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Reviews

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REVIEWS

Davis, Robert L., and Mark F. Shadle. *Teaching Multiwriting: Researching and Composing with Multiple Genres, Media, Disciplines, and Cultures*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2007.

Brad E. Lucas, Texas Christian University

In *Teaching Multiwriting*, Robert L. Davis and Mark F. Shadle draw on over a decade of teaching their students through engaged, active learning. Their pedagogy crosses disciplines, encourages inquiry and expression, and promotes a broad notion of composition that embraces the experiential, the non-discursive. Conjuring up a blues motif that echoes throughout the book, they aim to situate readers at a rich “crossroads” of literary texts, pedagogical strategies, and unusual artifacts that compose their “multiwriting” pedagogy. They aim “to strike balance between the theory-heavy approach to ‘resistant writing’ of Derek Owens and the more practice-oriented work of other precursors, including Tom Romano and Bruce Ballenger” (9). The end result is something hard to pin down, a style that left me both struggling against and embracing the book. Ultimately, I realized that *Teaching Multiwriting* exemplifies the creative energies in rhetoric and composition, encouraging us to avoid disciplinary complacency and to take pedagogical risks.

I like their blues analogy for its legacy of combined tradition and innovation (7), and they’ve inspired me to comp on their blues riff by extending the analogy to explain the style of *Teaching Multiwriting*. For blues guitarists, slide or bottle-neck style is an expected part of the musical soundscape: simply put, a glass or steel tube (the slide) is moved along the top of the guitar strings to produce continuous changes in pitch. Fifteen years ago, I learned how to play slide only because one very shrewd bluesman reprimanded me to loosen up and stop trying to hit the “right notes.” Now, in reviewing this book, I’m reminded of that moment when I learned to play between the notes. I’m reminded as well of James Moffett’s warning that when we strive to categorize, we “trade a loss of reality for a gain in control” (23). Inversely, perhaps, readers of *Teaching Multiwriting* will better understand the reality of multiwriting if they come to the book without trying to pin it down—trying, instead, to hear what’s driving the performance. And much to their credit, Shadle and Davis acknowledge that their particular style doesn’t suit all tastes: “Some readers enjoy this approach; others do not” (9).

The texture and style of *Teaching Multiwriting* emerges through an essayistic exploration that runs parallel to their aims in the classroom. In Chapter One, “A Crossroads in Space and Time,” the authors elaborate on the “crossroads discourse” that they define as “a broader set of discursive practices that emerge at the crossroads of disciplines, cultures, political practices, values, ethnicities, histories, and ways of being. . . . a symbolic setting where new cultural forms can emerge” (15). Multiwriting emerges from this discourse, and Davis and Shadle argue that their pedagogy generates particular outcomes: inspiring excitement about learning, improving student retention and stimulating further learning, making students “hungry for discourse,” de-mystifying academic prose, and encouraging students “to be self-directed”

(26). Throughout the rest of the chapter, the authors situate their pedagogy amidst the likes of Geoffrey Sirc, Derek Owens, Winston Weathers, Tom Romano, and others, but quickly we see that still more enter the crossroads: jazz musician Miles Davis, novelist Michael Ondaatje, self-taught Tuvan throat singer Paul Pena, and NBA basketball player Richard “Rip” Hamilton. At the end of all chapters in *Teaching Multiwriting*, the authors provide classroom assignments written directly to a student audience, allowing us to shift attention from our positions as readers to the more immediate experiences our students might have when confronted with multiwriting work. Chapter One provides assignments for a discourse diary, a daily inquiry exercise, and an “autobiography of a question” project that encourages students: envision yourself “as a mystery” and “trace a question of importance to you” (49). Finally, this chapter—like the others in the book—ends with a summary of relevant readings and films.

In Chapter Two, “Research Writing as a Key to the Highway,” Shadle and Davis revisit discussions regarding inquiry-based research projects that reach beyond academic discourse. Here, too, the authors provide examples of assigned readings and make references to works in architecture, photography, travel, and other areas that pay attention to form and discovery. More importantly, they showcase some of their student projects in detail. Here I think *Teaching Multiwriting* can be the most useful for new teachers (or seasoned faculty) who need a sense of student capabilities in producing non-traditional texts, blending their discursive work with unexpected means of delivery. For example, one student presented a project on astronaut Christa McAuliffe via a scale model of the *Challenger* that crashed to reveal origami figures. Another student represented her autobiography through a display basket of message-in-a-bottles, signifying how she envisioned her disposition and distant memories. These student examples run throughout the book, and they help us see the possibilities in multiwriting that we might otherwise have to imagine. In the remainder of the chapter, the authors take us on an extended exploration of how their pedagogy “relates to the current conditions and history of discourse and inquiry” and opens “the academic practice of research writing to the larger history of human inquiry” (66-67). They take on these lofty goals by addressing ancient and postmodern views of history, invoking Bakhtinian heteroglossia and emphasizing the roles of travel and place. During these moments in *Teaching Multiwriting*, I reminded myself of their aspirations to balance theory and practice, for their aim here is only to articulate a rationale for the pedagogy rather than engage in the complexities of history, discourse, and inquiry. The chapter-end student assignments focus on recalling a travel event, considering imagination and place, and imagining a transformative travel event, a “dream trip.”

While the earlier chapters might help readers understand the wandering approach to research promoted through a multiwriting pedagogy, Chapter Three, “The Loose Talk of Persuasion,” explains how the pedagogy serves to counter-balance contemporary forms of persuasion, the agonistic “rhetoric of certainty,” by offering what they call “loose talk”: quieter modes of dialogue and invitation that seek not to overpower, dominate, or win. Knowing their sense of “loose talk,” I came to a greater understanding of *Teaching Multiwriting* as a book that aims not to present an airtight argument but to persuade us through “changes and ongoing conversations that leave room for responses, pauses, and questions. . . . an invitation to new thoughts, encounters, actions, and forms” (99). Loose talk, like bottleneck slide guitar, takes us away from focusing on staid forms, opening up our ears instead to sounds that are new. But clearly, Davis and Shadle aren’t

advocating for only one view of rhetoric. The authors end the chapter by showing us how commonplaces, dialogue, and conventional ideas about argumentation can work well within a multiwriting pedagogy, especially one that focuses on crucial issues like war, genocide, globalization, or water issues.

In Chapters Four (“The Essay as a Cabinet of Wonder”) and Five (“Multiwriting Blues”), the authors let loose with extended discussions of the essay and the blues, respectively. As they have it, Chapter Four casts “the essay as a primordial way of ordering a world with too much in it to be fully explained or contained” and Chapter Five describes the blues “as a running commentary on living that keeps people going through the continuing difficulties and surprising joys of life” (163). Both chapters are thick with references to literary works, popular press books, music, art, archeology, music, history, and much more. Readers familiar with the essay, or the blues, will likely find both chapters a pleasure to work through, but in these chapters the pedagogy is underplayed, taking its best form in the end-sections: Chapter Four offers discussions of interviewing, inventory-taking, and the collection of artifacts; and Chapter Five asks students to consider forms and genres, service learning work, and multimodal exhibits of their work.

All in all, *Teaching Multiwriting* is an exuberant book that promotes the kind of pedagogical practices that I wish were more widespread. At times, Davis and Shadle take too much pride in the adoption and circulation of their unique pedagogy (33, 66), and the authors seem to neglect digital/new media work in favor of more traditional material forms; given how much time our students spend online and engaged in telephonic exchanges, I can’t help but wonder if the authors see their pedagogy as a corrective to rapid technological advances (or if and how students resist their multiwriting pedagogy as “not writing” or “not English”). I was particularly disappointed to find that—at the time of this writing—a companion website <http://www.mysteryhorn.org> was no longer in service, since it was apparently designed to facilitate the ongoing exchange of ideas and examples stemming from this book. Taking their cue, I was ready to explore, travel, and engage with others in loose talk about their mysteries and dream trips—and perhaps add a few of my own. Fortunately, I don’t need to go online to get started. ☐

Work Cited

Moffett, James. *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. 1968. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983

Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2007.

Heidi Estrem, Boise State University

Anne Beaufort’s *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* is another important piece in the mosaic of rich, contextualized studies of college writers over time. Along with Lee Ann Carroll’s *Rehearsing New Roles*, Ann Herrington and Marcia Curtis’s *Persons in Process*, and Marilyn Sternglass’s *Time to Know Them*, as well as ongoing studies at Harvard and Stanford, Beaufort’s book peels back another layer of understanding about the student writers that populate university classrooms. Unlike these

other studies, though, Beaufort's book focuses on only one writer in college and in the first few years in the workplace. Beaufort also goes beyond a solely descriptive naturalistic study to offer some conclusions and proposals for college writing instruction—a framework that challenges the prevailing models and extends our thinking about how people learn in purposeful ways. These two “stories” of the book—that is, the individual student in a writing class and curricular reform on an institutional level—are tales that many of us are intimately familiar with in our own institutions, and they raise pointed questions for those of us in composition (5).

The first and last chapters of the book center on the second story, the argument that a “more robust theory of writing instruction” would enhance students' experiences in first-year writing courses, in the Writing Center, and in writing-across-the-curriculum programs (16). These chapters point me toward a hopeful future for our field, one ripe with promises and challenges. Reading this as a writing program administrator, I feel again that familiar pull of paralysis: there is a lot to do; time is short; universities change slowly. What to do first, and where to start? Still, Beaufort's ideas push back at me to continue to work locally to enhance writing and writing instruction for students.

In the first chapter, “The Question of University Writing Instruction,” Beaufort addresses the challenges of writing instruction throughout the university. Because first-year writing is often taught as a “general skills” kind of course, Beaufort claims that students are “ill-prepared to examine, question, or understand the literacy standards of discourse communities they are encountering in other disciplines, in the work world, or in other social spheres they participate in” (11). Then, she discusses the challenges faced in discipline-based writing tasks: even though these courses have an intellectual content and frame, assignments in these courses too often focus on reading recall, and expert communicators have an especially hard time “making overt the knowledge about writing standards they have learned from a slow acculturation process, rather than by direct instruction” (15).

Beaufort then explores a conceptual model for writing expertise that gives her a framework for both analyzing her case study writer's experiences and for a reconceptualization of writing curricula in higher education. Expert writers, she claims, draw from five knowledge domains: writing process, subject matter, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge; and all four of these are encompassed by discourse community knowledge, the fifth domain. All five domains are captured in a useful diagram in Chapter One (19). The framework of these knowledge domains leads to the book's hypothesis: “If we can articulate these knowledge domains and apply them to shaping curriculum, we can then contextualize writing instruction more fully and have a basis for teaching for transfer, i.e., equipping students with a mental schema for learning writing skills in new genres in new discourse communities they will encounter throughout life” (17). Articulating and integrating all of the knowledge domains and directly affecting curriculum across a university is a huge task she sets for the field and for herself, and it's one that I very much admire while simultaneously finding myself again breathless at the scope of the task.

The middle of the book (Chapters Two-Five) traces the writing experiences of Tim, an undergraduate Beaufort first met while conducting the research for another study on students learning to write in multiple contexts (27). In Chapter Two, “The Dilemmas of Freshman Writing,” Beaufort focuses on Tim's two con-

secutive first-year writing courses. Working through each knowledge domain outlined above, Beaufort demonstrates how these first-year writing courses—courses that Tim enjoyed and in which he did well—leave “un-named” so much of what was informing the course (42). Chapter Three, “Freshman Writing and First Year History Courses” documents and analyzes the writing that Tim did in his first major courses for history—during the same semesters he took freshman writing courses. Through a careful analysis of the comments Tim received on his work in history, Beaufort notes how the “epistemological expectations of the discourse communities of history and norms for genres and those of freshman writing differed greatly” (63). The expectations for writing in one course were significantly different from those in the other, and Tim lacked the specific tools to go about addressing these differences. The disservice to students like Tim, then, is that he was “not primed by teachers in either discourse community to understand different values and community purposes as they would affect writing goals, content, structure, language choice, rhetorical situation, etc.” (68).

Beaufort then moves into two chapters that focus on Tim’s writing experiences in two disciplines and three varying contexts: his coursework as a history major, his coursework as an engineering major, and his on-the-job writing experiences in an engineering firm. “Learning to Write History” (Chapter Four) explores the ways in which Tim sometimes mis-reads the conventions of the discourse community of history. As he worked through additional courses, his interviews began to reveal moments where he understood that he was “at least attempting to write within and against the discourse community of historians” (76). “Switching Gears: From History Writing to Engineering” (Chapter Five) traces Tim’s move from history course work to mechanical engineering course work and then workplace writing. As he moved into math and science courses, he didn’t lack just a “knowledge of these subjects,” but he also “needed to change his habits of thinking” (119). In the workplace, the context changed even more, and his purposes for writing—and the kinds of writing he did—also changed.

Chapter Six, “New Directions For University Writing Instruction,” draws from both the previous case study chapters and Beaufort’s own pedagogies to further the discussion of the nature of writing instruction in a university. This application and extension make it the central chapter of the book, and the one with the most serious implications for those of us who teach in universities. First, she asserts that a “developmental model for understanding writers’ growth [and] for designing curriculum . . . needs to encompass the five knowledge and skill domains used here to frame the analysis of a writer’s growth” (142). This model, which Beaufort has just used extensively as analytical framework, is then also her framework for curricular development. Despite Tim’s relative success with various writing contexts, she argues that novice writers “would probably produce writing at a much more expert level, more quickly, if they are explicitly taught genres in relation to social contexts in which they function” (146).

The second argument of this chapter is that universities need to do a better job planning and sequencing curricula and that “teachers in all disciplines should employ techniques that aid transfer of learning for writers” (149). For composition specifically, we should “teach those broad concepts (discourse community, genre, rhetorical tools, etc.) which will give writers the tools to analyze similarities and differences among writing situations they encounter” (149). We need to think more broadly in our curricula, this chapter argues, and we need to give up

the notion that teaching is an individual enterprise. She writes: “teacher autonomy should not be the primary criterion for curricular decisions when students’ developmental progress is at stake” (155). The enormity of sequencing and scaffolding writing instruction at the college level is real, and I appreciate Beaufort raising this issue. Still, I wonder what tight sequencing of courses might look like at a university like mine. Students change majors; they take courses out of sequence; they make decisions that challenge our best attempts to provide cohesion and consistency. Can we take on the ideal of teaching for transfer (151)? Absolutely. Does it require an incredible amount of patient, ongoing professional development, and realistic support from deans and others? Undoubtedly.

At the end of the book are two crucial pieces, depending on which “story” of the book intrigues you most. The epilogue (“Ten Years Later”) is an extended dialogue between Beaufort and “Carla,” the instructor of Tim’s two first-year writing courses. As a researcher, seeing these glimpses into how a research “subject” responds to the portrayal of her in the project is useful and insightful. And, finally, the first appendix outlines, in detail, the kinds of assignments Beaufort uses in her teaching of first-year writing, along with the rationale for how she aims to teach for transfer. This section will help instructors envision the curriculum—the “explicit” curriculum, based on these knowledge domains—that Beaufort mentions throughout the book. It also leaves the reader wanting more and wishing that we were ten years down the road, reading about students who have experienced a more explicit, more sequenced writing curriculum in college. As a writing program administrator and teacher of first-year writing, I appreciate the conversation that Beaufort’s book initiates and extends. If we’re listening, we should hear a lot of rich and unsettling questions about first-year writing, writing across the curriculum, and instruction in higher education. ☹

Mao, LuMing. *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie: The Making of Chinese American Rhetoric*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2006.

Yufeng Zhang, Millersville University of Pennsylvania

As an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) writing teacher in the United States, I have taught college composition to international students for about eight years now, and, during this time, I have worked with students from very diverse backgrounds. My teaching experience allows me to see that learning to write in a new language encompasses more than just the ability to correctly use grammar and vocabulary in that language; a more challenging aspect of writing is that the values and conventions of literacy can vary across cultures and contexts. What should students do when cultural conflicts arise in writing instruction, and what suggestions should we teachers provide? Should students preserve the discursive values and conventions of their home cultures and thus run the risk of being devalued and disadvantaged, or should they, in order to survive and succeed in America, completely embrace the “norm” of English writing (if that can be defined!) without question? The answer might lie in students’ own needs and life goals, but, as a teacher, I found LuMing Mao’s, *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie: The Making of Chinese American Rhetoric* an enlightening and

insightful resource for addressing these complex questions. Mao proposes that border residents, including ESL students, should not constrain themselves to either the discourse of assimilation or the discourse of deficiency or difference (142); instead, they should construct a new rhetoric by negotiating between and reflecting upon various rhetorical differences.

To start, how is the Chinese fortune cookie related to the making of Chinese American rhetoric? What does this process involve? What is the significance of the making of Chinese American rhetoric? Mao addresses these fundamental questions in both the introduction and the first chapter. First, Mao explains that the making of Chinese American rhetoric is analogous to the birth of the Chinese fortune cookie in that they both invoke different traditions: the Chinese fortune cookie, for example, is an integration of a Chinese tradition of using message-stuffed pastry as a means of communication and a European American tradition of serving dessert at the end of a meal (4); similarly, Chinese American rhetoric “selects and invents from both Chinese rhetorical tradition and European American rhetorical tradition” (22). As a hybrid discourse, Chinese American rhetoric is born of not only the experiences of Chinese Americans, but also the interactions between Chinese Americans and European Americans.

Very often, emergent discourses establish and distinguish themselves by underscoring their unique discursive features in relation to other more dominant or recognized discourses. This, as Mao asserts, only reinforces the existing hierarchy, which is exactly what emergent discourses set out to challenge in the first place. Therefore, the making of Chinese American rhetoric should take a different path: instead of demonstrating any internally coherent, distinctive, or fixed characteristics, it is a process of “adjusting and becoming” (17). Mao further emphasizes the “togetherness-in-difference” nature of the Chinese American rhetoric, that is, when different rhetorical practices intertwine and coexist with each other. On the one hand, in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent and interconnected, this hybrid ethnic rhetoric blurs the boundary between Chinese and European American rhetorical practices, empowers its users at rhetorical borderlands by providing “the potential for positive change and transformation,” and thus allows border residents to represent their experiences with their own voices; on the other hand, not immune from the influence of asymmetrical relations of power, the emergent Chinese American rhetoric “entails necessary perils, too—perils of misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and outright rejection” (3), or perils of being simply ignored.

Throughout the rest of the book, Mao specifies the encounters and conflicts between Chinese rhetoric and European American rhetoric at the borderlands, and illustrates how awarenesses of and reflections on the differences between the two rhetorics contribute to the making of Chinese American rhetoric. With reference to Chinese culture, language, history, and philosophy, he clarifies some common misconceptions about Chinese rhetoric; in doing so, he reiterates the significance of the rhetoric of togetherness-in-difference: without it, it is hard for different discourses to “face each other without prejudice and without the ‘othering’ impulse” (59). More specifically, in Chapter Two, Mao shows how the concept of face, “a regularly invoked discursive construct in Chinese rhetorical repertoire” (27) that has been misconstrued and misrepresented by Western scholars, has impacted Chinese rhetoric and the making of Chinese American rhetoric. Consisting of two aspects, *lian* and *mianzi*, Chinese face puts a great emphasis on the interconnectedness between self and community. According to Mao, Chi-

nese and Chinese American writers' discursive practices—such as preferences for proverbs, literary citations, and canonical precedents—can be explained by the concept of Chinese face, as they are rhetorical strategies that help writers establish their authority and demonstrate their “membership and conviction in this larger social-cultural environment” (41). Just as Chinese face practices should not be replaced by European American “common sense” (36), these rhetorical practices should not be viewed as inadequate or subordinate.

In Chapter Three, Mao focuses on the indirection in Chinese rhetoric, a visible communication style that has been taken out of its cultural context and thus greatly under appreciated. Drawing upon fundamental features of Chinese culture and language, the author argues that Chinese indirection, instead of simply being regarded as nontransparent, indecisive, or incoherent, should be reevaluated (73). First, in terms of correlative thinking, a notion that characterizes Chinese culture, Chinese indirection should not be viewed as an opposition to American directness; just like yin and yang (an example of correlative thinking), these two communication styles are actually complementary to each other. Second, Chinese indirection can be accounted for by the contextualized nature of the Chinese language: there is a tendency in Chinese “to cluster initially a range of conditions as causes for a particular event that follows, or to provide a frame of reference that precedes the presentation of facts or events” (72). In addition, because of the “discursive interdependence” of the Chinese language, that is, the meaning of a word highly depends on other words it is associated with, discursive contextualization is especially important in Chinese (73). Therefore, rhetorical moves in Chinese discourses, such as the use of analogies, allusions, and anecdotes which might seem irrelevant to a writer's major argument, can actually be meaning-making strategies that guide readers to interpret the text. With reference to both his personal experience and other discursive examples, Mao further illustrates how Chinese indirection and American directness can complement each other and achieve togetherness—in difference.

Along the same line of argument, in Chapter Four, Mao responds to the common characterization of Chinese rhetoric as lacking originality and individualism. He points out that this accusation is biased and problematic because it attempts to understand Chinese rhetoric in terms that are non-Chinese and neglects the large sociocultural context that shapes this discourse. According to Mao, the ideology of individualism is not universal or locally Chinese; first introduced into the Chinese language at the turn of the twentieth century, the word “individualism” carries a negative connotation of self-centeredness in Chinese, which may explain why it is not strongly promoted in Chinese discourses. More importantly, as Mao emphasizes, individualism is not the only way to realize original or individual expression; the discourse of *shu* or reciprocity, which “puts individuals in connection with each other” and “calls on individuals to situate their discursive performances” within the large social, cultural context, is capable of developing creativity and originality as well (114). In an effort to do justice to Chinese rhetoric by understanding it on its own terms and in its own context, the development of the discourse of *shu* also means to initiate and engage a dialogue to “interrogate the ideology of individualism” (121). Once again, reflections and encounters like this are part of the making of Chinese American rhetoric.

In Chapter Five, the author moves the setting for the creation of Chinese American rhetoric from classroom discussions to the street. By presenting and analyzing

real written texts produced by Chinese Americans in response to offensive racist remarks against the Chinese community in Cincinnati, Mao shows how Chinese American rhetoric helps its users claim their agency and effect change in the contact zones. Through his thorough analysis, Mao successfully connects and illustrates the concepts and theories mapped out in the previous chapters, which strengthens his argument for the rhetoric of togetherness-in-difference. For instance, he demonstrates how the writers of the sample texts negotiate between Chinese face and European American face, employ the strategies of both directness and indirection, and practice the discourse of *shu* by connecting to the people and city leaders of Cincinnati with this new, hybrid Chinese American rhetoric. In the next concluding chapter, Mao returns to the topic of the Chinese fortune cookie again, but this time, he highlights its differences from the making of Chinese American rhetoric; for instance, Chinese American rhetoric is not as “easily identifiable” as the Chinese fortune cookie (145). In doing so, the author signifies the implications and challenges for making this, or any other, ethnic rhetoric.

As a native Chinese now living in the United States, I am quite familiar with the features Mao details in this book concerning Chinese and American rhetorics, cultures, histories, philosophies, and languages. However, what I have found inspiring and eye-opening is the convincing way he integrates and connects all of these elements to make a strong case for the making of Chinese American rhetoric. In a world that is getting more and more multicultural at every level, anyone can benefit from reading this book, especially from its message of mutual understanding, respect, and coexistence. ☺

Reynolds, Nedra. *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004.

William FitzGerald, Rutgers University/Camden

I write this review sitting in the library of Haverford College, my alma mater. In a vaulted wing housing a collection of art books, surrounded by panels of oak and portraits in oil, I can look up from my work—as I too frequently do—and gaze through high arched windows on an improbably perfect landscape of academe: nineteenth-century buildings of honey-hued stone, venerable trees, lush lawn on which, this lovely day in May, various students recline, readying for finals. Indeed, ever since career opportunities brought me to live within walking distance of my old undergraduate haunt, this library is a site away from home to which I retreat for serious writing. At times, when I enter this space, the twenty-odd years that have elapsed since my student days are elided through the force of memory, and I am transported by familiar sights, sounds, and smells to another time. This is surely one reason I come: to experience a palpable connection to a place that has shaped me, even as I have journeyed onward to and through other places. The writing I do here now is marked by that journey as well as it is anchored by experiences, including memories, of this place. It is fitting, I think, that such experiences of place come into sharp focus in reading Nedra Reynolds’s *Geographies of Writing*, a book that has much to tell about the insufficiently explored, yet profound, connections between writing and place. Reynolds breaks

new ground here by applying perspectives drawn from the discipline of geography to composition studies. The result is an ambitious, if occasionally strained, effort that both orients and challenges the field of composition to see activities of writing in quintessentially spatial terms.

Reynolds frames this task in an “Introduction” that instructively recounts Plato’s *Phaedrus* and its prescient concerns with the relationship between discourse and place. Breaking with habit by walking with Phaedrus beyond Athenian walls, Socrates exposes himself both to risks that come with boundary-crossing and, stopping to engage in dialogue at a site rich in mythological import, to inspiration borne of the locale. This iconic scene serves Reynolds in her intentions to consider “spatial practices of the everyday” and their effects on writing; conceived in terms of “walking, mapping and dwelling,” each activity becomes a focus of later chapters (2). Her first chapter, “Between Metaphor and Materiality,” offers a boundary-crossing survey of postmodern theory on space with particular emphasis on the work of Edward W. Soja, whose *Thirdspace*—building on Henri LeFebvre’s *The Production of Space*—articulates a “trialectics of spatiality,” a rejection of binaries involving space and time in favor of an understanding that space is simultaneously perceived, conceived, and lived (16). Doing so allows Reynolds to critique composition’s “imagined geographies,” those spatial metaphors, such as discourse communities and conceptions of writing as travel, that may ignore material dimensions of literacies, including matters of privilege, access, and difference (27).

In Chapter Two, Reynolds examines the discipline of geography, specifically cultural geography, for what the field’s “visual epistemology” might contribute to composition’s own ways of seeing (51). Here begins a series of ethnographic accounts of geography’s lived realities as an academic discipline that Reynolds bases upon her experiences as a participant observer in a department of geography at the University of Leeds in Great Britain, where, unlike in the United States, geography remains a popular field of study. Her profile of the research and teaching activities she encountered at Leeds are among the most engaging elements of her project. In this initial account, Reynolds recognizes the singular importance of cartography in representing geographic knowledge and offers the activities involved in “reading landscapes” (60) as an analogue to composition’s increasingly visual practices. Reynolds would also have us recognize the immersive activity of walking as a spatially conceived way of seeing and offers the modernist figure of the *flâneur*, or urban Rambler (69), who both walks and writes the city landscape he typically traverses. Rather than view *flanerie* merely in historical terms, Reynolds seeks to rescue this figure as one who “embodies method” through “an approach to street life, a way of moving through the world, collecting, arranging, and remembering, dependent on seeing” (70). Indeed, following Reynolds, one might think of the contemporary blogger as a virtual *flâneur*, navigating the labyrinthine paths of cyberspace.

Chapters Three and Four can be considered in tandem, for each is rooted in Reynolds’s research sabbatical in Leeds. Chapter Three focuses on mapping, especially the kinds of mental maps we construct and follow in daily living through the “habitual pathways” we take routinely and the “contested places” we lay claim to or often avoid in fear (78). Reynolds illustrates these concepts through extensive interviews with geography students at Leeds, who share their experiences with the city’s neighborhoods, parks, and transportation arteries. What stands out in these interviews is the juxtaposition of richly detailed familiarity with parts of the city and relative ignorance of others, often in surprising proximity. This contrast is further examined

in the following chapter, where Reynolds introduces the notion of “streetwork”—a variant on fieldwork—to describe how geographies of difference are experienced at close range in urban environments. Contrasting images of a sanitized, Disneyfied “mainstreet” with the more chaotic street life of many cultures, Reynolds frames the street as that “realandimagined space” where difference is encountered (93). Her own fieldwork here describes the research activities of geography students engaging in ethnographic streetwork in various communities in and around Leeds, an activity, she observes, whose methodology holds lessons for service learning initiatives in composition, initiatives which may underestimate forces of resistance in place when negotiating difference.

In a final, compelling chapter, “Learning to Dwell,” Reynolds turns from the spatiality of movement and vision to that of “habitation and embodiment” (140). For Reynolds, dwelling, conceived as “a set of practices as well as a sense of place,” has much in common with spatial practices related to textual production (140). She thus underscores that writing, too, is a mode of habitation; we inhabit discourses as well as assemble various habits that “go with us” in navigating other textual domains (140). Reynolds further emphasizes the degree to which our embodied practices, including acts of writing, necessitate encounters with difference, of gender, race, class, and ability, among others—not always protective or comforting—whenever we leave our homes and venture out, materially or metaphorically. With this insight, Reynolds identifies various practices within university culture illuminated by concepts of habitation and geographies of difference. She stresses the attendant difficulties of navigating across borders by offering the example of first-generation college students surveying the alien terrain of the academy and characterizes inhabiting contested spaces like the discourses of current composition studies as a conversation among theorists “from different neighborhoods” (164). She closes this chapter by briefly examining spatial practices of textual production both in material terms, such as the composition of texts in “crowded computer labs” (168) and the challenges of collaborative writing, and in more metaphorical spaces involving the canon of arrangement and the use of electronic slideware.

These snapshots demonstrate an effort, if one not entirely successful, to close the circle between theory and practice in an otherwise intriguing, highly significant study. One concludes *Geographies of Writing* with a sense of the deep connection between the social construction of space and the enactment of those constructions in discourse. What to do with that perception remains, no doubt by design, work yet to be performed both by Reynolds and by her readers in the multiple contexts in which composition and its instruction take place. In many respects, her book enacts the very methods—of walking, mapping, and dwelling—it articulates. That is, Reynolds emerges as something of a *flâneur* herself, navigating vibrant streets and busy intersections and recording impressions in something of the manner, one comes to realize, of a collage. If readers expect a resolute linear model of exposition and juxtaposition of diverse elements into a potentially coherent whole, some of *Geographies of Writing* may prove disorienting. However, as Reynolds eloquently insists, resisting that easy binary is her challenge—and ours. ☐

Works Cited

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