

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis explores the potential applications for 3<sup>rd</sup> generation activity theory in writing studio spaces, using the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio at Oregon State University as a focal point. David R. Russell, Nedra Reynolds, and Deborah Brandt have all investigated systemic and communal elements in student writing processes, while Cydney Alexis and Hannah J. Rule have focused on the material culture of writing as the context that foregrounds student writing habits. The asymmetrical exigencies of that material culture of writing can provide the data-rich empirical ground for investigation that Pamela Takayoshi speculates about, especially when this culture of writing is examined with particular focus on the public spaces in which students undertake academic writing tasks. The Undergrad Research and Writing Studio, at Oregon State University, is one such public writing space. Activity theory is a valuable lens for such an investigation; using Clay Spinuzzi's "pulse" can help to articulate the human burden, for students, of navigating the gap between expectations of writing and resources of space.

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The Writer's Path: Exploring the Writing Studio Through the Lens of Activity Theory

by  
Ruth Sylvester

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Ruth Sylvester, Author

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The author expresses sincere appreciation:

To my parents, Andy and Sally Sylvester, whose commitment to writing, at work and in the home, fostered my own commitment to writing, by myself and with others.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Tereza, whose leadership and work ethic inspired me to continue with writing center work, and whose guidance has provided the impetus for my academic career.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction: A Review of Writing Center Pedagogies**

The writing journey that produced this thesis would have been impossible without the scholarly work of two very different academic voices: Marilyn Cooper, who published “The Ecology of Writing” in 1986, and Stephen North, who published “The Idea of a Writing Center” in 1984. While the two essays are not directly pedagogically connected, they both examine how infrastructure supports, or does not support, writers. Both of them attune to the pressures that writers face in working environments. As part of their respective missions to articulate the ecology of writing and the idea of a writing center, Cooper and North both deal with the construction of the ideal writer. North’s piece investigates the inaccuracy of the expectations placed on student writers, and the corresponding inaccuracy of teachers’ perceptions about the function of a writing center. In view of these inaccuracies, North points out the constraints that writing center professionals like himself face with regard to institutional recognition and workplace security for employees and student writers, and makes these constraints present to his audience by introducing a brief but influential taxonomy of workspaces that a writing center should not be confused for - “the grammar and drill center, the fix-it shop, the first-aid station” (North 437). Cooper directly references the myth of the ideal writer as an isolated writer, and she portrays this isolated writer in a manner that parallels North’s taxonomy: “The solitary author... simulates how his text will be read by reading it over himself, making the final revisions necessary to assure its success when he abandons it to the world of which he is not a part” (Cooper 365-366).

In the 35+ years that have passed since these pieces were published, writing center scholarship and composition theory have continued to align in the search for more effective ways to support the needs of individual student writers, both inside the classroom and out. In the same time frame, writers have encountered significant new contexts for writing outside the classroom. Current student writers experience the social and spatial dimensions of writing very differently than student writers in 1984 or 1986, and the institutional illusions of the ideal writer have changed to fit these new dimensions. Sites for writing, some public, some private, some virtual, continue to influence the experiences of student writers. This thesis will explore the potential of university writing studios as sites where student writers undertake tasks of inventional composition, using 3rd generation activity theory as a framework to describe the supportive infrastructure that writing studios can provide to actual (rather than ideal) student writers.

When Deborah Brandt accepted the Exemplar Award at the Conference on College Communication and Composition in March, 2017, she offered a miniature narrative of the first public site of writing that she experienced: “I joined my father in the newsroom, which was one big word factory: eight reporters at our desks, no cubicles, talking on the phone, clacking on the typewriters, carrying stories over to the editor, who would mark them up with his thick blue pencil and send them in a pneumatic tube to the typesetters upstairs” (Brandt 126). Brandt described the newsroom her father wrote in as a physical space that witnessed diverse writing processes within a workplace context. This example is notable because the newsroom, as Brandt’s father experienced it, would have been both analog and non-

academic. A workplace environment for writing processes in the 21st century has an academic analogue in the writing centers that are publicly housed on university campuses. The explicitly academic nature of these spaces informs the workplace context of the composition processes occurring in real time. Brandt's newsroom, by contrast, functioned so well because the materials of writing were omnipresent in it, because the stakes of that writing were legible even to newcomers like Brandt, and because the interactions of the working writers, with one another and with the texts they composed, remained the defining trait of the space. While the stakes of the newsroom grow ever higher, the material contexts of public writing workspaces continue to adapt to technological advancements. Writing studios are a recent development in the realm of public, academic writing spaces. Studio pedagogy in writing center contexts dynamically juxtaposes the liminal timescale of individual student writing processes with the communal pressure of public academic participation. The incorporation of elements of space design and the commitment to interactive, visible, and iterative dimensions of process demonstrate how studio pedagogy aligns with and supports the common aims of a writing center to make composition tasks legible, tangible, and navigable for student writers at varying levels.

When the Undergraduate Writing Center at Oregon State University became the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio, this name change signaled a shift toward the transformation of the processes of writing and research for undergraduate students. Such a shift also signified that the studio's identity as a physical site for composition would be modulated by diffuse and personal objects. Studio pedagogy in

writing center contexts casts writing tasks as visible, physical workplace tasks that can benefit from purposeful collaborative student-to-student interactions. Tasks of composition in such public sites of writing are different for each student; these tasks are human, asymmetrical, and original. Thus, the application of activity theory to studio pedagogy, focusing in on a particular studio space (in this case, the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio at Oregon State University) can yield insight into the patterns of student involvement in the material culture of writing at that academic location. In order to explain how activity theory, as conceptualized in its 3rd generation by Clay Spinuzzi, can describe student and staff navigation of the writing center activity system in studio space, I will begin by offering background on some of the writing center pedagogies that have preceded and informed studio pedagogy. Chapter 1 investigates the influence of Stephen North's "Idea of a Writing Center" on later writing center work, with particular regard for the ways that student behaviors in writing center space can inform student interactions with writing center staff members, including peer tutors. Chapter 1 also provides a very brief introduction to studio pedagogy in writing center contexts. Chapter 2 describes the physical context of the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio (hereafter, the URWS) at Oregon State University according to principles of 3rd generation activity theory as articulated by Clay Spinuzzi. Chapter 3 explores the potential for empirical composition research in writing studios like the URWS by invoking Marilyn Cooper's ecological lens of composition in tandem with the principles of 3rd generation activity theory.

Reviewing Writing Center Pedagogies

Stephen North, in “The Idea of A Writing Center,” articulated the need for writing center pedagogy that could function separately from a classroom, with opportunities for student self-determination. North’s framework imagines a writing workplace both distinct from the classroom and distinctly marginal, and North accomplishes the distinction of marginality by articulating what a writing center should not be: neither a garrett, or a fix-it shop, or a basement, even though many writing centers continue to be housed in basements and quonset huts and narrow, poorly lighted rooms (North 437). Those rooms are still workplaces for student writing, workplaces that acknowledge student agency and autonomy differently than a classroom could.

Though North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center” only briefly mentions student “work,” the essay’s insistence on identifying writing centers as distinct from classrooms points toward student autonomy in writing and to students’ right to a space in which they can undertake writing without the supervision of the classroom teacher (North 434). North separates the student “work” of writing, that is, composition, from grammar and punctuation, which he deems “subskills.” In this way he demonstrates how the time-bound academic processes of composition occur on different terms for each student writer and must be recognized and accommodated as such. North asserts that writing centers remain on the margins of academic discourse because teachers may not recognize the significance of a space for student self-determination in composition. He was writing before the smartphone and before the personal computer - the year my father was supposed to graduate from college - in a university environment in which students would sign up in teams to practice

programming a computer in a library. North's convictions that a writing center is neither "the grammar and drill center, the fixit shop, the first-aid station" retains the academic character of the space (North 437). A writing center, for North, is a necessarily academic space that is not yet being recognized as such. Similar spaces existed, at the time of North's writing, and these were recognized as writing workplaces, but these workplaces were not academic. Newsrooms like the one where Deborah Brandt worked with her father would have been such workplaces.

North's essay is light on pedagogical unpacking or exploration of implications beyond the writing center, but he does observe that "nearly everyone who writes likes - and needs - to talk about his or her writing" (North 439). This liking and needing is differently legible to writing center professionals in the digital age, and "talk" about writing can manifest in many forms, notably augmented by word processors, synchronous video communications, and smartphone cameras, among other technologies. But the dynamic nature of the "talk" about writing, and the urgency of student self-determination in undertaking processes of writing, remains salient today. North asserts that "teachers, as teachers, do not need and cannot use a writing center: only writers need it, only writers can use it" (North 440). Nowhere in the piece does North establish an exclusionary binary relationship between teacher and writer (that is, nowhere does North insist that one must be exclusively a teacher or exclusively a writer). Thus, the separation is between the teacher as supervisor and the writer as independent worker. The models of aid for student writers that North decries - the "grammar and drill center, the fixit shop, the first-aid station" and the "labs" dating back to the 1930s - these models do not provide avenues for students to explore

writing on their own terms, but rather in terms of the degree of supervision necessary for them to complete an assignment (North 438). When North expresses how writing centers “must be accepted on their own terms, as places whose primary responsibility, whose only reason for being, is to talk to writers,” he implies that the “talk” is the mode that sets writing centers apart from traditional classrooms (North 446).

North’s categorization of fix-it shops, first-aid stations, and grammar and drill centers as separate from the mission of the writing center does not necessarily disavow the pedagogical elements that those supervisory modes of student aid embody. Rather, by evoking the images of the shop, the drill center, and the first-aid station, North is trying to distance the imagined writing center from the “writing clinic” and the “writing lab.” His task in making the writing center separately legible was a daunting one in 1984, when writing workplaces were more marked as physically distinct from academic spaces. In the digital age, however, writers in professional office settings (such as journalists and software engineers) use the same tools for writing as a college student visiting the writing center. This universality offers the writing center more ways to become legible as a workspace mirroring professional working conditions.

Thus, North’s articulation of the writing center as being on the margins can be made differently legible in the digital age. North’s implied evocation of a workspace, distinct from the classroom, in which students could pursue writing on their own terms, “preferably to someone who will really listen, and knows how to talk about writing too” persist in pedagogies that support student autonomy to move through writing center space (North 434). These pedagogies can exist in other spaces, like the

classroom, and their adaptation for writing center focus forms an important trajectory in writing center history.

#### Writing Center History: Labs, Clinics, And Fix-It Shops

Neal Lerner, in his book *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, directly answers North's distaste for the term "lab" as applied to writing center spaces. He traces the history of writing laboratories from the 1890s to the 1930s. In this history Lerner explicitly links the term "lab" to pedagogies that support an experimental orientation toward the interactions of students and teachers in writing. Lerner conceptualizes the writing laboratory as a pedagogical commonplace with lasting influence both inside the classroom and out. He claims that laboratory pedagogy is the ancestor of the " 'workshop' or 'conferencing' approach following the work of Donald Graves and Donald Murray at the University of New Hampshire, who popularized the term," since it encompasses, in a one-to-one context, "a striving for authentic activity that embodies the experimental nature of the laboratory" (Lerner 32). Though Lerner traces this genealogy toward the modern construction of a writing center, when he describes people who move through a space in which this pedagogy is implemented, he does include the teacher. Lerner's tracing of the teacher's interactions with students who learned a variety of concepts, not only writing, in a laboratory pedagogy classroom, fits well with his claims about the pedagogical innovations of Donald Murray. Donald Murray's approach to writing institutes the teacher as a guide who supervises students as they move through stages of revision; the guiding teacher also directs students to undertake inventional writing tasks in the classroom. In this way, a laboratory space remains a classroom in which students are supervised as they

conduct experiments in writing. Without the freedom to experiment, “we are as frustrated as our students, for conscientious, doggedly responsible, repetitive autopsying doesn’t give birth to live writing” (Murray 3). The writing laboratory presumes the presence of the writing teacher, who will circulate through the space; the writing clinic thrives on a similar presumption that a student’s writing is either gravely ill or is not alive yet. In the commonplace of the laboratory and the clinic, the writing teacher who works through the process of invention and revision with students during class time, rather than assigning and grading inventional writing that must be completed outside of class, helps students to attune to their own habits and processes as individual writers. Student writers who undertake tasks of invention and revision in a writing center may receive similar process guidance from writing center staff, including from tutors who may or may not be student peers.

Elizabeth Boquet has specifically investigated how tutoring evolved under the aegis of writing clinics in her article “‘Our Little Secret’: A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions.” Boquet traces the influence of psychological methods (as of psychotherapy) of critique in writing center pedagogy in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This influence resulted in a hybrid writing laboratory pedagogy that drew on the psychotherapy methods of Carl Rogers: “The Rogerian nondirective method succeeds in securing the space of the writing lab as sacrosanct, as distinct from the classroom, a space where students should feel secure in their thoughts and ideas, as they should in a therapist’s office” (Boquet 470). This emphasis on student writers’ feelings of security helped to define the public-facing character of the idealized writing clinic as a professional space where judgment-less

therapy about writing could be dispensed one-on-one. Such a Rogerian nondirective hybrid lab would not have employed peer tutors, instead relying on a metaphor of the writing clinic as a space in which a student writer could seek writing therapy from an authority figure, someone with credentials as a writing “doctor” or “therapist.”

Boquet writes of writing labs during the same time period that “it seems more likely that the literature at this time offers the beginnings of an articulation of professionalism predicated on doctor-patient privilege bordering at times on the collusion of staff and students against administration” (Boquet 470). The professional identity of this kind of writing therapy space turned on the authority and experience of its tutors. While the medicalized character of the writing clinic faded with time and with the shift toward peer tutoring as influenced by the open admissions movement and the composition scholarship of Kenneth Bruffee (Boquet 473-475), the student writer’s tendency to measure the legitimacy of a writing center space by looking for help from a writing expert remains to the present day.

Nancy Maloney Grimm’s book *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* was published in 1999, the same year as Boquet’s article. Grimm articulated in this work her conviction that peer tutoring methodology had to adapt to help students become aware of the systems of power that surround them in the university. Grimm expressed her concern that writing centers set up to evoke a middle class ideal of comfort only helped the students who already understood writing processes as a mode of capitalist production that reified a middle class (or scholarly upper class) identity. Grimm also suggested that the conceptual promise of peer tutoring, backed up by Melissa Weintraub in a thesis from Oregon State in 2007,

contains the potential of upwardly mobile professional development. Weintraub narrates how Lisa Ede, composition scholar and former director of the Writing Center at Oregon State University, encountered this potential: “The level of growth and learning that writing assistants gain as a result of their experience working with student writers was a surprise to Ede when she started. She was also surprised at the different type of relationship she had with them as compared with students in her classes...Ede believes that the work done in the Writing Center is worthwhile just for what it gives the writing assistants, as long as no harm is done to the students who seek services” (Weintraub 55).

#### Publics in Writing Center Space: Ethical Parameters of Collaboration

Two kinds of pedagogy have helped, in the past, to make the necessary spatial literacy of writing centers legible - writing across the curriculum (WAC) pedagogy and tutor training pedagogy. Writing across the curriculum pedagogy supports the spatial literacy that students need to develop in order to use a writing center efficiently because it acquaints students with new possibilities for low stakes writing in their preferred disciplinary area. Low-stakes writing familiarizes those same students with components of process writing pedagogy that can be performed with feelings of safety in a public space such as a writing center. This metacognitive link helps students to understand the academic function of the writing center as a place of safety in which to undertake writing processes.

Much has been made in writing center pedagogy of writing center spaces as places in which students can implicitly become familiar with the genres of academic

writing that they will need to follow in their writing tasks. Kevin Davis has observed that:

most university classes seem to revolve around the magical thinking that students (who know little) should absorb what professors (who know much) teach. Writing centers, however, do not traditionally emphasize this type of top-down learning; we need to be sure that we continue to focus on the kinds of learning we do best: developmental, experiential, collaborative, individual. Our work should emphasize the learning human more than the learned subject, the integration more than the regurgitation (Davis 29).

Though Davis' description of "magical thinking" in "university classrooms" could be more nuanced, his summary of the purposes of writing center work, at odds with "top-down learning," remains very in line with standards of writing center mythos and with guidelines for writing center staff to help students.

Michael Pemberton, in "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center Connection," categorizes peer tutors in writing centers as all-purpose guides who help student writers to articulate genres (including disciplinary genres) by approaching all genres the same way. He makes the conclusion that a lot can go wrong in the writing center if peer tutors apply this all-genre approach to assignments that have been specifically designed for WAC/WID classes: "In the context of a writing center that wishes to approach the needs of student writing in a WAC program, this approach [of treating all genres the same way] is insufficient" (Pemberton 368). In drawing this conclusion he does articulate that peer tutors who approach all genres the same way do help students who already have the tools to differentiate between genres in their own discipline. The writing center is often, usually, able to help students more (or less) based on how many tools they already have. Not every student writer benefits in the same way from having an all-purpose guide. Not everyone in the same major benefits from WAC resources in the same way.

Tutor training pedagogy in writing center contexts has provided methodologies that make the literacy practices of writing centers more directly legible to students along the axis of peer-to-peer interaction. Tutor training pedagogy for writing centers undertook a major shift when Jeff Brooks of Seattle University wrote “Minimalist Tutoring: Making Students Do All the Work” for Writing Lab Newsletter in 1991. Brooks’ pedagogical proposal separated and re-organized the elements of Rogerian nondirective counseling to emphasize student ownership of student-written texts. The Brooks piece has been the subject of some controversy because it imposes a very particular prohibition on peer tutoring - a prohibition Brooks articulates as a property of authorship, related to the student writer’s feelings of ownership for the text they are composing. The prevalence of this pedagogical framework signaled a shift toward professionalism - professionalization of writing - in academic writing center spaces. But it also led to concerns about the ways that student writers who do not have a strong foundation (of writing processes and literacy practices) may not understand how to take ownership of their compositions, and may therefore progress more slowly in a writing center that professes minimalist pedagogy. Writing centers that adopted minimalist pedagogy and trained their tutors to rely on such a pedagogy also required a specific literacy and professionalism from their students - a literacy that can be difficult to make legible given the public support character of writing centers in institutional contexts.

Ripples of Stephen North after 2005

Anne Ellen Geller and Harry Denny both published articles in the *Writing Center Journal* in 2005. Denny’s article, “Queering the Writing Center,” gained

traction in writing center circles for its articulation of the unconscious binaries of privilege that writing centers may propagate even as they seek to equalize treatment of students through one-on-one tutoring: “Writing centers are places overflowing with structuring binaries...These binaries and their negotiation of which side is privileged and which is illegitimate are ubiquitous in sessions” (Denny 97). Anne Ellen Geller’s article, “Tick-Tock, Next: Finding Epochal Time in the Writing Center,” discusses the concept of epochal time in the context of a writing center structured according to the appointment model, in which timed one-on-one “conferences” are the norm: “It is that question of what is possible in the designated time of a conference that so often constrains what can or can’t happen during an actual conference” (Geller 17). While Denny’s and Geller’s articles might seem unrelated at the outset, their discussions of student access contain significant convergence regarding the specifics of the *time* students spend at the writing center. Geller’s model shows what can happen for student writers when they have a lot of buy-in and everyone gets the most out of it. What I learned from reading about Geller’s model was that the most important resource students need to be able to access in writing center contexts is time management. Denny’s article has more to do with the ethical implications of forcing, pushing student writers to assimilate into academic writing by providing a single model for a writer who performs academia. However, Denny’s argument more broadly applies to the way that an appointment-based writing center provides one model of time management, and this model extends the participation cues of the classroom and rewards the expression of writing according to classroom precepts. Denny’s argument takes aim at the academy and suggests that students don’t benefit

from a one-size-fits-all writing center. Geller's article takes a close look at the ways that students need more or less time-resources (as measured in one-on-one sessions) and how writing tasks seem to transcend the limits of time that are imposed on individual peer writing appointments. Putting them together it would seem that all students do not benefit equally from a one-size-fits-all model of time management, whether that model is structured or unstructured.

### Studio Pedagogy in Writing Center Contexts

The pressures of communal writing processes in a writing center that presents itself pedagogically as a studio space complicate writing center goals regarding academic literacy and resource access. The robust rhythm of a studio environment in the compressed timescale of the academic calendar yields a writing workplace that is not, ultimately, so unlike the sites of professional writing that Clay Spinuzzi has previously analyzed according to the tenets of activity theory. Studio pedagogy, as defined by Russell Carpenter, aligns closely with the academic literacy and resource access goals common to writing centers. Russell Carpenter, in 2013, defined the main principles of writing studio pedagogy as information fluency, critical and creative thinking, interactive, visual, and dynamic thinking, and integrative collaboration (Carpenter 318). Carpenter's definition was devised in the context of the Noel Studio at Eastern Kentucky University, a multimodal space offering writing help to undergraduate students.

Prior to Carpenter, William J. Macauley, Jr. offered a taxonomy of studio pedagogy that relied upon student engagement. Macauley's thoughts on studio pedagogy were published in *Writing Lab Newsletter* in 2007; in his column,

Macauley reviews the characteristics of studio spaces in disciplines outside of academic writing, such as music and visual art, and discusses the potential merits of implementing studio pedagogy principles at a writing center for a small liberal arts focused college (Macauley). The taxonomy of studio pedagogy principles articulated by Macauley evokes North's notions of infrastructural support for student autonomy:

In my research, I found that studios consistently included three features (regardless of discipline or location):

1. Studios are generative: they allow, encourage, and expect the production of quality work.

2. Studios are individualized: they anticipate and require a high level of individual (student) ownership over the work being done.

3. Studios work on the assumption that each participant has a role to play: architect, engineer, musician, painter, or writer.

Certainly, these aspects of studios lined up nicely with the interests of all three programs: students as empowered thinkers, researchers, and writers; students as informed and active participants in their own work; students as active participants in identifying roles in their own work (Macauley 2007).

Macauley's definition dwells on the roles that students embody while working in the studio. Macauley's attentiveness to the activities and choices that students pursue in studio space demonstrates a commitment to student autonomy. These interlocking definitions of studio pedagogy align closely with the academic literacy and resource access goals common to writing centers. Just as writing centers strive to make writing processes legible, tangible, and navigable to student writers who are still building their academic literacy, studio pedagogy prioritizes "visual, interactive, and dynamic" ways of thinking, along with "information fluency" and "critical and creative thinking" (Carpenter 318). The application of studio pedagogy in a writing center context relies on the resources of the individual physical space, and so the rhythm with which students navigate that space illuminates the urgency of access in a public writing space that is interactive, visible, and iterative. Each student's process of navigating a writing studio will be different from the process of navigating a

writing center organized according to the appointment model (in which students can conceptualize their tasks within a specific allotted time). The principle of studio pedagogy that relies most on student navigation is “integrative collaboration,” in which “consultants encourage students to see their communication from multiple perspectives through the feedback process while incorporating insights offered from interactions within the space” (Carpenter 318). In this definition, the consultants are employees who circulate within the space offering guidance to student writers; their presence bolsters the public, iterative character of the studio while simultaneously upholding the ethic of engagement that is deeply embedded in the material culture of composition at the academic location that is the writing center. The “interactions within the space” demonstrate evidence of the students’ individual pathways navigating through a studio space. The metacognitive dimension of this navigation amplifies the urgency of the writing processes that students undertake in a writing studio. Such a metacognitive urgency reveals the intimacy of resource access in a setting that prioritizes individual autonomy in choosing an iterative and collaborative path.

#### Connections to the Material Culture of Writing

Hannah Rule, who studied the writing process habits of graduate students and reported on these habits in “Writing’s Rooms,” asserts that “Writing’s rooms suggest that composing’s recursivity be understood not only textually but also *environmentally* as composing activity romps all over (and beyond) its rooms” (Rule 429). Rule does argue against “systematizing” writing processes, but I think her case study illuminates personal, individual components of writing activity that fit into the

mythos of process writing, even as she is trying to break from that mythos. Rule's focus on processes of writing is highly personalized and her research methodology includes narratives from graduate student writers whose primary site of composition is within their home space. These personal narratives provide some insight into the ways in which writing influences an activity system in which a single writer manipulates and acts upon textual objects. An academic studio space that functions as a writing center is a public site of recursive composition and it has been designed to allow the environmental and textual understanding that Rule insists upon, but on a much larger scale, in which many, many student writers and student researchers manipulate textual objects at different composing stages. Rule's research builds on Cydney Alexis' definition of a *writing habitat*: "The habitat, as I conceive of it, is comprised of the place in which a writer chooses to write and the objects that populate that place. It can be private or public." (Alexis 84-85). "Writing habitats" are "object-populated," as Alexis acknowledges, but it is important to remember that they are also people-populated, and people create asymmetries of process. Hannah Rule established the connection between a particular physical space designated for writing and the recursive patterns of activity that form invisible props for the processes of composition: "Focus on writing's rooms means focus on what at first may seem *peripheral*, accounting for what's on the desk, repetitive action, periods of silent or motionless inactivity, pauses, or other seemingly nonwriting activities" (Rule 404-405). The repetitive patterns of activity that Rule designates here as "seemingly nonwriting" could easily describe the paths that students take through a studio space as they complete composition tasks. In a studio space that is particularly set up to

nurture writing, the asymmetrical pathways of activity that form Rule's focus remain just as necessary.

## **Chapter 2: Activity Theory and Studio Pedagogy in the URWS at Oregon State University**

As Rule and Alexis have articulated in their research into composition tasks within a personalized material culture of writing, the sites of writing in which composition takes place can be simultaneously distinct in their social topographies and mundanely recursive. Although much recent research into the material culture of writing has focused on private writing spaces, this chapter will investigate the URWS at Oregon State University as a uniquely public writing space with a robust history of supporting student writing and peer staff. This investigation will examine the tenets of 3rd generation activity theory as a possible complement to studio pedagogy in the URWS.

### **A Brief History of the Writing Center at Oregon State University**

Circa 1970, the OSU Writing Clinic was founded by Margaret Lawrence, an instructor in the English department, with the help of other instructors whose names are no longer known (Weintraub 43). In 1976, the OSU Writing Clinic became a part of the new Communication Skills Center, led by Jim Perkins, an instructor in English and a graduate of Oregon State University and Western Washington University. The Communication Skills Center was housed in the McAlexander Fieldhouse on the second floor, adjacent to the armory where ROTC practices were held. Within the Communication Skills Center, the writing section was also known as the Writing Lab. Until 1990, several colleges (among them Agriculture Business, Education, Forestry,

and Home Economics) required all of their students to take an English Diagnostic Test administered by the Writing Lab (Weintraub 48). Records for the Communication Skills Center began to be more visible in 1979 through a report written by Lisa Pedersen prior to the appointment of Lisa Ede as director of the center in June 1979. At this time, the Communication Skills Center, or CSC, moved to the basement floor of Waldo Hall, where the writing center remained until the fall of 2017. During her time as the director of the CSC, which would become the Center for Writing and Learning, Lisa Ede accomplished a number of innovations, including putting a greater emphasis on the identity of the Writing Lab as a place “to teach students to think and act like writers” (Ede qtd. in Weintraub 54), rather than as primarily a remediation resource. Ede was also integral in developing the professional training of the peer writing assistants who worked in the Writing Lab (Weintraub 55).

When the Writing Intensive Curriculum program was instituted in 1990, the Writing Lab became known as the Center for Writing and Learning (which also included the former CSC). The WIC requirement superseded the English Diagnostic Tests completely, largely on the urging of Lisa Ede (Weintraub 45). The Center for Writing and Learning continued to expand its services to undergraduate students, but its university position remained precarious. Lisa Ede’s leadership and care helped to foster and grow the writing center during her time as its director. Throughout that time, however, and continuing into the directorship of Dennis Bennett from 2007 onward, the writing center has been unevenly housed under the funding umbrellas of several different academic units, including Academic Affairs, the College of Liberal Arts, and Undergraduate Academic Programs (Weintraub 61).

In 2015, Dennis Bennett, the Writing Center Director, and Roberta Kjesrud, the director of the Hacherl Studio at Western Washington University, corresponded about applications for studio pedagogy in the writing center, in light of Roberta's recent move to a collaborative studio space housed in the library at Western Washington University. These correspondences inspired a plan to implement a collaboration between the Writing Center at Oregon State University and the Valley Library (Bennett interview). The move to the library was completed in the fall of 2017 (Deitering, Filar-Williams) and the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio continues to function in the Valley Library at the time of this writing.

The current URWS space is positioned at the back of the Learning Commons on the main floor of the Valley Library. The total space is an upside-down L-shape, with the long upper leg of the L composed of a memorial hallway that also provides access to bathrooms, water fountains, and elevators. Thus, some of the foot traffic in the space is predicated on a pre-existing pattern of access to those resources. The short lower leg of the L contains the studio coordinator's cubicle and three other cubicles, one of which is commonly used by a research librarian who helps students during studio staff hours, and one of which is occupied by the ELL coordinator for the space.

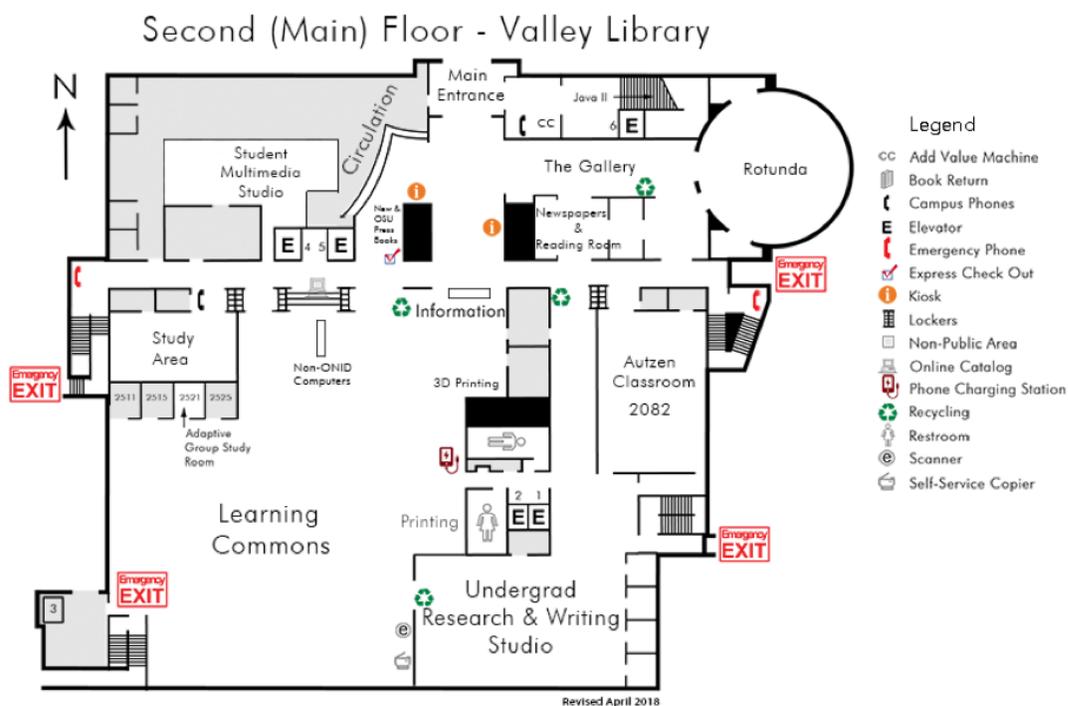


Fig. 1 – URWS Floor Layout in Valley Library. This floor map shows the location of the Undergrad Research & Writing Studio and Student Multimedia Studio on the Main Floor of the Valley Library. “Second Floor,” *Floor Maps*, OSU Valley Library, OSU, 2018, <https://library.oregonstate.edu/floormaps/second-floor>.

Figure 1 shows the four cubicles at the bottom of the backwards L. The space contains at least eight rolling whiteboards, which are marked with blue stickers designating them the property of the URWS. The lower leg of the backwards L contains an assortment of rolling chairs and rolling tables and also four large stationary desks with computer monitors. The computer monitors are on the back wall and the “front wall” of the space consists of a cubicle wall barrier that separates the studio space from the QuickPrint library station in the learning commons. Other features of the space include: power outlets, windows, supply closet, reserved signs directing students not to use certain cubicles, and puzzles on a stationary table in the

center of the studio. Tools that are expressly designed for consultant staff to use in the space include: student check-in station (a laptop equipped with an ID scanner), shallow blue trays for the green intake forms that students are directed to fill out describing the trajectory of their writing project during their visit, and a clipboard that holds a chart for keeping track of how many people are writing in the space every half hour.

When a student enters the URWS, the student is directed to provide identifying information to a consultant at the check-in station in front of the coordinator's cubicle. At that point, the student will be directed to choose a place to sit and work, and if the student indicates interest in speaking with a studio consultant later on, the student will be provided with a series of flip cards on a small stand in order to signal that they are ready for help. Studio consultants - the staff - sit at high, narrow tables facing the entrances to the space, in both legs of the backwards L shape. The placement of the tables helps consultant staff to see students as soon as they come into the space.



Fig. 2 – URWS Space. (Photo taken with permission from the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio)



Fig. 3 – URWS Consultant Desks. (Photo taken with permission from the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio)



Fig. 4 – Flip Card: Working (Photo taken with permission from the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio)



Fig. 5 – Flip Card: Digital Confirmation Slip (Photo taken with permission from the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio)



Fig. 6 – Flip Card: Studio Consultant (Photo taken with permission from the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio)

### Studio Pedagogy in Context

Since the studio model is fairly new as far as its use in writing center contexts, I will be exploring some theories that can further illuminate elements of studio pedagogy in a writing center context by describing interactions between writers within a library workspace. Russell Carpenter defined the main criteria of studio pedagogy as information fluency, critical and creative thinking, interactive, visual,

and dynamic thinking, and integrative collaboration (Carpenter 318). This definition was devised in the context of the Noel Studio at Eastern Kentucky University, a multimodal space offering writing help to undergraduate students. Carpenter's model for studio pedagogy builds on an ethic of collaboration; the descriptions for each principle include references to "consultants," however, the article does not provide any more detail about the consultants except that they are "trained" - it remains unclear, at the time of my reading, whether Carpenter intended that "trained consultants" would signify peer students working with student writers (Carpenter 318). In the descriptions of studio pedagogy principles, the roles of these "consultants" are presented with details to articulate the guidance that a student writer, or group of student writers, could expect as they navigate the space.

Notably, the description for integrative collaboration, "Consultants encourage students to see their communication from multiple perspectives through the feedback process while incorporating insights offered from interactions within the space," does not include a supplementary definition for "feedback process" or for the "insights offered from interactions" (Carpenter 318). The ethic of collaboration that Carpenter relies on in order to construct his pedagogical framework - including references to the work of Ede and Lunsford - rests on an undefined parameter of collaboration that draws legitimacy from a similarly undefined "feedback process." Before Carpenter's work in the Noel Studio, William J. Macauley Jr. published a Writing Lab newsletter column detailing his exploration of the possibilities for implementing studio pedagogy in the writing center at a small liberal arts college. Macauley's principles for studios prioritized student involvement and the expression of student agency

through roles that they would take on while in the space: “students as informed and active participants in their own work; students as active participants in identifying roles in their own work” (Macauley n.p). The question of student activity in the writing studio, and student agency to complete tasks of invention, is bound up with the genres in which students are working toward proficiency and with the academic and social expectations they must navigate in order to do so.

To describe these academic and social expectations, I now turn to 3rd generation activity theory. Activity theory applications in recent writing center contexts include John Nordlof’s Vygotskian reading of scaffolding, the IWCA Outstanding Article for 2015; in composition theory, David R. Russell’s applications of activity theory to reading genres will inform later sections of this project. Clay Spinuzzi’s innovative scholarship in 3rd generation activity theory includes a framework to describe activities within a workplace according to the timescale, goals, and details that those activities represent. This framework can be divided into four typologies: the hierarchy, the market, the network, and the clan (Spinuzzi 15). In the analysis that follows, I will explore how the hierarchy, the network, and the clan typologies all govern different patterns of activities in a writing studio.

#### Confluence of Activity Theory and Studio Pedagogy

In the article “Toward a Typology of Activities: Understanding Internal Contradictions in Multiperspectival Activities,” Clay Spinuzzi defines an activity system by listing its parts: an activity system forms around an object, that object is transformed to meet an outcome, actors do the transforming of the object, using tools and following rules, under a certain division of labor and supported by community

stakeholders (Spinuzzi 8). Spinuzzi has identified four typologies that can broadly describe activity systems - hierarchies, markets, clans, and networks (Spinuzzi 15). Studio pedagogy in a writing center context offers an opportunity to observe the material culture of writing in a public space that the writers interact with, but do not control. The configuration of the public, bounded space which a writing studio occupies fits well with the expanding definition of the network typology in Spinuzzi's recent book *All Edge: Inside the New Workplace Networks*. However, the potential network typology of the writing studio is significantly influenced by the hierarchy of academic institutions and by the close-knit social structure of writing center staff, particularly those staff who are peer mentors (at Oregon State University, they are known as "consultants"). In a network, as defined by Spinuzzi, "the object" taken up by the actors "is defined across a network of activities rather than within the division of labor of a single activity" (Spinuzzi 153). The writing studio environment of the URWS functions as a network under this definition, because the "objects," writing assignments, that student writers bring to the studio are continually and recursively re-iterated as students undertake multiple inventional tasks. However, the genre of the assignment prompts which student writers and studio staff must interpret in order to embark upon networked activities is still a hierarchical genre that represents the authority of the academic hierarchy.

The "object," the writing assignment, is defined internally, in the classroom, by an authority figure, the teacher; the student must take full responsibility for completing the assignment, which means that the division of labor for the assignment is stable and uncontested, and the directions for completing the assignment are

provided at the beginning of the task process. All of these properties apply to the classroom and Spinuzzi's hierarchy typology (Spinuzzi 146). The characteristics of the network typology are demonstrated in a writing studio, however, in the open timescale of the space, in the spatial boundary of the studio itself, and in the relational nature of the objects (whiteboards, tables, rolling chairs, scratch paper) housed within that boundary. A writing studio occupies the public character of a workplace, but the student writers that work there have agency to choose how to spend their time - they can spend it gathering resources, composing texts, talking with peers that they study with in other academic contexts, or talking with studio consultants who offer advice about key points in the writing process when the writer chooses to ask for help.

Within the spatial boundary of the networked studio system, the genres of the flip cards and the green sheet help the student writer to communicate with studio staff about the order and intensity of writing tasks already prescribed by the academic hierarchy. The influence of genres in physical space has previously been explored by David Russell in his article "Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis." Russell performed a close reading of his family's grocery list in the context of the activity system of the grocery store in order to demonstrate how genres function in activity systems completely outside of academic contexts.

Russell described the grocery list as a genre that mediated two separate activity systems: the family activity system and the grocery store activity system (Russell 7). Russell and his daughter revised the grocery list multiple times so that it functioned not merely as a concrete list of needed items but also as a template that reflected the spatial organization of the grocery store itself. In his close reading,

Russell emphasized that the usefulness of the revised document was due to its effective mediation in interactions between family members and between the family activity system and the grocery store activity system (Russell 7). This effectiveness marks all of the commonly used genres that Russell surveys in the article. Russell's grocery list example is particularly useful to my exploration of activity theory because it demonstrates the extent to which a written genre can be linked to a physical location.

The grocery list mediated the concrete (food-related) needs of the family activity system and it also mediated the family members' interactions with the grocery store activity system. These mediations happened more effectively because Russell and his daughter Madeleine revised the grocery list multiple times and included the numbers of the aisles in which specific items could be found. In the URWS, mediating genres include the assignment prompt, the green sheet that students fill out in order to identify the writing tasks they plan to undertake while in the studio, and the flip cards that signal whether they want to work alone or with assistance from a consultant.

The concept of "pulse," as articulated by Clay Spinuzzi in his descriptions of 3rd generation activity theory, can help to illuminate the boundaries and entanglements of collaboration in the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio. When actors in an activity system transform objects to meet outcomes, their labor follows a time-cycle that Yrjö Engeström, a Swedish activity theorist, calls a "pulse." Spinuzzi adopts Engeström's terminology of "pulses" and "pulsing" as he describes ways in which the time-cycle of labor in an activity system can be affected by the objects that

an activity system interacts with. “Work activity is dynamic: it pulses like a heart, with each pulse transforming the object. If your heart stopped pulsing, you’d be dead; similarly, if an activity stops pulsing, it’s no longer an activity” (Spinuzzi 101). The terminology of pulses and pulsing originally comes from a subfield of activity theory called knotworking. The concept of pulse as Spinuzzi defines it - the action that encapsulates the time-cycle of transforming an object - can effectively describe the expectations for student to consultant interactions that Russell Carpenter listed under his third writing studio pedagogy principle of Integrative Collaboration (Carpenter 318). In this sense, the student must take responsibility for transforming an object (a writing assignment, which they have the opportunity to compose in the writing studio, rather than bringing a completed draft and receiving advice only on the draft). The time-cycle in which the object is transformed can be temporally and physically bounded within the writing studio. Hence, Carpenter’s expectation that the student, encouraged by consultant workers, will absorb “communication from multiple perspectives through the feedback process while incorporating insights offered from interactions within the space” would benefit from additional descriptions of how a student might comfortably navigate the space with the proper alertness and concentration (Carpenter 318).

Interpersonal collaborations in a writing studio can occur with minimal scheduling strictures. In such an open working environment, the physical design of the space is also significant to the collaborative processes that take place within it. The Undergrad Research and Writing Studio, the case study for this project, is housed in the Valley Library and was arranged according to specific principles of library

service design. For an overview of the types of design present in the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio, I now turn to Mary O’Kelley’s work on “zones of behavior.” A research team of librarians led by Mary O’Kelley, in “Can A Library’s Design Cue New Behaviors? A Case Study,” investigated student response to public- and private-designated library areas by surveying students on their preferences for study spaces within the library. Their surveys and observations suggested that the different study spaces nurtured four distinct behaviors: public-alone, public-together, private-alone, and private-together (O’Kelley et al). All four of these “zones of behavior” can occur in a library setting in which students interact with resources according to a timescale they control. The connection between the library space at large and the Undergrad Research and Writing studio, in terms of the four “zones,” lies in the dynamic resource interactions that students undertake when they are moving from one “zone” to another. Students who move a piece of library furniture to close off an open study area change their “zone” from public to private.

This system is notable because it does not measure students’ proficiency in any way in order to assess how best to serve students - in fact, it measures stress/access/expression of need as shown by students moving different articles of furniture to enhance privacy, rather than measuring any action that requires prior knowledge of the space to perform: “Users are publicly visible and purposefully interact with one another. Using these zones as both a pragmatic design tool and a conceptual framework helped the designers and stakeholders better visualize the continuum of the learning process” (O’Kelley 848). Design principles for writing studios vary by site and resource palette. Writing studio pedagogy prioritizes the

public-together zone of behavior that O'Kelley documents in her study. However, that same pedagogy encourages student self-determination in undertaking writing tasks.

Moving furniture around counts as part of this self-determination, even if it should undermine the primarily public-together character of the space. The pragmatics of library space design partially elucidate the parameters of collaboration that student writers navigate in a writing studio. Hence, the zones of behavior are valuable as a taxonomy to describe the paths that students chart for themselves through writing studio space, engaging with physical tools along the way, whether those tools are allies to the writing process, or obstacles. Student writers have options in the purposefully designed physical space of the writing studio, but their activities, their assignments, are circumscribed by the hierarchical activity system of the university (following Russell, 18). Students will be held responsible by the institutional hierarchy for the writing work that they produce and turn in for evaluation. Studio pedagogy in a writing center context theorizes the necessity of autonomy for student writers according to the open timescale of the tasks they undertake.

Students in the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio often roll the standing dry-erase boards, which are arranged in the center of the space, to the side of the room in order to be next to a desk with a computer monitor and several electrical outlets. In this way they create impromptu carrels. This dynamic impulse sends the explicit visual cue that the students behind that dry-erase board prefer to interact directly with library resources, rather than with studio staff. While the guiding

presence of studio staff is integral to the public character of studio pedagogy, its intersection with the habits of privacy that persist throughout the material culture of composition writing can become paradoxical in a dynamic space. In a studio model for a writing center, student writers have many options, but they may not always have complete control over the physical space in which they are free to make those choices, because this space is a public academic workplace.

The studio framework provides unique opportunities for invention, but the distributed patterns of invention, driven by student choices, present entanglements in which time management can become a concern. Students navigate the writing studio by means of hierarchical, fixed genres, but these genres can only dictate certain things for them, and the network setup of the studio space requires students to navigate these cues independently, even though they are entangled because the impetus that brought them to the studio is only as consistent as their own habits of invention. In activity theory, this entanglement is described by what Engeström calls knotworking; in which the patterns of actions that make up an activity are continuously tied and untied in a pulsating motion (Engeström et al). The pattern of tying, untying, and retying implicates multiple actors, objects, and genres, and this pattern is both insistent and idiosyncratic.

While typologies and genre theory can describe the framework that a student writer enters into in the writing studio (as this chapter seeks to demonstrate), these perspectives do not directly address the path of the student writer and the variable pressures that writers encounter as they navigate writing studio space and the roles and responsibilities that accompany inventional tasks in the writing studio. The

pulsating, idiosyncratic, and mobile patterns of knotworking (from Engeström) can describe how students deal with the impetus provided by a writing assignment once they have entered the writing studio space. These patterns represent potential for empirical composition research (as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3).

In a studio environment, student writers use hierarchical genres to navigate both abstract content and physical space. In this way, the tasks of invention that students undertake in the writing studio are distributed in physical space in patterns that are guided by staff and by objects and cues within the space itself. Students have to navigate not only the abstract content specified in their assignments but also the responsibilities and expectations present in studio space. Student responsibilities regarding time management are often reflected in big-picture writing center values, especially about what writers are doing when they are not writing, but they are productively in motion around the writing center. Time management has fewer variables in an appointment-based writing center than in a writing studio. The structure of timed appointments narrows the options for a student writer to choose between tasks; this structure raises the stakes of the guidance and feedback that the student writer may receive in the session, especially from a peer consultant.

Anecdotal evidence of anxiety regarding time management in appointment-based writing centers separates the writing tasks of non-administrative writing center staff from the writing tasks of students who come to the center for appointments. When non-administrative writing center staff are also peer mentors (and thus, themselves student writers), the stakes of this separation can be high. As Anne Ellen Geller, Elizabeth Boquet, and Frankie Condon have noted in their discussion of time

management in an appointment-based writing center, “downtime activities” while at work in the writing center, as disclosed by their peer mentor staff, include “reading...writing...researching morbid professions or rare neurological conditions,” and the peer mentor staff consider the benefits of this downtime to include “establishing a network between like-minded individuals” (Geller et al. 43-44). These activities are not counted as work activities, but reading, writing, and researching do fit with writing tasks that occur during the processes of inventional writing. And since peer mentors who are part of a writing center staff are student writers themselves, these recursive inventional activities occurring in a writing center outside the timescale of the scheduled appointments are notable because they provide insight into the ways students may write differently when they have more choices about the writing tasks they undertake.

Employing studio pedagogy in a writing center context uncovers possibilities for research about the recursive activities that writers undertake while they are composing. A writing studio is defined by its physical positionality (the space that the studio occupies) very differently than an appointment-based writing center. Such a space includes potential for research into the work activities of all writers who are constrained by the physical framework of the studio, such as peer mentors, librarians, and administrators. The open timescale of the writing studio adjusts the stakes of the choices that all of these writers make while they are present in the space. In the untimed environment, interactions between writers, and between students and staff, can vary widely in intensity and duration. Because of this variation, the physical location and layout of the writing studio becomes more salient, and the efforts of

student writers to navigate inventional tasks through their interactions with staff and with studio-defined objects becomes more significant.

The writing assignment provides impetus for the first motions that student writers make towards the space, to enter the space. Unlike an appointment-based center, expectations for student behavior are based more on the choices that the student makes and less on the way they have already adhered to the hierarchical genre of the assignment prompt. The prompt becomes a map that the student interprets based on their responsibilities, and the staff interprets based on composition standards - but the time frame of these interpretations is based on choices that the student makes. William J. Macauley Jr. was adamant that the power of studio pedagogy is about the choices that students get to make (Macauley n.p.). However, this interpretation hinges on the roles that students take on in a studio space, because choices mean responsibilities. Students are often unaware of what those responsibilities might look like unless they have prior experience with studio models in other contexts. So when Macauley makes a judgment about the roles and responsibilities that student writers have the potential to embody in the writing studio, he is also making a prediction about the kinds of tools that may be useful for a studio to develop in order to guide students toward those roles. In the chapter that follows, I will use activity theory principles in an ecological framework to explain how a particular writing studio deploys some of those useful tools.

### **Chapter 3: Writing Studio as Writing Ecology: An Activity Theory Exploration**

Writing Center Praxis: Research Potential in Context

The format of this chapter is inspired by Roberta Kjesrud's article "Lessons from Data: Avoiding Lore Bias in Research Paradigms," published in *Writing Center Journal* in 2015. Kjesrud pointed out the stakes of writing center praxis and the extent to which the potential for writing centers as research sites is seated in commitments to praxis, especially to those forms of daily praxis that require the most planning and patience and may correspondingly seem to garner the fewest accolades. The study documented in Kjesrud's article provided insight into the entangled relationship between perspectives in writing center scholarship that may rely on anecdotal material and perspectives in writing center pedagogy that inform taxonomic research frameworks. Kjesrud's observations regarding this entanglement, and her reflection on the disconnects between established writing center lore and newly gathered empirical data, informed my investigation into a holistically adaptable framework for future empirical research, one that could be uniquely inflected by the objects and practices of a particular writing studio (Kjesrud 34-35). I have adopted Kjesrud's "lesson" to "apply exploratory rather than prescriptive lenses" with this project. This chapter will employ two main exploratory lenses: Marilyn Cooper's ecological model of writing and Clay Spinuzzi's concept of typologies for describing activity systems in 3rd generation activity theory.

Due to the considerable, but recent, expansion of studio pedagogy in writing center contexts in the last fifteen years, this chapter's exploration of the common ground between Cooper's ecological model of writing and Spinuzzi's typologies will be calibrated for a writing studio context. Cooper observed that "all the characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the

characteristics of all the other writers and writings in the systems” (Cooper 368). A writing studio productively constrains the overlapping, mutual determination of writing activities and their characteristics within a spatial boundary. The arrangement of the physical space of a writing studio is particularly significant for an ecological approach because every writing studio is a uniquely arranged site; writing studios are dependent on spatial resources in a very different way than non-studio writing centers.

The application of studio pedagogy in a writing center context benefits from attention to spatial concerns and to bodily motion, because studio pedagogy allows student writers to choose their interactions in the space without the timescale of appointments. An appointment-based pedagogy, by contrast, could be housed in a variety of different spaces that would be separately legible as writing centers, as long as those spaces maintained reliance on a clear session timescale for one-on-one interactions between student writers and writing center staff. However, the legibility of a writing studio as a space for inventional writing comes from the spatial boundary that it imposes upon writers who may be in motion as they undertake tasks of invention in composition. The recursive nature of these tasks radically situates student writers within an ecology of invention for the duration of the time they choose to spend in the writing studio. The empirical properties of such an ecology are dynamic and can be measured as such.

#### Calibrating Exploratory Lenses for the Writing Studio

Ultimately, studies like Kjesrud’s offer insight into the potential of writing centers as sites for empirical composition research. Kjesrud’s investigation of the

cyclical influences of lore and praxis illuminates the possibility for definitive patterns of activity that take place in a writing center, patterns that can tell a researcher interesting things about processes of invention in composition writing. In a writing studio, such patterns can multiply. For example, the interpretation of prompts is significant in most, if not all, writing center spaces, not only in writing studios. In a studio, however, the unscheduled structure of the interactions between students and staff can lead to many different configurations of interpretation. These configurations need only occur within the spatial boundary of the writing studio to count as part of the socially constructed network of writing activities in the studio. Thus, the physical dimensions of the writing studio are significant because they offer a habitat for an ecology of inventional writing that follows the format of the ecology of writing as socially constructed and proposed by Marilyn Cooper in 1986.

Marilyn Cooper describes the trope of the writer who composes in isolation as a myth in her landmark article about the ecology of writing: “In contrast, then, to the solitary author projected by the cognitive process model, the ideal image the ecological model projects is of an infinitely extended group of people who interact through writing, who are connected by the various systems that constitute the activity of writing” (Cooper 372). Cooper’s articulation of the writing ecology does not address the writing body’s capacity for motion. This capacity is (more) pronounced in a writing studio, because the studio is specifically designed to encourage dynamic interaction. Writing studio spaces vary in shape and size, but favor an open layout. In an open layout workspace, writing bodies encounter both obstacles of process and obstacles of privacy, sometimes simultaneously. Appointment-based writing centers,

in which a student writer comes to a writing center to meet with a consultant one-on-one for a designated amount of time, tend to arrange these appointments so that both the student writer and the consultant have chairs to sit at and a table for materials. The chairs and tables may have wheels, but the writing activities that take place in an appointment-based writing center are framed as stationary activities that may require prior investment and preparation. However, many student writers may still be learning the time management skills necessary to make an appointment to get help in the future. Writing studios, on the other hand, offer an open layout in which writing activities are not constrained to particular tables and chairs.

As this chapter demonstrates, a writing studio is an optimal site to conduct research into the activity of writing precisely because a writing studio provides a microcosm of the intersection of several socially constituted systems. Within this microcosm, student writers engage with the university system as they work to complete writing assignments. In addition to their engagement with university expectations, writers in a writing studio navigate socially constituted systems of activities that are unique to the studio itself. These systems can be comprehensively described by the typologies of the hierarchy, the clan, and the network, which Clay Spinuzzi has articulated in his recent work on 3rd generation activity theory (Spinuzzi 144). The umbrella of these typologies can offer a guiding framework for a researcher to analyze specific patterns of writing activity within a writing studio. A 3rd generation activity theory analysis of a writing studio, attuned to patterns of activity by human actors navigating objects, can yield valuable details regarding not only the distinct processes of composition writing that take place in a writing studio, but also

the pulsing cycle of work activities that comprise those composition processes. Such an application might align the writing activity that Marilyn Cooper described (Cooper 368) with the dynamic, constantly pulsing work activity that Spinuzzi identifies as transformative (Spinuzzi 101). This alignment provides a researcher with activity theory tools to navigate the complex, interactive social systems of writing by means of the physical objects that student writers interact with as they undertake inventional tasks in a writing studio.

#### A Matrix for Mapping an Ecology of Distributed Invention

Tools from activity theory, to be used for conducting composition process research in the writing studio, can be arranged according to the discretion of the researcher. In the table that follows, the left-most column (Who/What) identifies physical objects and human actors that student writers interact with in the URWS as they undertake inventional and composition practices in the space. The middle column describes the ways that writer interactions with the listed object or actor fulfill Cooper's ecological model with regard to inventional tasks. The right-most column lists theoretical frames that most directly correspond to each interaction.

According to the organization of this table, the writing ecology of the URWS can be documented using activity theory principles to describe the recursivity of mediation (for hierarchical genres), interpretation (by human actors) and distribution (of inventional practices and composition processes by means of physical objects) within the space. Cooper's lens of the writing ecology evokes the simultaneity with which multiple individual distributions of invention occur in a writing studio. Mapping these connections demonstrates ways in which the research potential of the

writing studio ties to the distribution of inventional writing activities within a clearly demarcated physical location. Note: In the URWS, the staff who interact with writers are known as consultants.

| Who/What        | Inventional/Composition Practices   | Theoretical Frame  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Assignment      | Provides impetus for invention; defines parameters for composition processes  | Hierarchy Typology (Spinuzzi)                                      |
| Consultant      | Interprets parameters of invention; guides composition processes in real time   | Clan Typology (Spinuzzi), Knotworking Theory (Engestrom)           |
| Check-in Desk   | Identifies the nature of the student workspace; establishes parameters for student motion in the space  | Network Typology (Spinuzzi)  |
| Green Sheet     | Mediates student interactions with the content of their inventional processes   | Hierarchy Typology (Spinuzzi); Genres in Activity Theory (Russell) |
| Flip Cards      | Mediates student interactions with the space (marking a writing location) and with staff (signaling for help)   | Network Typology (Spinuzzi); Knotworking Theory (Engestrom)        |
| Whiteboards     | Mobile inventional tools; can be used to mediate student interactions with space and with content; can mark student privacy   | Library Service Design, Studio Pedagogy (Carpenter)                |
| Tables + Chairs | Distribute invention throughout the space, at writers' discretion   | Library Service Design (O'Kelley et al)                            |
| Group Space     | Guides co-working processes for multiple students looking for help with the same assignment (invention distributed narrowly); streamlines interactions with consultants | Studio Pedagogy (Carpenter, Macauley), Clan Typology (Spinuzzi)    |

Table 3.1 - Matrix

As this matrix delineates, students interact with objects, genres, and people while they are in studio space, and these interactions tend to mediate, interpret, and/or distribute processes of invention. Following Russell's shopping list example, genres (especially hierarchical genres) mediate, people interpret, and objects (such as furniture) distribute. Though these interactions are entangled and knotted together, the network setting of the writing studio orients students as navigators who respond to the impetus of the assignment prompt and allow themselves to be directed by the check-in process. Students move through the space as navigators, and by interacting with physical objects, interpreting, mediating, and distributing, they enact unique patterns of invention.

#### Applications for the Matrix

Spinuzzi's hierarchy typology is shown through genre mediation and through encounters with objects. Hierarchy compels the student to enter the workspace, and writers navigate that workspace through a mixture of hierarchical genres and networking cues. Hierarchy compels the students and the writing studio staff by means of genres (the genres of the flip cards, the green sheet, and the assignment prompt). In the studio, genres and objects provide tools and cues, and people provide interpretations. Student writers interact directly with studio resources that connect them with studio staff. When they swipe their ID cards at the check-in station, when they fill out a green paper that offers them space to list the writing tasks they are looking for help with, and when they flip a card on the small stands that signal their work status in the studio, student writers are communicating with staff, and their communication is mediated by the genres and objects listed in the matrix.

These communications are precipitated by the hierarchical genre of the **assignment prompt**, which compels the student writer to enter the writing studio workspace. Thus, a prompt is jointly interpreted by the student writer and each member of the studio staff who comes into contact with the prompt. This joint interpretation is a concentric thread across the many overlapping patterns of writing activity in the writing studio.

The hierarchical genre of the assignment prompt provides the initial impetus for a student writer to visit the writing studio. A member of studio staff interprets the prompt and the green sheet that the student has filled out. Interactions between staff and students provoke new inventional tasks. The interpretive work of the staff is dynamic and pulsing, and the interactions between staff and students reveal an intersectional topography of work activity that converges upon the genre of the flip card. The **flip cards** represent hierarchical obligations separately and distinctly for the staff worker and for the student writer, and the genre of the cards is salient to both parties in the interaction (see Figures 3-5 in chapter 2). The genre of the flip card is also a marker for what Spinuzzi calls the “stages” of a network. “Stages” are indicators of publicity (or privacy) that relate to the formality of the work being done in a particular space (Spinuzzi 108-111). Students use flip cards to signal whether they are working alone or looking for help, and their communication about working and their point-by-point needs will partially dictate the stakes of the working environment for the staff. Staff tasks look different in a studio full of students working quietly and separately than they do in a space full of students signaling to ask for help with a writing task. The genre of the **green sheet** can help students and

staff to clarify tasks. The necessary uncertainty that occurs at the moment when a student flips a card to signal for writing help adjusts the stakes of staff-to-student interactions; the staff member who walks toward the signal will not yet know what the student is looking for help with, and the student will not know how the staff person will react. While the interaction between these two people is mediated by the written genres of the green sheet, the assignment prompt, and the flip card, the dynamic entanglement that briefly ensues is a fairly high stakes one, and all students and staff will approach that interaction slightly differently.

#### **Chapter 4: Conclusion: New Directions for Empirical Research in Writing Studios**

In a writing studio, student writers have many options, but they may not always have complete control over the physical space in which they are free to make those choices, because the space is a public academic workplace. This is a shift, in Reynolds' terms, from "perceived space" to "lived space," especially in university contexts: "The educational mission of universities (*conceived space*) may conceal from us their status as actual workplaces (*perceived space*) and the two together combine in *lived space*: a university is a place where an internationally renowned researcher can't find a parking space" (16).

Activity theory can help to describe that shift. In fact, activity theory can help to describe the stakes of that shift. Writing centers, and particularly writing studios, embody the potential of student writers learning new tasks of invention and revision in an academic workspace. Just as students are under pressure to learn the genres of writing that will serve them well in their disciplinary area, they are also under pressure to learn the genres of the spaces that they move through in order to be

supported as they familiarize themselves with the necessary written genres. If students are simultaneously academically expected to be fluent in spatial genres in order to access the resources that a particular space offers, then, the potential illegibility of a writing studio in activity system context becomes a crisis of access. Thus, because the Writing Studio functions as a clan activity system within the larger hierarchy activity system of the university (and because financial stakeholders are part of the hierarchy, but students are encouraged to become stakeholders according to the clan activity typology, even though the objects in the clan activity system are implicitly defined processes that take longer to figure out how to participate in), students who are unfamiliar with the spatial genre of public/together in the university context may also struggle to access resources in the writing studio.

It is on the physical bodies of these students that the hierarchical activity system of the university intersects with the clan and network systems of the writing studio via the boundary of the studio space and the objects contained within that boundary. When student writers are expected and guided to make their writing processes dynamic and interactive in a public manner, surrounded by other students, they may make new choices about how they will navigate the space in which they undertake writing tasks. These navigation choices are hybrids of the established “zones of behavior” (O’Kelley et al), and they reveal something about how academic expectations and misconceptions about composition processes can interfere with the physical, spatial processes that students undertake when they are completing writing assignments.

Activity theory can describe this interference in terms of the patterns of activity that students undertake in order to cope with academic expectations for writing. In a public space such as the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio, a designated public-together zone, Deborah Brandt's definitions of literacy as involvement can also stand for the behaviors of academic literacy and library knowhow, according to her observation that "to write words down is not to give them a detached life but to give them a public life - to make them shared" (Brandt 39). Many previous studies of writing processes have focused on situations in which researchers work with writers one-on-one. These conditions are intimate and urgent. Student writers composing in public in the Undergrad Research and Writing Studio are also doing so in intimate and urgent conditions, but the personal stakes of these public processes are not as commonly studied. Pamela Takayoshi suggested that it is time to begin "focus[ing] [] attention on the writing processes writers use in navigating culture and text" (Takayoshi 551). Studying the processes of composition to understand the impact of technological advances, as Takayoshi advocates, should also include investigating the implications of public participation in writing in an academic context. Russell, Reynolds, and Brandt have all investigated systemic and communal elements in student writing processes, while Alexis and Rule have focused on the material culture of writing as the context that foregrounds student writing habits. The asymmetrical exigencies of that material culture of writing can provide the data-rich empirical ground for investigation that Takayoshi speculates about, especially when this culture of writing is examined with particular focus on the public spaces, like the URWS, in which students undertake academic writing tasks.

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