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## **Review: Rhonda C. Grego and Nancy S. Thompson. *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach*.**

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Over the last twenty years, space and place have become increasingly common tropes in composition studies, resonating with the recognition of the social construction of writing and identity. Bridging the divide between composition practice and spatial theory, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach* articulates an "institutionally aware" methodology called the writing studio, one that seeks a "third space" location outside the usual educational and disciplinary binaries. The writing studio is an "alongside" environment where student writers compose, discuss, and critique their work in a non-classroom setting in order to examine how their own positioning inside and outside the academy influences what, how, and why they write. Grego and Thompson's book brings to composition a much needed awareness of third spaces, a concept borrowed from postmodern geographer and urban planner Edward Soja.

Grego and Thompson's prologue describes the exigency for their taking a studio approach: in the early 1990's the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education abolished basic writing at four year state supported colleges and universities. When the University of South Carolina (USC) decided not to offer "remedial" writing courses, Grego and Thompson created alternative resources for student writers entering the university. The studio approach emerged as a way to address student needs: small groups of students along with a staff group facilitator



met frequently to discuss, analyze, and work on assignments. By addressing writing as an interface between local and larger institutional interests, Grego and Thompson's studio approach brings a heightened awareness of how institutional positioning and power relations define student writing and basic writers. The authors attend closely to the physical layout of the studio: design, body proximities, tools, furniture, technological resources, and equipment. The studio is explained as a "spatialized and spatializing methodology" that offers the potential for institutional change through making power relations and disciplinary expectations explicit, specifically by identifying how and where students and instructors locate themselves and their work.

Chapter One constructs a critical framework for their approach. Calling attention to the influence of institutional geography and material conditions on local and historical experiences, Grego and Thompson identify the ways that institutional and disciplinary rhetorics can disembodied and distance both students and instructors from serious engagement with the complex dynamics of everyday work places. The gap between theoretical and pedagogical perspectives and the "real" work done in classrooms and on campuses challenges over-generalized and abstract notions of space and place in the academy. To address this oversight, Grego and Thompson suggest their own "interactional inquiry," a research method that utilizes small groups, workshops, qualitative strategies, and a feminist ethos to deconstruct traditional research roles and call attention to the specific, complex social relations that instructors and students bring with them to an institutional setting.

Chapter Two continues such institutional critique while introducing the work of Kenneth Burke and cultural geographers Edward Soja and Doreen Massey. Starting with Burke's pentadic rhetorical analysis of "scene," the authors establish writing as encompassing many different, overlapping, and conflicting geographies. The studio exists "outside but alongside" the classroom, taking advantage of the tensions and gaps between institutional and everyday experiences, combining internal and external analysis. Grego and Thompson then draw on Soja's theory of third space, the liminal, in-between places not rigidly



structured by institutional, social, and spatial conventions. The authors imagine the studio as being able to shift across and between disciplinary and institutional areas and boundaries to open up and decentralize student writing. Moreover, because the studio thirdspace is not a typical classroom controlled by curriculum, program of study, or subject matter, it recontextualizes traditional student/teacher power relationships.

Chapters Three and Four move from theoretical discussions to concrete examples, exploring the studio approach in three different institutional settings. Using thick description, writing samples, and quotes from participants, Grego and Thompson identify how student writers and studio staff are positioned within their studios and in their specific institutions' geographies. Chapter Three examines how student writers in studio groups engaged institutional and spatial awareness to analyze their work and their location, while Chapter Four focuses on the experiences of the studio staff, adding disciplinary positioning to geographies that instructors and graduate students must navigate. These chapters serve as models of interactional inquiry research, a method that seeks not only to discover knowledge to create and map settings and interactions through collaboration, sharing, talking, and storytelling. Even when articulating their methodology the authors include aspects of spatial awareness, describing the physical proximity of researchers and participants sitting together and discussing experiences, albeit often marginalized by their own institutions.

In a powerfully written Epilogue Grego and Thompson trace the personal and professional repercussions of the studio approach, measuring its successes and set-backs on institutional and individual levels. Using personal accounts, the authors highlight the risks inherent in having students and instructors question an educational institution's power. Ironically, though the studio approach had been adopted by their university, the authors recount how the institution questioned the disciplinary and professional value of interactional inquiry as a valid method of research, denying one of the authors tenure and a position in the hierarchy. Still, Grego and Thompson argue that scholars in



composition should incorporate analyses of space and place , place and material conditions into other modes of rhetorical analysis, s..... ing way to highlight how external, material conditions influence our writing lives.

While *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces* does not address community writing or service learning, it is easy to recognize the value that the studio approach could bring to explaining, creating, and sustaining the “alongside,” cooperative status of university/community partnerships. Likewise, although Grego and Thompson identify the writing center at USC as “centralized” and too removed (institutionally and spatially) from the specific needs of student writers and instructors, the potential for framing the writing center as an “in between” place to achieve third space positioning through the use of that invites interactional inquiry seems promising. By exploring the “flows, forces, and tensions” between everyday, institutional, and disciplinary spaces and places, Grego and Thompson’s studio approach offers practical and *material* methods for applying third space concepts in composition.