Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen: Mapping Change through Studio Work

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ABSTRACT: *In this autoethnographic, institutional narrative, we describe the evolution of a Studio program at an open-access, regional campus of a state university. The Studio, first conceptualized by Grego and Thompson, is a one-credit writing workshop taken by students concurrently enrolled in a composition course. Developing this program necessitated incursion into an institutional landscape that we learned was not transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested. In remaking that landscape, we came to understand the crucial roles of space and place, power and colonization, in institutional change and in the teaching of writing. Institutional spaces are never transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested; thus remaking an institutional landscape involves issues of power and colonization. Postcolonial theories helped us think about the shifting and asymmetrical relations of power embroiling us as we struggled to bring about change in our campus's approach to at-risk students. We argue that the contradictions and confusions students experience in the university embody the work in Studio, and that these contradictions must not be smoothed out in any narrative we write or theorizing we attempt.*

> We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place.
>
> –Edward S. Casey

> [I]f we think of the university's institutional discourse as objectifying and decontextualizing, so our disciplinary practices also have a tendency to pull our thinking, writing, and talking out of specific places and into a kind of intellectual no-place, a Universe of Ideas.
>
> –Douglas Reichert Powell

Our story of the evolution of the Studio program at Miami Middletown, an open-access, regional campus of a state university, is a story about our

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coming to understand the relationship of space and place in working for institutional change and as crucial concepts in the teaching of writing.change and as crucial concepts in the teaching of writing. Since institutional spaces are never transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested, remaking the landscape of the university involves problems of power and colonization. Postcolonial theories—Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity—have helped us think about the shifting and asymmetrical relations of power that embroiled us as we struggled to bring about change in our campus's approach to "at-risk" students, and our mixed, and not entirely innocent roles as implementers of change. At the same time, postmodern geographer Edward W. Soja's rethinking of spatiality in terms of lived lives has helped us to see that the contradictions and confusions students experience in the university embody the work in Studio and must not be smoothed out in any narrative we construct or theorizing we attempt. In part, then, this article is an autoethnographic institutional narrative. As such, one of our aims in addition to describing our Studio program is to locate for readers various sites within a college or university that a Studio approach might impact and to elucidate how the struggle for this new space represents a struggle within a "configurative complex" of cultural, social, and institutional places, to use the words of phenomenological philosopher Edward S. Casey (25).

We began rather naively with the question: How could we change the entrenched practices of the teaching of basic writing at our university? After almost foundering amid conflict, we came across Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's Studio model ("Repositioning"; "Writing Studio"). A small group workshop, the Studio provides a place where students, concurrently enrolled in different writing classes, meet once a week to discuss and question the demands of their various writing assignments. This model has shifted our attention from merely working to change composition pedagogies to asking more productive questions about relationships: How do students understand the rhetorical situadedness of writing and academic culture more generally, and how do teachers communicate (or not) their objectives to students and other teachers? Below we tell our story in greater detail. For now, we would just note that, rather than seeing the terrain of writing instruction as competing sets of pedagogies, contents, and assignments, our Studio experience has led us to believe that the single most important knowledge for students of writing (and for those interested in changing the university) is learning about contextuality—both how context impacts on a rhetorical project and ways in which rhetors engage with particular contexts in order to achieve their ends.

The Studio Model

> Asking questions not only helps clarify assignments but helps students develop a broader and richer vocabulary for talking about writing processes and products, and with more words come more ways of seeing the assignment and envisioning the writing processes and what the products might look like, more ways to imagine possibilities.
>
> —Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson ("Repositioning")

The Studio uses an interactive inquiry approach: Students and instructor work together in the workshop to examine individual, diverse writing curricula in order to uncover the rhetorical situation, including the contextual constraints and determinants, of particular writing assignments; teacher expectations; and social issues in students' lives at home, work, and in the university. All these form the "place" from which students must write. Understanding the "place" in which a writing task is embedded may be as trivial as understanding that a certain teacher wants the textbook formula for a paper and no other structure, or as complex as discussing various institutional and disciplinary ideas of "good" writing and the differentials of power that often remain hidden under the illusion of the transparency and uniformity of institutional space. The primary work of students and instructor in Studio is to engage these not-so-trivial realities and tensions of emplacement, and by bringing them to the surface and discussing them, together consider how they impact upon a writer's desires and choices. Following Grego and Thompson ("Repositioning"; "Writing Studio"), we call this process interactive inquiry.

Only when writers understand these determinants can they make choices that serve their own rhetorical ends. By learning how to inquire into the rhetorical situation that every writing task comprises—inquiring into contexts more deeply than merely naming the audience and purpose for a paper—students become more skilled agents[1] who can then decide how to use writing "skills" for the ends they wish to achieve (however differently skills are defined in different classrooms, which is itself a hot topic of Studio discussions). Although such knowledge is the most important lesson we can teach about writing, ironically it may be that it cannot be learned as well inside even the most pedagogically progressive classroom, since understanding contexts requires seeing the wide array of diverse and competing assignments, choices, and constraints, and listening to other students' and teachers' stories. In short, understanding "place" requires a "space" from which to view it that is both inside and outside its boundaries.

Setting Out: Utopian Dreams

> When a true dialogue between students and teacher occurs, rather than random associations between their scripts a new transitional, less rigidly scripted space—the third space—is created . . . . [I]n this unscripted third space. . . student and teacher cultural interests, or internal dialogizations, become available to each other . . . [and] actual cross-cultural communication is possible[;] . . . public artifacts . . . and even historical events are available for critique and contestation.

> —Kris Gutierrez, Betsy Rymes, and Joanne Larson

When we first read Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson's description of a classroom third space we thought we were reading a description of our composition utopia. This was the space we sought with our dialogic and democratic pedagogies and (in our most euphoric moments) hoped that we had created in our classrooms and student-teacher conferences. In our own classrooms, we listen carefully to student scripts and the underlife of our classes, and we set up our courses so that students can interrogate elements of society that affect learning. Striving to let go of standard teacher scripts and communicate with students about what really matters to them, we sometimes experience third-space moments in which students contest and even transcend the dominant institutional scripts—in one-on-one conferences, e-mail messages, small group workshops, class discussions, and sometimes even in student journals and papers.

As classroom teachers, we relish such moments, but we are not so naive as to think that in discussing institution, culture, and society, the constraints of institution, culture, and society have been surmounted. Script and counterscript persist and in many cases are the topics of third-space discussions: Students express concern that their efforts might not be understood in terms of our criteria; discuss economic hardships that have brought them back to school and, oftentimes, hinder their ability to keep up with classwork; lament the ways academic prose just does not seem to express ideas they feel need to be expressed.

Though we dream of utopia and may even steal glimpses of it from time to time, we face the fact that as classroom teachers our ability to move script and counterscript into mutually transforming dialogue is painfully limited. Teachers are themselves written by a powerful institutional script each time they pencil in student grades on a scantron sheet or click little boxes to submit them electronically at the end of each term.

Institutional demands—grades, class size, fifteen-week semesters, five major projects, attendance policies, due dates, office hours—remind us that the dream of third-space teaching may be transitory at best. This is not to say that dialogic and democratic pedagogies have no chance against the dominant scripts of the university, only that college classrooms as typically construed—individual kingdoms ruled by individual teachers—make the development and sustenance of third-space moments all the more unpredictable for the student. This is especially so for the "at-risk," open admissions students of our campus.

As opposed to the selective residential main campus in Oxford,[2] Miami Middletown is primarily a two-year commuter campus, admitting any student who has completed high school or a G.E.D. Miami Middletown's population consists of a mix of non-traditionally aged students who work and support families while taking classes, as well as recent high school graduates and post-secondary students. Most are first-generation college students, and many come from the local Appalachian and African-American communities of this working-class steel town. Students from this population identified as "at risk" often have a fragmented history of schooling, dropping in and out of the university for academic, financial, and /or other reasons related to life circumstances. Many have a history of lack of success in school; in high school they have often been relegated to "remedial" writing instruction and have been silenced, pacified, and made to feel inept at writing as a result. Unfortunately, our "at-risk" students may very well encounter similar treatment and attitudes in some college writing classrooms. We thus asked ourselves how we could create the institutional conditions for ideal, third-space interactions to take shape and flourish outside and across the cultures of such classrooms.

Then came Grego and Thompson's description of their Studio program at the University of Southern California. Having just read their 1996 "Repositioning Remediation: Renegotiating Composition's Work in the Academy" in College Composition and Communication, we attended their CCCC presentation and returned with the hope that the Studio approach could achieve the types of third-space encounters we wanted our students to experience. Hopeful that this approach might revitalize our campus's basic writing classes, we proposed to our department the formation of a Studio program and brought the idea to our campus's Office of Learning Assistance, which staffs and oversees the basic writing courses.

At that time, students who had been referred to basic writing enrolled in two 1-credit courses simultaneously, English 001 and English 002. We

proposed borrowing a few sections of these 1-credit courses to use as Studio workshops, which students would take concurrently with the regular first-semester college composition course. The Office of Learning Assistance rejected this idea, but instead agreed to pair sections of the basic writing and first-semester college composition courses. Students designated as basic writers could thus take both courses simultaneously rather than waiting until the second semester to take the first-semester College Composition course. Although this solution was a compromise, it had attractions. Since only about 65% of the students on our campus persist from one semester to the next, we suspected that students who were forced to wait to take College Composition until completing the basic writing class probably carried over little knowledge from one course to the next. Many students come for a semester and then leave for a semester, a year, or five years. When such students re-enroll they are likely to have forgotten what they had learned in the remedial course. Moreover, we hoped that pairing basic writing with a composition class might facilitate more collaboration between the instructors of the paired courses and influence changes in the way basic writing and composition were being taught on our campus. So we agreed to the compromise, and Cindy piloted one paired class in the fall of 1997.

The basic writing course, from what we could make out through syllabi and worksheets, functioned more or less like a current-traditional basic writing course. By this we mean that it emphasized surface correctness and final products. Students filled out decontextualized grammar worksheets, completed modes-based exercises, and produced five-paragraph themes. The syllabus offered a review of subskills (one week punctuation, the next transitions, etc.) and represented composing as a surface task of assembling words according to fixed rules rather than as a deepening process of inquiry and a fluid and complex rhetorical act. The basic writing course ran counter to the philosophy and practices in most of our college composition courses. Thus, the compromise version of Studio gave students identified as "at-risk" through our school's placement processes3 two courses at once, a "remedial" class latched onto a composition class stressing the writing process, revision, and (post)process critical pedagogy. By (post)process we mean a continuation and deepening of the teaching of the writing process through a critique of process as solely a matter of individual writers or as a knowledge wholly systematizable. (Post)process theory recognizes the importance of communicative interaction and conflicting interpretations in meaning making.[4]

In the two years during which we tried this paired version of Studio, the dream of collaboration between instructors never become a reality; the conjoined courses proceeded pretty much as two courses operating according to distinct, if not conflictual, pedagogies. Furthermore, the experiment could not expand beyond one set of paired classes a semester because of the difficulty of having the same students enroll for two linked courses, only one of which, College Composition, fulfilled degree requirements.

In the meantime, John, who was in charge of a faculty development workshop, invited Grego and Thompson to come to Miami Middletown in fall 1997 to discuss their Studio program. Their visits to our classrooms and their presentation on our campus that November laid the groundwork for the next step in our evolution towards a Studio program. During this visit, they planted the seeds of a shared vocabulary and the principles of Studio in the minds of faculty, staff, and administrators. The next year, the Office of Learning Assistance, with the aid of faculty at our university's other regional campus, created a new, 3-credit basic writing course called Fundamentals of Writing with a new course number. This move freed the former basic writing course numbers ENG 001 and 002 for our use. We seized the moment and asked to pilot a free-standing Studio program along the lines Grego and Thompson had described. At about the same time, English faculty on our campus created a new placement process with a range of referral options, including the recommendation that an incoming student enroll in both College Composition and Studio. The Office of Learning Assistance made some changes in its orientation program so that advisors had the option to refer students who were judged to be "at risk" (through the COMPASS diagnostic test administered by Learning Assistance and/or students' Writer Profiles, scored by English faculty) to the Studio program. Thus, in fall 1998, Middletown students enrolled in Studios based on the Grego and Thompson model for the first time. We each taught three Studios, with about four to seven students per class, for a total of six sections and about forty students.

If we were to continue this all too neat narrative of institutional transformation, we might conclude with some sweeping statements and some statistics: At the end of the first semester's piloting of the Studio program, 76% of Studio students completed both the Studio and their English class with a C or better. As Studio instructors, we helped students reflect on their assignments, spoke to composition teachers about students' progress, and invited classroom teachers into the Studio to participate and observe. We felt energized by the third-space moments that Studio work helped create, and we were excited by what students and faculty were learning about the culture of writing at Miami Middletown.

But while all this is true, it is also an overly general and optimistic description of events and aims. A deep description of what actually occurred reveals a much more complex story: of an institutional terrain already inhabited and functioning, although appearing opaque to us; of the two of us as aggressive, naive, or just plain bumbling interlopers; of less change than we had hoped for; and (where change did occur) of change as accidental or partial.

The Land Is Already Inhabited: Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

> The idea of transformation from a "sheer physical terrain" and the making of "existential space"—which is to say, place—out of a "blank environment" entails that to begin with there is some empty and innocent spatial spread, waiting, as it were, for cultural configurations to render it placeful. But when does this "to begin with" exist? And where is it located?
>
> —Edward S. Casey

> At bottom, there is still hegemony.
>
> —Victor Villanueva, Jr.

On the one hand, a consideration of place means that we cannot envision the third space as "sheer physical terrain" (nor, to be fair, do Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson or Grego and Thompson suggest that we should). Rather, like Pratt's contact zone, the third space operates as a site where the habitual thoughts, practices, and feelings of students and teachers, held at bay through script/counterscript interplay, can "meet, clash, and grapple" (Pratt 34) and open themselves to critical reflection. The Studio itself represents an intersection of emplaced interests and concerns constitutive of our campus: those of our campus administration, particularly our Office of Learning Assistance; our predominantly working-class students, whose job and family obligations frequently demand they be in multiple places at the same time; our main campus in Oxford, with whom we must negotiate a place for basic writing instruction alongside the official curriculum; and other faculty, whose pedagogies are represented by those students who enroll in the Studio. To overlook any of these concerns as they intersect in the very bodies of students in Studio, and to consider the Studio to be sheer space—completely open or mobile—is to, in a sense, commit an act of hypostatization akin to the colonizer who sees a "blank environment"—an empty space—in which to found a city of his own design.

We say "in a sense," here, because our positioning in regard to structures of power tended to fluctuate in different institutional, social, cultural, and pedagogical contexts. Institutionally, socially, culturally, and pedagogically we tried to stake out counter-hegemonic positions. We resisted our selective main campus's attempts to ignore the particular needs of "at risk" students on a regional campus. We attempted to redress the education of our students, who had been inadequately prepared for college writing through policies of tracking, remediation, and unequal funding of public schools. We tried to provide a place for students of various races, ethnicities, (dis)abilities, and social classes to critically evaluate their relationship to an institution whose values and "norms" reflect the history—white, middle-class, and able-bodied—of those who created it. Studio pedagogy itself is counter-hegemonic, as well: Students set the agenda and receive no grades (just one hour of credit); teachers work with students "from the bottom up" to negotiate the demands of college curricula. Given such institutional, social, cultural, and pedagogical factors, it is hard to imagine the Studio instructor in the role of colonizer.

However, our consideration of the third space as place provides us with a view of ourselves as Studio instructors in which our alignment with democratic and dialogic aims emerges as more tenuous. As much as the Studio has an advantage over conventional classrooms in terms of its third-space potentials, to ever think of the Studio itself as sheer physical terrain, as a unified and transparent space, subordinates—without benefit of dialogic, democratic negotiations—the terrain of other institutional, cultural, social, and pedagogical places, on which our own aims encroach. As much as there are institutions in people, disciplining us and enabling us in various ways, there are people in institutions, people who embody the places a society institutionalizes. Each move we made within our institution toward a Studio program entailed a (re)placing of habitual institutional practices—borrowing the basic writing courses for the Studio workshops, referring new students to appropriate entry-level writing courses, changing faculty advising practices, revising English Department committee assignments, creating course schedules—each held in place by people already working within our school. Our movement toward a Studio program involved movement into places, not empty spaces, already peopled. To resist, as Bhabha urges, the "politics of polarity" (209), and yet to characterize ourselves politically in relation to these people, grows increasingly complex.

At times we've seen ourselves carrying the promises of democratic education on our shoulders, arguing on the side of compositionists like Tom Fox against narrow views that read the crisis of access mainly in terms of lack of skills (10). At other times, we've felt like imperialists, aggressively imagining and appropriating open space over the interests and concerns of workers already in place: As full-time members of the English Department and active researchers, we came armed with our "expertise" in composition theory to a place where people (Learning Assistance staff and adjunct faculty in particular) had labored (in several cases, long before either of us had arrived) on year-to-year and semester-to-semester contracts on behalf of underprepared students enrolled in our school.

We often found ourselves succumbing to a politics of polarity as we sought to engage with others in dialogue about the need for a Studio program. Sometimes we fell into script and counterscript, "us" and "them" (even when the "them" was a heterogeneous array of people in many different institutional sites spread over the main and two regional campuses of Miami University). In fact, much of the progress we made toward a Studio program was made in the absence of substantial dialogue between individuals in the various institutional places it has impacted. In a sense we crept along in corridors, setting up house here and there, but outside of improvements we have perceived in our students' writing and the few individual interactions we have had with some composition teachers as a result of our Studio work, we question whether we have changed the pervasive "deficit" attitudes regarding basic writing on Miami's campuses.

On our own behalf, we might say that at this moment we are still learning how to effectively engage in what Victor Villanueva would call "the rhetorical enterprise of a counter hegemony" (132), this article being part of that learning process and that enterprise. One of the most visible sites in our narrative needs to be our Office of Learning Assistance, which oversees the campus's writing center and basic writing classes, including the new Fundamentals of Writing course. The material offices for these services are located in Johnston Hall, along with our campus's administrative offices, campus bookstore and commons, and English classrooms. With other full-time faculty, we have offices on the second floor of Johnston Hall, the top floor. The writing center and Office of Learning Assistance share a suite on the basement level. At the time we began to consider possibilities for a Studio program, much of what went on in the basement of Johnston

Hall in terms of writing assistance was literally invisible to us upstairs and to most members of the Department of English, located on the university's main campus. Indeed, much of it still is invisible.

At our main campus twenty-five miles away, this invisibility was intensified. In fall 1995, the start of his second year at Miami, John mentioned this invisibility to other members of the English Department's Committee on College Composition, situated in Oxford, Ohio. At the year's first meeting, as he listened to the Director of College Composition read a list of reports from subcommittees regarding goals for the year, he noticed that no subcommittee monitored basic writing courses. When several members of the committee pleaded ignorant to the existence of such courses, a faculty member from our school's other regional campus at Hamilton, Ohio, explained that English 001 and 002 were offered regularly on the regional campuses and staffed through Learning Assistance. This teacher, a tenured English department colleague assigned to the other regional campus, had worked for several years with basic writing there. When at the next meeting John proposed and the committee endorsed the motion that a subcommittee on basic writing at regional campuses be created, she thanked John out loud.

Over the next year, the subcommittee met but three times, and since then the basic writing programs at the two regional campuses have moved in different directions—at the other regional campus, toward widening skills-based instruction to area high schools in the name of early intervention, and on our campus toward the Studio approach. In effect, those of us working in basic writing chose to devote time to actualizing our own agendas rather than meeting as a subcommittee to discuss or debate those agendas. When the subcommittee did meet as a whole through 1995 and 1996, the meetings were well attended and diverse in terms of jobs and institutional sites represented: tenure line English faculty from both regional campuses; our campus's Director of Learning Assistance; the director of our Writing Center and her counterpart from the other regional campus; and several adjunct faculty members (hired through Learning Assistance) who were teaching the basic writing courses at that time. In terms of establishing a place for basic writing on our department's map, the subcommittee served its purpose. It now appears on a list of committee assignments for which faculty may volunteer (although even after the College Composition Committee approved the subcommittee, it was omitted from this list of service choices the next two years). Nevertheless, the subcommittee

included only those people who had already been working in basic writing and the two of us, who were just beginning to; our meeting places—at the two regional campuses—were still far removed from the goings on in our department at the main campus in Oxford (who supplied us with no representative).

Although we had made a place for basic writing in our department, the committee that had been assigned the task of developing that place engaged in little more than a series of scripts and counterscripts: pitting current-traditional pedagogies against process and (post)process pedagogies; the Office of Learning Assistance against the Department of English ; adjuncts (hired through the Office of Learning Assistance to teach basic writing) against full-time faculty (who traditionally had steered clear of basic writing). In short, the meetings of the Subcommittee on Basic Writing at the Regional Campuses were often contentious and unproductive, and what goals we did agree upon were daunting, often involving the development of new courses and expanding the power and scope of writing centers university-wide. Mostly, there were tense disputes over changes in the manner of teaching basic writing. As we write this, we lament our failure to generate third-space discussions in these meetings, meetings that in retrospect appear to us as but manifestations of rigid polarizations, not democratic and dialogic third-space conversations.

These polarities are not inevitable. Perhaps we just needed more time in this committee to engage our differences, to develop and discern third spaces and work within them toward understanding and improving conditions for students labeled basic writers, which after all was the shared goal of everyone on the subcommittee. What is evident to us now, looking back on ourselves at those meetings, is that we were the outsiders. We were the ones who needed to be informed about who was teaching what, about how many students were enrolled in basic writing, and about how many sections were available. We didn't know this particular landscape as well as we had thought. On top of all this, many of the other members of the committee seemed to know one another—if not personally, at least by shared experiences in Learning Assistance programs—and got along famously. We learned at the third and last subcommittee meeting that the English faculty member from the other regional campus and our own Writing Center Director were working together on a proposal for a new, 3-credit basic writing course, which would eventually become the Fundamentals of Writing course. In short, while the Subcommittee on Basic Writing at the Regional Campuses had helped basic writing form a blip on the university

English Department's map, it also showed us that basic writing had existed in several places in our institution all along. We had stumbled into a patch of our university terrain as if it were empty space, only to find it very much peopled—and with people who, we came to believe, saw us at best as initiates (given our lack of exposure to the basic writing courses on our campus) and at worst as intruders.

Regretfully, we did little to help the group challenge their characterizations of us nor did we generate any kind of dialogue that might help us learn if these were indeed accurate characterizations. Rather ironically (and in retrospect, embarrassingly), as we worked to make the place of basic writing visible to our colleagues on the main campus at Oxford, we discursively dis-placed those who were already working in that place at the regional campuses. We spoke to our Oxford colleagues in hallways after meetings, and in one meeting of the College Composition Committee, took advantage of the absence of other members of the Subcommittee on Basic Writing to speak off the record about our concerns for the basic writing program. Several of our colleagues at the main campus appeared sympathetic to our concerns; at least, we felt they seemed to side with our critique of the "skills and drill" approach to basic writing. At the same time, others saw interest in basic writing as a foolish career choice. Despite the formation of the Subcommittee on Basic Writing, basic writing remained, geographically and conceptually, distant from our colleagues on the main campus.

During this time, most of our concerns regarded the reductive approach of the basic writing syllabus then in use. All our attempts to influence basic writing curricula had been stymied. We found ourselves displacing the alliance we had sought to form via the subcommittee in order to gain some leverage by aligning ourselves with the English Department on our main campus. Although the basic writing courses had been staffed by Learning Assistance (the lone exception being the one English faculty member on the other regional campus), the courses were indeed English classes. The English Department does have the authority to withdraw recognition from these courses, but we soon came to realize that such action would most likely lead to the same courses being offered under the sponsorship of another department, putting them even further out of our field of influence. As the proposal for the new Fundamentals of Writing had been forwarded to the Director of College Composition, we hoped that she might intervene to guide the syllabus more toward the (post)process assumptions, assignments, and pedagogies driving our mainstream courses.

However, the proposal for the new basic writing course, imbued with the very same approaches and assumptions that had driven the former basic writing course, raised no objections from the English Department's Committee on College Composition and eventually was approved by the university's Curriculum Committee. Although we had not effected any change, approval of this proposal serendipitously left available the 1-hour course number, English 001, for use as the Writing Studio. So it was within this institutional context that we first sat down with students in Studio to help them discern and negotiate the institutional context in which they would be writing.

Studio as Hybrid Space

> [U]nrepresentable in itself [,] . . . the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference[,] . . . the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation . . . this hybridity, this "Third Space"[.]
>
> —Homi Bhabha

As Bhabha has argued, cultures (and here we are thinking of specific institutional cultures) are not deterministically fixed but can be "appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (209); yet we would add a slightly more cautionary emphasis that what emerges as "new" in the spaces of institutions, the interstices as Bhabha would call them, is necessarily made from and thus necessarily reproduces pieces of the older, already emplaced culture. We soon found that the divisions we had encountered throughout our lobbying for the program would follow us into the Studio sessions themselves. Far from being a transparent, uniform, or open space, this "new" Studio space quickly revealed itself as densely populated by overlapping and knotted social, cultural, and institutional contexts and constraints, lines that intersected in the lived lives of students and often entangled them—and us—in their nets. Students had been referred to the Studio through various diagnostic devices (writing placement recommendations, scores from a computer editing skills test, advising recommendations, and self-sponsorship—often for the extra hour of credit). Although students at our school are not obliged to follow these referrals, many did. Some had registered in Studios against what they felt to be their better judgments. While these students often resisted the idea of devoting additional time to their writing (which they were to pay for with additional money), other students who had had unhappy experiences with writing in the past sought out and took comfort in the Studio support.

Job and family obligations, which had complicated the academic careers of students previously, continued to do so, and our attrition rates for Studios (much as with other classes at our open-admissions campus) remained high (19% the first year).

Perhaps the most apparent of the contextual elements that materially and metaphorically marked Studio space were the divisions on our campus regarding writing theory and pedagogy. The Studio program revealed an even more divided landscape than we had at first imagined—not the simple divide between current-traditional approaches to the teaching of basic writing and (post)process approaches to composition. From the vantage point of Studio, we learned that the approaches on our campus to writing instruction were as contradictory as they were varied.

Our Studios situate us in such a way that we view the variety of assignments, classroom exercises, and grading practices our students encounter not only across the curriculum but also within composition classrooms. We listen to students' stories about their classes, read their syllabi, and review with them their graded papers. Our Studio sessions reveal that some teachers challenge students to write about significant social issues and allow students to define their own purposes and develop their own forms to serve rhetorical ends of their own choosing. Many other teachers stress adherence to modes of discourse and narrowly prescribe topics for students. Some teachers stress revision and ask students to develop portfolios; others grade papers only once, the first time they see them. Some teachers offer students feedback on audio-cassette tapes and in one-to-one conferences; others attend to grammar and stylistic matters by writing cryptic notes in the margins of student papers. One teacher used an elaborate color-coded system that neither the students nor Studio instructor could fathom, even after reading the explanatory key. Some teachers seem rather consistent in their process, (post)process, expressivist, or current-traditional approaches to college writing, while others include a variety of approaches and assignments that often confound students and Studio instructors alike.

One of the most challenging tasks in any Studio is to help students negotiate the various demands of their curricula without negating either students' concerns and desires of expression or the aims of their classroom teachers. We need to help students discern as best we can the underlying agenda of assignments, without compromising the authority of their teachers, while also engaging students in discussing the rhetorical needs and writing practices we believe will improve their writing. At the same time, in conducting the Studio we need to be conscientious about our own positioning, so that participants

develop and sustain third-space discussions. This means being careful not to represent the various voices emanating from classroom practices so as to arrange them into script and counterscript, them and us.

Studio Practices

> [W]e found ourselves struggling to articulate the value and meaning of what happens with student writers in Studio sessions and what we have learned by pushing past the boundaries of our own institutionally-inscribed assumptions.
>
> —Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson ("Repositioning")

As spatial praxis, Studio creates a space for students and instructor to scrutinize the very different pedagogies, assumptions, concerns, and content of writing instruction (represented through syllabi and assignments) that circulate throughout an institution but also remain discretely tucked away within individual writing classrooms. Just as importantly, Studio provides a space to address, question, and talk back to the people behind these official texts. Throughout the semester, as Studio instructors, we remain in contact with students' classroom teachers. We meet them in halls and use e-mail to inform them of their students' progress. We question the classroom teachers to enhance our own understanding of what they might be looking for in particular assignments and to exchange information about students' understanding or confusion about course assignments. Such interaction improves our instruction in Studio and contributes to a larger ongoing campus dialogue about the teaching of writing, which we hope will lead to reflection that critically sharpens the practice and theory of writing instruction of all teachers, ourselves included. We invite classroom teachers to attend a Studio session. Students can then directly ask questions of classroom teachers, and those teachers can observe and participate in the interactive inquiry of Studio, a practice we hope the teachers will take back into their own classrooms.

We also write memos describing Studio activities to classroom teachers, keeping them informed about work in which their students engage. These memos serve a variety of other purposes as well. For one, we do not send them out without first asking students to review them. Through this process, students get an additional chance to reflect on what they have accomplished in Studio. We also ask students to add to the memo, or write their own memos to their teachers about their work in Studio, giving Studio instructors an opportunity to reflect on what students consider to be, or not to be, significant. Indeed,

engaging the difference of viewpoints among students and instructor about Studio work can generate important third-space discussions.

These memos to teachers allow us to intervene in our campus's writing culture. They afford an opportunity to author a third-space discourse in the interstices of the various scripts and counterscripts of official documents. Among other things, we use these memos to represent our own approaches to writing alongside those of other teachers, giving them a chance to consider (just as we do in Studio sessions) how different approaches to writing may complement or collide with one another in productive or nonproductive ways.

For example, we use the memos to describe to other teachers what seems to work for individual students in Studios, offering them a chance to consider elements of their curricula that they might enhance or change or even disregard. By documenting what goes on in our interactions with students, and in a non-prescriptive manner, Studio memos provide teachers with a means through which they might critically reflect on their teaching methods and on ours:

> • The process of talking through really seems to help Justin [all student names are pseudonyms]; the more he talked and the more the group asked him about what he talked about, the more he found to write about.

> • During this session, Sharon also found out that reading her draft aloud helped her to locate many awkward sentences.

> • The Studio class felt Wendy could reorganize her draft, putting similar points together, and suggested she use the word "thing," which you tagged as repetitious, as a cue to cut to the chase, to be specific regarding her arguments.

> • Our Studio group examined the returned draft of Todd's paper on his traffic ticket. We felt he could handle your suggestions to add more detail and dialogue, since he was fluent in these matters in other areas of his paper. He was also confident he could address the matters of grammar and style himself, stating that since he had been submitting a draft—not a completed version—of his paper, he had not composed it with much attention to those areas. I suggested that he leave time during his writing process to attend to

matters of style and correctness, as these were among the matters you stressed in this preliminary grading.

• Bill also presented the outline he has in mind concerning his research project, and I talked about how research sometimes begins with an outline going into the project, how the research sometimes comes first, and how both the research and the project must remain flexible to new insights along the way.

• The Studio group discussed the "68" Danny received on a subject-verb agreement quiz. We talked about how vernaculars differed: I stressed to him that his usual way of talking is not wrong, but that rules of Standard Edited English were being stressed on the quiz. We talked about how he would not be able to trust his ear in many cases, since he is used to hearing verbs used in other ways. I suggested he study the passages that had been marked wrong toward the goal of locating patterns in his subject-verb usage and ultimately of recognizing these patterns in other contexts, a task which I told him is hard to do, but which will improve as he reads and writes more in college.

The above passages point to the range of conversations that the Studios generate. Given the small class size of Studios, we can delve more deeply into individual students' writing practices than can classroom teachers, many of whom are teaching two, three, or even four composition classes of twenty or more students. The fact that we are neither grading students nor designing their assignments also allows us more freedom to discuss, critically and rhetorically, the details of writing practice that intersect with larger issues of writing and language, issues such as the rhetorical choices involved in grammar and punctuation, or debates about dialects and Standard Edited English.

As a result of the space the Studios allow for our in-depth interaction with student writers, we also get to know students and their work in such a way that we can perhaps offer classroom teachers alternative means of engaging their students and students' texts:

• Much of our discussion also focused on what Heather confessed to be her feelings about feedback, as she says she typically feels "bashed" no matter how tactful the commentary. We discussed

as well Heather's reluctance to reveal private matters in her narrative for a public audience and how various omissions affected her paper.

• Since Ian had already received your feedback on the draft, we talked about the chances he might be taking if he should decide to move the draft in directions your comments did not address. He said he did want to do a little more to the draft in response to both our group and your comments before he submitted the paper.

These passages indicate issues that intersect in our Studio sessions, such as the politics of writing to teacher expectations and the ways personal insecurities and suspicions might impact academic discourse. They also point to ways the Studio can help students validate their concerns as well as their accomplishments. We find that the memos provide us with a means to act as liaisons for students, as well. We explain some of their motives for and perceptions about writing to teachers, and at the same time we highlight for teachers various student achievements:

• The class was generally impressed with Geoff's descriptive paper; we liked his comparisons ("vampire shadows") and word choice. Also, we liked his manner of organization as he describes his progress within his restricted line of sight.

• Students were impressed with Laurel's detail concerning the water tank in the waiting room, feeling that the scene expressed well the nervousness of the two girls.

• The group discussed at length Hank's use of "she" to describe the field, generally feeling it helped add a dimension of personality to the paper.

As a "split-space of enunciation" (to return to Bhabha's description of third space), the Studio does open up possibilities for new kinds of interactions that may lead to negotiating or at least discussing conflicting approaches to the teaching of writing. Paradoxically, however, at the same time the Studio is also driven by constraints that limit the kinds of dialogue that can occur. Consider the following memo Cindy as Studio instructor wrote to a classroom teacher:

I am writing to tell you how Jean is doing in Studio and invite you to make any suggestions about areas we might focus on. During the previous two weeks, we discussed researching topics related to the book you are reading. Jean narrowed her topic to "rape" and then to "acquaintance rape." I helped her get started on using the computer to search library materials (books and article citations), and she reported the next week that she had found a number of references she could use. We also went over a reasonable work plan and timeline for her completing her research paper. I suggested she have a draft by Nov. 12 to bring to Studio workshop so as to give her plenty of time to find more information and revise the paper by its due date. Jean is generally very quiet in Studio. I don't get a clear idea of how she is doing in English 111, and she hasn't brought any papers into our workshop. Let me know the areas we might work on or any other concerns you have.

This memo was written to a senior colleague who allows no revisions, assigns mostly in-class writing, and only a small number of out-of-class papers, primarily one research paper. The memo tries to open up dialogue about the writing process, such as drafting, workshopping, and revising, and about the content of the research project, but does not open discussion about the rhetorical situation of the writer or of the assignment, or conflicting social views about date rape, all issues that this teacher's pedagogy did not seem to welcome. The classroom teacher responded with a long complaint about the student's punctuation problems and grammar errors (she mentioned faulty parallelism, modifier errors, fragments, comma splices, fused sentences, and agreement errors) and characterized the student as one who "has refused to address" these problems when the first paper was returned. It's not clear, of course, how students could "address" these errors when they cannot revise their papers. There was no comment about the subject chosen for research, about its relations to the course reading or goals, or about Jean's thesis, beliefs, or argument.

This particular memo exchange illustrates the very real limits of curricular transformation that a Studio program faces, as well as the ways that Studio itself becomes complicit with values and approaches to writing external to it. Dialogue did not occur with that teacher, and change did not take place "out there" in the classroom. In fact, that classroom's "values" seeped into the Studio. As the Studio group worked with Jean to help her

craft a research paper without significant rhetorical context, Cindy had little success in getting students to inquire into the social and rhetorical complexities of writing a paper about date rape. Who would be an audience for such a paper? What does the writer want to say to that particular audience and why? Does the writer have a personal story connected to this issue? What do other people, in different positions, think about date rape and why might what they think be related to their positions? Tense about meeting the expectations of teachers who want one-shot, non-rhetorically based research papers (with perfect grammar and punctuation), students want to shut down competing interpretations and inquiry as off the mark and too risky. Students' discussions move centripetally back to reinscribing a current-traditional pedagogy of mastery of a set of subskills as the sum total of writing.

The Spaces and Places of Lived Lives

> [O]ther defining qualities of Thirdspace: a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in spatial praxis, the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power.
>
> —Edward W. Soja

> Staying around is half the battle.
>
> —Tom Fox

Studio space is frankly not utopian at all. Leading a Studio is hard work, requiring flexibility and improvisation, tolerance, and some complicity with "norms" and values one may wish to contest. We do not wish to endorse acceptance or passivity; we try to work counter-hegemonically against the emplaced practices and values we disagree with, but often what we are most aware of is how difficult it is to change the status quo. Two examples stand out. Not only are composition teachers sometimes not open to new kinds of interactions, as in the case of Jean's teacher; many adjunct faculty who have no office space or teach at off-campus community sites are simply unavailable for student conferences and unreachable through e-mail, memos, or phone calls. We are not blaming adjuncts for this com-

munication gap. It reveals the deeper institutional structure, its exploitation of part-time workers, and the low status of writing courses that are seen as easily and cheaply staffed by part-time workers, and this institutional reality impacts on our most vulnerable, "at-risk" students in highly specific ways. We use the Studio to discuss and prepare students to become more effective in conferences with their teachers, yet many students and even the Studio instructors often cannot talk with writing teachers, cannot ask questions, and debate or negotiate curricular issues. In Studio we see the real effects of this structural problem on students who don't ever communicate with their teacher and who have a sometimes shockingly limited grasp of what is going on in class. Unfortunately, as Studio instructors we see too often that, whatever the pedagogy and assumptions driving a writing class, they remain unknowable and unimaginable to students.

As Soja states "the lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices" are both real and imagined. In the gap created by little or no communication with their teachers, students' imagined "scripts" become a powerful unofficial curriculum that they bring with them to the classroom and into Studio sessions themselves. We hear these phrases again and again in Studio: "I just want to write what my teacher wants," "I have nothing to say," "I have no writing work to do," "Just tell me how to do this paper." We work to supplant these scripts with others, like "Let's do some exploratory writing to uncover something you want to say," "There's always writing work to do," "There's no single 'correct' way to write a paper," "Let's talk about the politics of just writing what the teacher wants," "Let's talk about your history of schooling." This last suggestion usually seems completely off-topic to students, and yet to unravel and examine the powerful forces of entrenched student and teacher practices firmly in place often does mean asking students to critically reflect on their past experiences of school and to imagine new ways of thinking about the classroom that will supplant the old scripts.

After leading Studios for several years now, we have undergone some changes, as well. We are both much more attentive to the rhetorical situations of our writing assignments as we have seen first-hand how student shortcomings may often be the result of unexplained or unexamined contexts set up by our assignments. Our responding to student writing has likewise been transformed. Studio discussions again and again reveal that students cannot understand teacher comments on papers, however well-intentioned the teacher was when writing them. (We have been just as guilty as others in this regard.) As Studio instructors, we've become much more

aware of the waste of energy and time taken in marking papers, when those markings seem opaque and indecipherable to students and even to us as practiced teachers! Several instructors on our campus use audiotape-recorded commentary. Playing these tapes back in Studio sessions was a transforming experience: Students got to hear the nuanced way that an attentive reader responds to a paper. Tape-recorded comments lend themselves to deeper discussions of content, arrangement, and rhetorical choices; allow the teacher to pose broader questions that remain text-based; and make discussion of contexts much easier. After one semester teaching Studio classes, Cindy saw these advantages and started using tape-recorded responses, changing a twenty-year practice of written commentary. And while John still writes comments on student papers, he now follows each marking session with a one-to-one conference to explain further and to negotiate with students the significance of his comments in relation to each assignment.

We continue to map the relations between our Studios and their intersections with other contexts in which our students write, bringing the third-space potentials of Studio practice into dialogue with the realities of the institutional, social, and cultural places teachers and students inhabit. In the second year of our program, we moved Studio sessions to our campus's Writing Center, which shares the basement suite with the Office of Learning Assistance. Thus, a place and an administrative division that was once on the periphery of our understanding is now closer to the center of our practice. As we lead Studio sessions in this place, we hope we are now more visitors than intruders, able to share and learn ideas about writing, instructional practices, and dreams for improving the culture of writing on our campus.

Authors' Acknowledgement

Notes

1. We are indebted to Pegeen Reichert Powell for her reworking of the concept of "skill" and would like to acknowledge her important contribution to redefining this term in her dissertation, "(re)Writing Skills and Changing Standards in Composition Pedagogy, Educational Policy, and Public Debate."

2. Miami University has three campuses in Ohio: the main campus in Oxford, Ohio, is a selective admissions, residential campus, specializing in liberal arts undergraduate education and selected graduate programs. The English department is the largest on campus and offers Master's and Doctoral degrees in creative writing, literature and composition and rhetoric. Miami's two regional campuses, located in Middletown, Ohio, and Hamilton, Ohio, are primarily two-year colleges with open admissions. Faculty in Arts and Sciences on all three campuses are members of their home department in Oxford.

3. The evolution of the placement procedures at our regional campus is a complicated story in itself. See Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni, "Rhetoric and the Writer's Profile: Problematizing Directed Self Placement" for a full account.

4. We put "post" in parentheses to indicate our position of continuing to teach process along with postprocess social theory and critical dialogue. Welch argues that compositionists should "remain at the intersection between 'process' and 'post-process' conceptions of composing (163-64), a position compatible with a third-space approach. For further discussion of postprocess, see Kent, and Dobrin.

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