THESE ARE TWO EXCERPTS FROM THE SAME BOOK: *GEOGRAPHIES OF WRITING: INHABITING PLACES AND ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE* BY NEDRA REYNOLDS.

Excerpt from **INTRODUCTION**
(Pages 1-4)

In one of the most well-known and influential rhetoric texts in the canon, Phaedrus is on his way out of the city, going for a walk "outside the walls," when he meets Socrates and shares his belief that his walk in the country will be "more refreshing than a stroll in the city squares" (Hamilton 21). Socrates joins Phaedrus, where they soon come to the Ilissus; Phaedrus spots a tall plane tree, and they settle there to hear and discuss the speech that Phaedrus has with him. Socrates seems so enchanted with the place and waxes so poetically about it that Phaedrus comments, "So far from being like a native, you resemble . . . a visitor being shown the sights by a guide. This comes of your never going abroad beyond the frontiers of Attica or even, as far as I can see, outside the actual walls of the city" (26). Socrates replies that he stays in the city because his love of learning, especially about human nature, keeps him among people. As he puts it, "the fields and trees won't teach me anything." In this opening scene, as the translator tells the reader, Socrates is in unfamiliar territory—and such an excursion "is quite contrary to his usual habits" (21).

Habitually, then, Socrates hangs out in the city, and through these opening lines Plato draws attention to the role of place in conversations, persuasion , and learning. While critics commonly note that the scene suggests seduction, the dialogue also develops from the myth and storytelling that accompanies this place. In fact, the myth-laden spot by the stream embodies those foundations of an oral culture that Plato is loathe to lose—and which he believes will be lost through a new culture of writing. The act of writing , Plato worried, diminishes the role of memory and makes other parts of the mind fuzzy and sloppy. Perhaps Plato sets the scene in Phaedrus so deliberately because he wanted to help readers to remember it: in a memorable setting, his ideas about love, the soul, and philosophical rhetoric are more likely to take hold, not just in the pliable mind of Phaedrus but also in readers of this carefully crafted dialogue.

Within the brief introductory space of this dialogue, Socrates and Phaedrus walk, cross boundaries, attend to the history of a place, settle in beside a stream, and begin to compose speeches from a store of half-remembered and half-created lines of argument. Most acts of composing take place in similar ways, drawn from a store of remembered and well-rehearsed spatial practices that come from the everyday and become engrained, habitual, embodied. And because readers and writers don't just "cross over" the margins of discrete discourse

communities from alienation to acceptance, we need a sense of place—for texts and classrooms and cultures—defined by contestations and differences that extend well beyond boundary lines. Places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of habitus. Theories of writing, communication, and literacy, this book argues, should reflect this deeper understanding of place.

As Plato knew and as I explore here, memory and place, location and argument, walking and learning, are vitally and dramatically linked in our personal histories and personal geographies. Places evoke powerful human emotions because they become layered, like sediment or a palimpsest, with histories and stories and memories. When places are inhabited in the fullest sense, they become embodied with the kinds of stories, myths, and legends that the spot beside the Ilissus holds; they can stimulate and refresh— or disturb and unnerve—their visitors.

Socrates, displaced from his usual haunt, may be more "open" to new ideas because he is in unfamiliar territory, or more close-minded or harder to convince because he is not occupying his usual hood. Many educators believe that only when people are "moved"—perhaps literally—can they be persuaded to see from a different point of view. However, moving them becomes the hard part when most people, like Socrates, live their daily lives within a very small radius.

How do people experience space, and what might that tell us about how they experience other forms of the social world? How do students, writers, or learners experience spaces and places in the everyday, and how might this inform cultural and material theories of discourse? What do "sense of place," pathways, habits, or dwelling have to do with learning? These are the questions this book explores through such concepts as mental mapping, streetwork, and thirdspace—all ideas important to cultural geography that I want to claim in working towards geographic rhetorics informed by the material, the visual, the everyday. My qualitative research conducted with students in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds informs the argument that composition studies needs cultural writing theories and material literacy practices that engage with the metaphorical – ways to imagine space – without ignoring places and spaces—the actual locations where writers write, learners learn, and workers work. I attempt to reimagine acts of writing through spatial practices of the everyday—walking, mapping, and dwelling—and through different spatial scales: the body, the street, the city.

This book makes three closely related contributions: one theoretical, to re-imagining composing as spatial, material, and visual; one political, to understanding the sociospatial construction of difference; and one pedagogical, to teaching writing as a set of spatial practices not unlike

those we use in moving through the world. *Geographies of Writing* sees writing instruction as rooted in time and space and within material conditions that affect students who are often transient residents of learning communities; "students pass through, and only pause briefly within, classrooms; they dwell within and visit various other locations, locations whose politics and discourse conventions both construct and identify them" (Drew 60).

Many of our experiences in life "take place" in a location, and then we draw upon characteristics of those locations to construct memories and to judge or respond to other places. Because homes, neighborhoods, parks, cafes, or classrooms can be so emotionally loaded, it's difficult, methodologically, to study the relationships of people and places, or to understand how some places can feel like home to some while alienating others. But it is urgent for us to consider how spaces impact upon learning, reading, and writing when opportunities for communicating expand through electronic technologies while, at the same time, moving through the world seems more difficult or more dangerous. This study of space and place, geography and mapping, location and materiality, develops from and responds to a rich and diverse literature on postmodern spatiality, cultural geography, and the sociospatial construction of difference.

Understanding the importance of lifeworlds is one place to begin in understanding difference, otherness, and the politics of exclusion—topics that define the causes of critical literacy, social justice, and liberatory education. Understanding difference via geography, therefore, is the widest territory I want to claim for this project. On a smaller spatial scare, if we could discover more about how people learn about boundaries and borders, when they may cross them without penalty; or how they can slip in without being detected; or what the safe times of day are, then we could apply these findings to a richer understanding of how people learn to read, write, and interact with texts. Imagining acts of writing as material—carving out time and space, in particular circumstances that differ for each writer—opens up new spaces in which to study and understand literacy and the construction of meaning.

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It's a cliché to describe learning or education as a journey, but the journeys we take to "expand our horizons" cannot happen without other journeys, like the daily ride on the bus to campus. Without ignoring the "higher" journey that such a bus ride makes possible, I want to start with the bus and stay with the bus, seeing what we can learn about the social production of space that repeats itself from the bus route to the lecture hall to the library to the pub and back home again. I rode that bus with students on many days for seven months. I lived in university housing, surrounded by students for neighbors; I ate the same take-away and drank in the same pubs, occasionally with them, and walked the same routes to campus or to the city center. I

shopped in the same shops, and I waited with them in queues to use the photocopiers in the library. I wen to lectures, sat with them, and took notes. I was never "one of them," but I shared their space and tried to pay attention.

Excerpt from **CHAPTER 4: STREETWORK: SEEING DIFFERENCE GEOGRAPHICALLY**
(Pages 110-114)

Disney World—one of the cultural geographers' prime targets for critique—opens with a fairy tale castle but soon becomes Main Street, USA, where commerce, charm, and the concrete come together in a swirling combination of nostalgia, patriotism, and an idyllic capitalist landscape. Places are said to be "Disneyfied" when they seem contrived, false, inauthentic—a pace that's trying too hard to seem safe or desirable, like gated communities. The Disneyfication of places, as chapter 1 referred to, has left us with the task of distinguishing authentic from inauthentic places, or with determining the betweens—a task that requires elements of walking, learning to see, mapping, and inhabiting the streets. Of all cultural locations, *the street* is perhaps the most contested, the most up for grabs, and the most provocative.

A rich literature about the street in geography, urban studies, architecture, and cultural theory provides ways of seeing the street as a site of textured, complex everyday practices emblematic of cultural difference. In "The Street in the Making of Popular Geographical Knowledge," David Crouch looks at ordinary folk knowledges about life "at street level." Defining the street as "a fragmented and uneven broken series of bits," used in numerous and diverse ways, Crouch also claims that the street organizes local knowledge (162) and its full of signs of commodification but also provides a place to be seen. Most importantly, streets become "embodied" stories, memories, and all sorts of meanings (164); that is, "the body itself is important in the way we make images of the street (166). To illustrate this embodiment, Crouch refers to children interviewed about their use of a vacant lot, partially concealed from the street, which they transform into a place with meaning, "another world" separate from the run-down flats where they live (167). The children take artifacts from home—a pram, stools, clothes—to remake the space, to transform it. In this way, then, the vacant lot becomes a space ambiguous in ownership, control, and identity (168).

In "The Culture of the Indian Street," Tim Edensor offers examples of "the rich diversity of social activity in Indian streets" in order to make a case for the highly regulated state of the western street (205). Edensor suggests that western tourists are drawn to the exotic, sensual nature of nonwestern streets precisely because their own streets are overregulated. From the figure of

the *flanuer* found in Baudelaire and Benjamin, writers have been fascinated by how people navigate or enact agency in the streets. Whether it's a rhetoric of walking in the city (de Certeau) or the battle cry of taking to the streets in protest, the street holds tremendous metaphoric power and captures our imagination. At the same time, however, streets represents sites of fear and vulnerability, especially for women, whose use of public space is limited to "defensive tactics" and leads to the development of a geography of fear (Valentine, "Geography" 386). Geographies of fear may or may not correspond with geographies of crime; statistics about "where" crime takes place are irrelevant because the threat is there, just the same (Hutchings, 32).

The intense conflict over streets can be illustrated by the plans of many urban developers and city planners in the building boom after World War II, when in New York City a developer named Robert Moses had a vision of the city completely interconnected by wide, fast, multilane highways and interstates. In the name of urban renewal and with the vision inspired by federal dollars, Moses built sixteen crosstown expressways, a building push that destroyed neighborhoods and the daily lives of tens of thousands of people (*New York City).*

Jane Jacobs set out to fight Moses, and she and her followers rose up to stop the destruction of the West Village and Soho by the construction of an expressway through lower Manhattan. An activist for city life, Jacobs was one of the first to resist the relentless modernist crusade against the street, a vision embraced by Le Corbusier and his followers who valued skyscrapers and interstates and thought the streets were dark and dirty. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs made popular the saying in geography studies, "eyes upon the street" (35), which she used not as Big Brother surveillance but to express the importance of long-term inhabitance to a neighborhood, particularly in the effectiveness of residential surveillance—one of her three requirements for a successful city neighborhood. Shopkeepers and stoop-sitters and those going about their chores keep an eye on the street, alert to trouble for the children and others. Rather than minding their own business, neighbors check the street routinely for anything out of the ordinary. Jacobs is not without her critics (see Berman 323-26), but her work still draws the attention of geographers and urbanists who study behaviors on the street or who study the history of urban movements. Putting trashcans away or making trips to the corner store are ways of inhabiting a place, and the small, routine acts help us understand larger cultural issues—like eating. Who eats on the street and who doesn't? What does eating in public represent?

Geographer Gill Valentine analyzes the tension between the historical taboo in England against eating on the street and the growing "foodscape" of the streets, where takeaway shops and vending machines and the chains of pastry shops, along with rushed lifestyles, are making eating on the street more common. Interested in street cultural generally, Valentine explores

"the relationship between public acts of consumption and the production of the public space of 'the street'" ("Food 192). Like many other cultural practices, the taboo against eating on the street developed as a means of regulating the boundary between public and private (193). Eating on the run, in public, is considered by some to be animalistic, uncivilized, or at least unmannerly. According to Valentine, food "has therefore played an important role… in producing the street as a particular social experiment" and as a "civilised space" (197). As with many other landscapes, a "blurring" is now taking place, a breaking down of once rigidly maintained social codes that makes the street "a more liminal space somewhere betwixt and between home, canteen, and restaurant" (202). Eating on the street marks a "private" activity made public, and these types of blurred boundaries are difficult for people. The homeless, for example, trigger such strong reactions, in Berkeley and elsewhere, precisely because they engage in private acts, such as sleeping or urinating, in public spaces (Mitchell). A bourgeois family picnic in a park may be acceptable, but standing on a street corner wolfing down a grinder is more problematic. Sipping from a can of soft drink is one thing; drinking out of a bottle concealed by a brown paper bag is quite another.

What is for some a benign cultural practice—eating a hot dog from a vendor—represents to others a violation of social codes or ill-mannered behavior; there streets, therefore, are a huge borderlands for any number of "others," those marked by class, race, or abilities. In *Eating on the Street; Teaching Literacy in a Multicultural Society,* David Schaafsma writes of an incident in a Detroit literacy project where educators were in conflict about a particular practice: "Should teachers confront poor black children about eating on the street, a conflict related to broader issues of authority and cultural difference?" (xviii). These leader-educators were divided about how to respond to this practice, which gives Schaafsma a way to illustrate the importance of storytelling about everyday conflicts. For this book about literacy, eating on the street works as a metaphor for larger conflicts and operates, too, as a material practice, involving real streets, real kids, and real food. I am interested in Schaafma's choice to focus on this particular conflict because eating on the street is, in fact, such a powerful emblem for issues of public/private, for transgressing boundaries, and for codes of cultural difference.

Street practices, formed from a swirling combination of walking and inhabiting, are of increasing interest to composition and literacy studies, as service learning, tutoring, and community writing programs invite students to explore the streets and cultures of local communities. However, this chapter argues that the "academic enthusiasm for difference" (Sibley 23) must be tempered by the sociospatial realities of everyday life. As composition scholars and practitioners advocate leaving behind familiar terrain in order to understand cultural difference and the complex conditions related to research and learning, a growing trend has emerged in higher education to send students out of the classroom, in various ways, in order to position the learner as an outsider, a foreigner, an other, a positioning that, in its

discomfort, often stimulates reflection. At the same time, one of the biggest pedagogical and ethical challenges for critical educators involves wrangling with the concept of "difference." Particularly when they're not so inclined, how can people be motivated to engage with lifeworlds other than their own and then use that experience to enact social change? Giving students the experience of a contact zone takes many forms, but one of the most common in recent years has been to send students "out of place," by asking them to go to community centers or other locations outside of the university, and then, in one version, to write about their experiences there. Those advocating service learning and those committed to the study of literacy practices recognize the need to move beyond or outside the academy, to the streets, to offer students "real" rhetorical situations (Heilker) or to understand the material conditions of writers' lives (Aronson; Gere). Sending students off campus serves to magnify differences between the college student and, say, the homeless person, the migrant farmworker, or the community leader they've been assigned to encounter.

How students *interpret* the difference they encounter tells us a great deal about their understanding of the social-ideological workings of culture, and, the theory goes, the experience makes students better writers, or at least better citizens—*if,* that is, social and cultural biases are not simply further entrenched (see Herzberg). Depending on the community service learning design, students may or may not set out equipped with a methodological awareness and a theoretical perspective that will help them in coming to terms with their experience—and, we hope, help them to develop a "social imagination" (a term Herzberg borrows from Kurt Spellmeyer). Advocates of service learning will testify to the transformative nature of these assignments—that students are changed and enlightened and that many of them continue to serve in their assigned and then adopted communities long after the required part ends. Despite reciprocity and transformation, the starting point is, nevertheless, one of a requirement being imposed by an authority, that is, they "have" to go. Since geographic research tells us of the reluctance of many people to leave their familiar terrain—precisely my point in the preceding chapter—or if it's true that students will not initiate such exploration on their own, then it might be worth thinking about the ways to reconcile this reluctance to travel with a growing trend towards service-related or community fieldwork, a trend that extends into many forms of disciplinary fieldwork. If we believe that white, middle-class students, in particular, are too comfortable and too safe and too invested in the status quo, how do we give them educational opportunities that will make them decidedly uncomfortable—a condition where learning might happen—without creating a "punishing pedagogy" (Forbes)?