

INTRODUCTION

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It goes back to the second Day of Creation when “God . . . divided the waters which were under the Firmament, from the waters which were above the Firmament,” thus the first boundary line. All else after that, in all History, is but sub-division.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*

Nearly all of the conversations in composition studies involve place, space, and location, in one way or another. The field’s conversations focus upon the ways that places both “include” and “exclude” people based upon the particularities of their various subject positions, the tensions between composition’s roles “inside” and “outside” of the classroom in particular and the academy in general, the problematics of “real” and “imagined” places in the formation of disciplinary theory and practice, and a host of other issues that address, to some degree, *where* composition resides. There is no way to easily characterize or codify these various scholarly conversations and activities, in part because of the multitude of differing ways these terms are defined and employed in the scholarship of composition studies. Because of this, or perhaps in spite of it, some scholars have turned toward a more critical scrutiny of how we define and are defined by our understandings of space, place, and location. This collection brings together some of those scholars in an attempt to further our understandings of how place, space, and location enmesh, problematize, and shape the field’s work.

The purpose of this collection is not to simply define terms like “place,” “space,” and “location” in any permanent sense. These terms mean and do different things in different contexts—attempting to

define and stabilize them across and beyond contexts is to strip them of their power, to take away their ability to enrich the discipline in its diverse manifestations, and to disregard the fascinating and valuable history of these terms as they can and should contribute to the work of composition studies. With that said, however, there is some need to discuss how these terms—particularly “place,” “space,” and “location”—are used and understood as the basis of this collection. This is not to finalize how these terms can and should be used, but rather to provide readers with a context about how and why this collection came to be, how and why it is structured the way it is, and how and why the collection impacts the field in important and timely ways.

One significant aspect of this collection is the breadth of ideas involving location and composition that is covered here. Contributors write about many different places that are important to the field of composition studies: classrooms, campuses, cities, workplaces, community centers, public spheres, MOOs (Multiuser Domains, Object-Oriented), and blogs, among others. Even books and others kinds of texts themselves are considered as places, not just documents or material objects, though they are these things, too. Importantly, this brief list of places that find their way into this collection marks a *range* of places, those that are seemingly real and material as well as those that appear metaphorical and immaterial. Naming a classroom or campus a “place,” that is, seems like a much more literal designation than, say, suggesting a public sphere, a textbook, or a blog is a “place.” The collection does not privilege either the materiality or immateriality of a place, however; one major premise underlying *The Locations of Composition* is that all places—material and metaphorical—are equally *real*. The “reality” of places and their ability to influence the discipline, in other words, is not determined solely by whether they are material and physical or immaterial and imagined. Composition is structured by various kinds of places physical and imagined, neither of which should be privileged, both of which should be investigated, because places are imagined, arranged, represented, and distributed in discourse and texts. However, it should not be forgotten that physical places themselves contribute to these activities of imagining, arranging, representing, and distributing. Physical places can be imagined and reimagined; imagined places can be made physical and materialized. Strict dichotomies between material/immaterial and real/unreal break down easily. How these places enrich or diminish the discipline is the important question.

Yet to understand how a place enriches or diminishes composition studies is to understand how it is *located*. The terms “place” and “loca-

tion” are often used synonymously, though doing so is in some ways a misinterpretation that elides their differences. The collection starts from and builds upon the general theoretical position that places are *bounded areas endowed with human meaning*. To clarify, Robert Sack suggests that place

refers to the countless areas of space that we have bounded and controlled. These humanly constructed and maintained places—or places-as-territories, many of which can be virtually identical in their look and function and found repeatedly over the landscape—range in scale from a room to a continent and support innumerable projects we undertake: a kitchen, as a delimited area of space, is supported by rules about what may or may not take place that help make possible food preparation; and a very large area of space, such as Antarctica, because it is bounded and thus partly constructed by international treaties, helps maintain and even restore what we think of as elements of nature. (2001, 232)

Sack contends that places are “tools” that provide the means for humans to undertake their “projects.” He suggests that “places add to the nature of the projects. That is, projects not only require place in the sense that they need a place to occur, but the place becomes an active agent in the project and thereby affects it” (232). This includes writing projects, as many of the chapters in this collection suggest. However, we want to extend this understanding of place a bit further by noting that places are located and relational. Evaluating, studying, or defining a place is an activity that must consider the place’s position in relation to others. As Leibniz writes (in seventeenth-century gender-exclusive language), “Men fancy places, traces, and spaces, though these things consist only in the truth of relations and not at all in any absolute reality” (qtd. in Casey 1997, 162). To be located, in other words, is to be positioned—either physically or metaphorically. One may be physically located or positioned east or west of a place, above or below it, or inside or outside it, for instance. One may also be metaphorically located or positioned inside or outside a place, behind or in front of it, floating on it or sinking in it, for or against it, beside it, far from it, moving toward or away from it, or even between it and another place. Therefore, by naming this collection *The Locations of Composition* instead of, say, *The Places of Composition*, we mean to suggest that studies in composition are made up of various different places—both physical and imagined, though all real—but coming to terms with

these places derives from working to see how they are located relationally, as well as by recognizing our own locations on, in, under, against, between, away from, and/or among these places.

“Space” is another term often entwined in studies of place and location; it is a multifaceted term that also does not lend itself to easy definition or appropriation, a term privileged above place and location in many theoretical and philosophical inquiries. It is common, for example, to understand space as the prior condition of place, as Robert Sack does, or, to look at it the other way around, place is often seen as a modification of space; space is devoid of meaning, while place is endowed with meaning by humans; space seems open-ended and undelimited, while place is bounded and structured. Yi-Fu Tuan, for instance, in “Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective,” writes that place “has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also the reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning” (1974, 236). Places no doubt have histories and meanings, yet we instead contend that space is not prior to place, not a preexisting condition of it. Rather, space is the outcome or product of place.

A simple analogy: when we travel by airline we are assigned a seat in most cases. The airlines, that is, usually assign us a *place* to sit—12B, 17F, or, if we’re lucky or privileged, 1A. These places are *located* relationally to each other. We find 12B or 17F based upon where these seats are in *relation* to the other seats, rows, and aisles. It is usually not until we find our place, however, that the issue of *space* comes about. How much space will there be between me and the people in my row and how much space will be available in the overhead compartment or under the seat in front of me? In such cases, space is a *product* of the place—the inside of the airplane in general and one’s seat in particular. Importantly, however, one must recognize that these spaces are not empty containers or voids—small ones at that—that exist underneath the seat in front of us or in the compartments above us. If they were nothing more than containers under the seat or in the overhead compartment, they might simply be understood as additional places—those simply located in relation to other places. Rather, we can recognize the space under the seat and the space in the overhead compartment as such when we understand them not only as products of place but also as products of human activity: the activity of *making room*. On the airplane, to continue this analogy, we have to *make room* in this place—adjust and contort our bodies, condense and scrunch bags, cram and jam suitcases together as closely as possible. The inside of an airplane is

a bounded place endowed with a great deal of human meaning. Yet from this place, spaces are activated by how humans make room for themselves and their belongings. Space and making room are outcomes of human activity in the place itself. Making room, furthermore, *adjusts* locations. I may wish to make room for my body by reclining the seat back as much as possible; however, doing so also adjusts the relationship between my seat and the seat behind me, therein reworking the relationship—the location—between them. Thus, place, space, and location are separate but interrelated. To understand one, in some sense, it is important to understand them all.

This analogy may be a crude one, but it can be extended to the workings of composition studies generally and this collection specifically. By emphasizing locations, then, we hope to emphasize places and their meanings for the discipline, with particular emphasis upon how those places lead to new spaces, new activities, and new instances of making room in the discipline. This is also to emphasize how those places and activities constantly shift and move in relation to one another. Thus, to emphasize locations is to focus on the positions, activities, changes, and motions of and within composition. Locations tell us about relationships, but they also imply adjustment and modification. Composition studies may be a discipline that includes places such as classrooms, writing centers, public spheres, and rhetorical topoi, for example, but studying these places—understanding their benefits and weaknesses, recognizing how they can and cannot enrich the discipline—is a matter of studying how these places are located: how they relate to other places inside and outside the discipline, how our activities carve out new spaces from these places, and how these places allow us to alter, change, position, reposition, and move through our scholarly work and practices.

Therefore, this collection is not an attempt to *map* the discipline of composition, to provide a layout of all the important and not-so-important places on a current chart of composition studies. Creating a map is to stabilize places, to show how they look at a moment frozen in time. Mapping is reducing possibility to simplicity; mapping is to fix the ground rather than to show how the ground is made to seem fixed; it is to chart grounds already made rather than to explore how the grounds are made in the first place, how the grounds are remade, and how the grounds could have been made differently. As editors of this collection, we like to think that such a map of composition studies is an impossible document, one that could not exist because the field is always on the move. Rather, we are more interested in the relationships between places, the spaces they create, the locations that alter

and (re)orient, and the ways the work of composition studies contributes to all of these activities. To ask, in other words, *where* composition *is* can be problematic, because that is to ask where composition is standing and stable, where its places have been solidified and made permanent: this is to deny its movement, its amorphous qualities, its contingent and multifaceted, yet impermanent and transitory, structures. The purpose of *The Locations of Composition*, then, is not to introduce brand-new places of inquiry in composition studies (readers will likely already be familiar in one way or another with the different places covered in these chapters), though we admit that part of making room—the activities of using spaces brought forth by places—is to bring new places into view for the discipline.

Furthermore, we do not mean to suggest that all contributors to *The Locations of Composition* agree with the ways we have defined and problematized the terms “place,” “space,” and “location.” Our vision for the collection as a whole may certainly—and productively—differ from the ideas presented in individual chapters. Such tension should be viewed as an asset to these conversations instead of a liability. Terms such as “place,” “space,” and “location” are open-ended terms whose meanings are contextual and specific to individual arguments. The larger argument we hope this collection makes can differ from the specific arguments proposed by authors of individual chapters. As readers will discover, additionally, the chapters in this collection present a broad range of places to be considered. As we hope is obvious, it was never our goal to develop a collection dedicated entirely to one kind of place, such as public spheres, workplaces, classrooms, cyberspace, or cities, for example. Including chapters that discuss such a broad range of places, instead, allows the collection, first of all, to function in some ways as an introduction to the different places of composition and how they can and do relate to each other, though most compositionists should still find a great deal of interesting material in these chapters. Furthermore, the broad range of places written about in this collection affords readers the opportunity to make their own connections among the various chapters, to recognize their own locations in relation to these various places, and to *make room* in their scholarly work for a greater range of places that structure composition.

The collection is comprised of three sections of five chapters each: “Across the Field,” “Inside the Classroom and Beyond,” and “Among the Institutions.” The first section of *The Locations of Composition* includes chapters that examine different notions of place and location as they affect of the field of composition studies in a broad sense. Sid Dobrin’s chapter “The Occupation of Composition” provides specific

definitions of place and space based upon the writings of philosophers and critics such as Edward Soja, Georges Perec, and Henri Lefebvre. Dobrin theorizes these terms and what they can mean for composition studies and explores in particular the ways that composition as a discipline has come to “occupy” certain places as well as the ways it has (and has not) conquered space in academic territories as a means to find safe places. In this sense he is very much interested in the way composition as a field has positioned itself and is located.

Elizabeth Ervin’s chapter “Composition and the Gentrification of ‘Public Literacy’” argues that, recently, compositionists have been turning away from the composition classroom as a topic of scholarly discussion and focusing instead on the implications of public discourse. This trend may be fueled by self-interest on the part of compositionists—the desire for subject novelty and a need to enhance professional and material status by establishing a more relevant identity for the public. The danger in this trend is that composition studies may sacrifice academic literacy for the sake of exploring public discourse; the responsibility of teaching students the basic conventions of writing will fall to faculty who do not specialize in the study of composition. This conflict suggests that compositionists must consider the following actions: self-reflection on the subject of academic engagement with public literacy, the goals of composition for the university itself, and challenging the traditional understanding of academic success and its rewards.

In “In Visible Texts: Memory, MOOs, and Momentum,” Cynthia Haynes writes that MOOs, in an educational situation, provide opportunities for multiple-users to interact with each other (using text) in real time and supply an environment for learning in an adaptable virtual world. Haynes claims that our understanding and memory of words are resistant to a change in velocity—words that are in motion tend to stay in motion—and that the visual representation of moving words calms viewers into learning and retaining what they have learned in memory.

Thomas Rickert, in “Invention in the Wild: On Locating *Kairos* in Space-Time,” argues for the necessity of connecting *kairos* to a rich, material sense of place, for a view of *kairos* that is “implaced.” Without place, Rickert suggests, *kairos* is an empty concept. His version of *kairos* is a way toward “developing a richer understanding of environment and our inventive relationship within it” and provides the means to understand invention as an ambient activity rather than a subjective one; invention, that is, “itself is an emergent process extending far beyond the bounds of an autonomous, willing subject.” Thus, these notions of *kairos* and invention must be understood in terms of “posthuman subjectivity,” rather than in terms of traditional subjectivity that views the

subject as “autonomous” and “willing.” This suggests invention “less attuned to advantage or success *over* an audience than working with what an audience in a material situation brings forth.” On first glance, a chapter about *kairos* and invention would appear best suited for the section of *The Locations of Composition* that deals more with classroom and pedagogical concerns; however, Rickert’s essay focuses specifically on a profound issue in contemporary rhetorical thought, reviewing and challenging key texts in the discipline written by authorities in the field. Thus, he is not simply rethinking how *kairos* can be used in the classroom, or what we can do with *kairos*; rather, Rickert is reconsidering what *kairos* does to us.

Peter Vandenberg and Jennifer Clary-Lemon’s chapter, “Looking for Location Where It Can’t Be Found: Possibilities for Graduate Pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition,” looks at graduate work in composition studies that concentrates on how theory-based scholarly writing limits the effectiveness of future writing teachers in interacting with location—such research is “placeless” in that it operates solely in generalizations. Implicit expectations of graduate work can control students’ research to the point that “success” is defined by abstractions rather than interpretation of and applications for local places. By encouraging community-based graduate research, graduate students will be able to go beyond the “objective” perspective by engaging with a place beyond the university and by putting themselves in relation to that place and its inhabitants. It will also allow them to examine the ethical implications of interpreting the “other” by looking at the issue through the eyes of people outside of the academy.

The second section of *The Locations of Composition*, “Inside the Classroom and Beyond,” mainly examines issues of place and location as they relate to student writers and praxis in the classroom and elsewhere. John Ackerman’s chapter, “Teaching the Capital City,” examines the relationships between writing instruction and social geography. Ackerman sets forth a georhetorical methodology as a means to help not student writers but students as writers “replot the coordinates” of their metaphysical centers and to practice composition in such a way that it garners a distinct authority derived from “residences.” Ackerman highlights the concepts of “adjacency” and “substitutability” as means to help students “discern the center and periphery of daily living at a complex institution [the university] that is premised on hypothetical and deliberative worlds of majors, disciplines, and future employers in imagined constructs such as a workforce or national economy.” Ackerman’s essay not only provides a variety of rich theoretical insights but

also allows readers to draw such insights into the realm of their teaching endeavors.

Robert Brooke and Jason McIntosh contribute to this collection “Deep Maps: Teaching Rhetorical Engagement through Place-Conscious Education.” This chapter argues that students need to see themselves in place—that is, need to be aware of the ways places surround them and structure their responsibilities, choices, views, and conflicts. “Deep maps” is a term coined by William Least Heat-Moon. Deep maps are used as invention exercises in composition classrooms, as developed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Summer Institute for the Nebraska Writing Project. Deep maps, they argue, “aren’t road maps like state highway maps, but are drawings of psychological locations (both literal and abstract) created by writers to represent their relationship to place.” Deep maps serve as invention exercises as well as creative experimentation and the beginnings of place-conscious education. They are meant, in part, not only to provide students with intellectual exercises to foster writing but also to encourage their civic participation—to write not only about places but for them.

In “Between Perception and Articulation: Imageword and a Compassionate Place,” Kristie Fleckenstein writes about the need to create compassionate classrooms where students “experience connection rather than alienation,” a project of utmost importance especially for teachers who engage in critical writing pedagogy and teaching about conflicts. Creating a compassionate classroom comes about by altering the traditional Western notion of places as static and unchanging. Fleckenstein argues that doing so can happen through the lens of “imageword,” “a way of knowing comprised of image-making and word-making,” whereby place can be understood as a product of perception and articulation—that is, a “a sensuous, coproduced, and dynamic reality.” Importantly, Fleckenstein suggests that imageword helps develop compassionate classrooms, but these are not places that cure all social ills and problems. Rather, they serve as the beginning of ways students can connect with one another on affective and intellectual levels.

Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber’s “The Locations of Usability” creates a “landscape of usability” that provides teachers and theorists of composition with new ways to envision usability outside the usual contexts of technical communication theory and practice. Their “landscape of usability,” in particular, includes the following “locations”: metaphorical, rhetorical, methodological, and pedagogical. Each of these locations is interestingly described and theorized as well as applied to composition scholarship and teaching practices. “Mapping

locations of usability against locations of composition (as both text and activity),” they write, “provides one way of enriching our changing notions of what it means to write and read in the world.”

Tim Lindgren and Derek Owens contribute “From Site to Screen, From Screen to Site: Merging Place-Based Pedagogy with Web-Based Technology,” a chapter that explores the relationships between place-based pedagogies and new media in writing classrooms. In particular, they explore how various metaphors structure our understanding of and relationship to places as well as the ways that “locative media” technologies connect information and people with places, create knowledges of place, and impact places and communities. Additionally, Lindgren and Owens detail two of their own online pedagogical projects—WhereProject and 21st Century Neighborhoods—that “ultimately seek to foster online communities of interest that in some ways transcend the limits of geography but where the rhetorical goal is to encourage the cultivation of local knowledge.” These projects, importantly, provide spaces to explore the complex relationships between writing, place, and technology.

“Among the Institutions,” the third section of *The Locations of Composition*, uses the term “institutions” in more than one way. While we in the academy often understand institutions as universities, this section also explores different aspects of composition studies as “institutions” and their relationships to other, more traditionally defined, institutions such as universities and workplaces. Amy Devitt, in her chapter “Transferability and Genres,” suggests that first-year composition classes are not, and are not intended to be, lessons on how to write papers throughout an undergraduate’s education nor a substitute for learning to write all genres within the university or the larger context of professional writing. Locations, in the both the sense of literal environment and the metaphorical cultural and institutional environment, are significant components of written work and help define its standards. Providing students with a critical awareness of genres would enable them to understand not only how genre shapes written work, but also how to adapt the genres (and associated rhetorical forms) they know to new situations and locations. Having an awareness of antecedent genres will prepare students to assess the applicability of known genres to new genres and anticipate possible shortcomings and adjustments necessary to adapt to new writing situations.

Nancy Myers, in “Relocating Knowledge: The Textual Authority of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*,” alters our perspectives on institutions somewhat by examining how “a textbook [Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*] acquires institutional and disciplinary

authority,” as well as how, implicitly, the textbook itself has become a kind of institution in and of itself in composition and rhetoric studies. Myers argues, furthermore, that the textbook forms its own multifaceted location, where it is situated in time and space. As a type of location, it serves as “a nexus point where academic contexts and cultures, systems of texts, and ways of reading intersect to produce textual authority.” Analyzing the textual authority of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* in this sense allows us to understand how knowledge—disciplinary, institutional, and social—is located and relocated, stabilized and reproduced.

Nedra Reynolds’s chapter, “Cultural Geography and Images of Place,” argues that cultural geography shapes writing and must be taken into consideration when situating composition within the context of the university or nonacademic communities. Because the field of composition increasingly communicates through visual media, it is important to consider how images can represent—and misrepresent—the reality and effect of time and place on student writing. The Harvard University video *Shaped by Writing: The Undergraduate Experience* assumes a placelessness to writing instruction that is not an accurate representation of the cultural (or physical) landscape that students must negotiate on other campuses—the classic academic writing that is appropriate at Harvard may not be appropriate at other colleges that focus on professional or electronic writing. The limited view presented by this video indicates that visual representations of the study of composition should be guided by the relationship between local spaces, identities, and culture.

Christopher Schroeder’s “Notes toward a Dynamic Theory of Literacy” examines student locations and spaces that constitute and surround Northeastern Illinois University, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Schroeder notes how difficult it is to account for the various locations that students inhabit and move through: physical, ideological, linguistic, and experiential locations, among others. And he critiques composition’s dominant models of literacy by studying these various student locations and by showing the difficulty of simply applying disciplinary concepts such as language, discourse, and identity on top of them. He uses these critiques to begin developing a “dynamic theory of literacy” that helps fulfill composition’s ideas of social justice so prevalent in the field and “permits those of us who are concerned about social justice to come closer to fulfilling the rhetoric that surrounds our work, if only because it affords an opportunity for other practices to be admitted as legitimate means of intellectual work.”

Tom Deans’s chapter, “Shifting Locations, Genres, and Motives: An Activity Theory Analysis of Service-Learning Writing Pedagogies,”

argues that teachers and scholars interested in service learning should recognize the locations in which service learning happens less as places and more as activity systems, which asks that we rethink our notions of discourse communities that are typically associated with these distinct locations. In this chapter Deans explores the relationships between and among the university and the community-partner organization as activity systems that overlap with the service-learning classroom. In doing so he discusses why some service-learning programs succeed and why some fail; he also offers pedagogical advice for those implementing service-learning programs, and he lays out new directions for service-learning research in composition studies.

The activity of putting together a book like this, as Mason from Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* reminds us in the epigraph beginning this introduction, is an activity of dividing and subdividing from beginning to end. We realize that these chapters have been artificially joined with and divided from one another—they have been located in particular ways in this collection by us the editors. Contributors did not compose their chapters with these divisions in mind, nor did they compose them knowing the titles of these divisions. But readers, we hope, will continue to redivide, reconnect, and relocate these chapters and do so from their own ever-changing locations.

Works Cited

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