coffee using a French press) etc. Clearly, I’m making some huge generalizations about the identity of 2 fictional people, but I think my point is clear; the preferred materiality of texts that people engage, embody values and ideologies that then affect the user’s identity and belief-system.

This then leads me to my 2 discussion questions:

1. How sound is this theory of identity-forming texts (be it new media or otherwise)? What are the affordances and constraints of textual materiality as ID forming?
2. On page 13, Wysocki paraphrases Bourdieu by saying “it is what we don’t see that allows our practices and products to connect with each other in ways we may neither intend nor like and to shape the ways in which they are connected—and hence to shape what we are capable of doing and knowing” (Wysocki). Where do material practices, values, and ideologies intersect in our classrooms? Can we use these intersections, as contact zones to better understand each other’s literacies/identities? How or how not?