

AND THEN THEY STARTED TEARING DOORS DOWN:

A LOOK AT *CHORA* IN THE WRITING CENTER

by

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Brian Edward Engler

April 2013

DEDICATION

This paper is for my mother, Suzy Engler, because she never got to see me grow up and become the person I did.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the roles of the writing center through the rhetorical idea of *chora*, or space. There is still much debate amongst writing center scholars as to what exactly a writing center is, and because of this no real definition of the writing center space has been created. Rather than try to create my own definition, I instead use the idea of *chora* to examine the space of the writing center in terms of these other spaces in an attempt to see ways in which various definitions of the space interact and sometimes conflict with each other. Because of the flexible nature of *chora*, I examine the space of the writing center not only in terms of its physical manifestations, but also through its metaphorical spatial relationships within the university setting as well as the pedagogical space it can inhabit as a true center for writing.

In the process of looking at the *chora* of writing centers, I discovered several threads that ran through many definitions of the writing center space. First, writing centers are largely identified as “marginalized” spaces—or spaces that don’t seem to fit in anywhere else in the university setting. However, unlike many in the writing center field, I identify the strengths that are inherent in the marginalized space. Second, because of the marginalized space in the institution, writing centers are prime locations for multimodal writing pedagogies. There the works of several compositional theorists, I identify multimodal moves that translate easily into the writing center space. Finally, I look at ways in which the multimodal pedagogies can be better reflected in the physical space of writing centers. This includes looking at several different kinds of spaces and their efforts that can be adapted moving towards multimodal pedagogies in writing centers.

INTRODUCTION – CHORA IN THE WRITING CENTER

One of the most interesting writing center meetings I've ever been able to take part in occurred towards the middle of the last academic year when a large group of tutors and other staff got together to brainstorm what they wanted to see in the new writing center. The focus of this meeting looked beyond the architectural layout of the space, and instead focused on what we would want to make up the space that was supposed to become the new writing center. During this meeting, a few ideas were tossed about that have been rattling around in my head for the past year. First and foremost, one tutor was adamant in the space being different from the rest of the rooms in the academic building. I distinctly remember the term "anti-classroom" being thrown around, and recall wondering what exactly could make that true. It makes sense, in a way, that a writing center could be constructed as a kind of "anti-classroom". It is, after all, a space that is generally separate from the rest of the centers of academic learning on a college campus. Unlike the classrooms around it, it only has one inhabitant. It doesn't have the conflict of character that comes with having to cater to the needs of an engineering class, a hotel management class, two different literature classes, and a business statistics class that another classroom has to deal with in a single afternoon. This puts the writing center in an interesting space. It has a luxury of being able to stretch its legs a little bit and really turn the area that it inhabits into something with a specific purpose.

The other thing that stuck with me was many of my fellow tutor's insistence that there be some method of noise mitigation available. It should be understood that the spaces that this particular writing center were moving from were both unusually quiet.

One occupied a small closet-like space with thick walls and noise-reducing cubicles that was never occupied by more than two tutors at a time, and the second (still occupied) space is a small, glass-walled room in the library where only one person works at a time. Both of them were, at times, unsettlingly silent. Now, it should be established here, both for clarification and for the sake of my paper to come, that I am not the “silent” kind of guy. I am a child of the ‘90s action film and hair metal. I think the final scene of *True Lies* is genius, with Arnold Schwarzenegger blowing up an entire floor of a building with a Harrier jet to exterminate a single man with a pithy phrase, and I can listen to the entire guitar solo of Guns ‘n Roses “November Rain” with only a very little bit of ironic sensibility. That being said, I had trouble seeing where my colleagues were coming from. The first writing center I worked at was a site of absolute hysteria the vast majority of the time. It was situated right off the library common area, next to the only coffee shop on campus with constant foot traffic and noise from conversation and the constant grinding of coffee. There were no silent spaces and was a wholly unorthodox learning space.

So it struck me that my mental separation from my writing center peers was being caused by what I would consider a fundamental disparity in our visions of what a writing center was supposed to “be”. In short, we had all constructed an idea of what the writing center “space” was that didn’t necessarily fit together. I think we all saw the ultimate goal of writing centers the same way—that is, the concept of “place” was not the issue. There was no pedagogical basis for our disagreement; it merely came about because of what we each thought the best way that space could be constructed was different. Perhaps a way to

put this into more concrete terms is to say that the issue I was having was not an issue of *topos* at all, but rather an issue of *chora*.

In his book, *The Rhetoric of Cool: Composition Studies and New Media*, Jeff Rice spends a whole chapter outlining the idea of *chora* and its separation from *topos* that I think does a great job of creating the differentiation that I want to explore here. While he uses the idea of “cool” for demonstrating his ideas of *topos*, the idea of “writing center” can be applied just as easily. He says that, “We employ the *topoi* for purposes of familiarity, to speak to those assumptions and beliefs we imagine an audience relating to and recognizing quickly” (Rice’s emphasis 30). In short, he is saying that the idea of “cool” works because we all have a preconceived idea of it that comes from generally anything that is a part of popular culture. Likewise, I am able to recognize the idea of “writing center” because I have had the ability—and pleasure, of course—to interact with one and have seen the physical construction of one as well as the kinds of work that go on inside it. With regard to this idea of *topos*, Aristotle puts out the idea that the *topoi* are the “places or lines of argument from which to draw enthymemes” (15). Really, then, this idea works because we all have the basic building blocks from which we can construct the form of the idea of the “writing center”. As I said before, I don’t think the conflict of vision between my colleagues and I was a result of this mistaken *topos*. We each had a construction of the idea of “writing center” in our heads. We knew roughly what it would physically look like, and we all knew what kind of work would go on in there, so our *topos* aligned. The problem, then, went deeper than that, into what Rice calls a “hyper-rhetoric practice,” or *chora* (33).

Just as Rice argues that “cool” extends beyond the normal bounds of the use of *topoi*, I would argue that the idea of “writing centers” could function in a similar manner. Rice says that, “Cool as culture studies, cool as technology, and cool as visual writing all individually operate from different *topos*-based positions” (33). You can think of writing centers as similar beings as we progress further and further into uncharted territory and questions of what, exactly, a writing center can do. We think of writing centers as places of one-on-one tutoring, of collaborative learning, of online compositional spaces, as physical retreats, as WAC centers, as WPA headquarters, and the list goes on and on. Really then, while my colleagues and I had similar ideas of the *topoi* of writing centers, we were all examining it from a different dimension. Rice uses Gregory Ulmer’s book, *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*, to examine this idea further. Ulmer argues that *chora* works as a strategy “by means of pattern making, pattern recognition, pattern generation. It is not that memory is no longer thought of as ‘place,’ but that the notion itself of spatiality has changed” (Ulmer 36). To maybe put this a little differently, *chora* enables us to gather all of the *topoi* in a single place and use it to break off chunks of that idea perfectly enough to examine all of its meanings. In terms of writing centers, this means gathering all of our various concepts of what the writing center “space” can be, and examining them individually in such a way that patterns begin to emerge, and even in such a way that contradictions can be isolated and explored.

The real value in *chora*, I think, lies in its ability to act on so many different levels. Edward Casey extols the virtues of *chora* in his book, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. In it, he writes that with *chora*, “place is definitely not precedent

if by ‘place’ is meant something like a particular locale or spot: anything of this order of specificity, that is, of the order of *topos*...misses the mark...[One of *chora*’s] essential properties is its connectivity—its power to link up, from within, diversely situated entities or events” (43, 47-48). To turn this into a visual metaphor, then, we only need to imagine the writing center (or any idea, as Rice proves with “cool”) as a sort of blacksmith’s puzzle. I have a particularly infuriating example of one of these sitting on my desk called a “Gordian’s Knot.” What makes this “knot” remarkable is that it is made up of six separate pieces that are terribly intertwined to the point that they are formed into one immovable solid. However, after fiddling with it for a few minutes it becomes apparent that parts of it move independently from one another, and after using the cheat book it is possible to take the whole thing apart and examine the knot not just as a solid whole, but also as individual pieces. As Casey says, this ability is really very remarkable and useful from a rhetorical standpoint. By breaking apart these larger ideas related to place, connections emerge that were not available before. Rice perhaps puts this idea down more clearly than I am able when he writes, “*Chora*, I learn, teaches me to bring together disparate events and texts from 1963. It teaches me how to make connections” (35). Now, my connections will obviously reach beyond 1963, as I am not talking about the birth of modern composition, but the core idea here is the same.

To me, then, *chora* allows us to see connections that are otherwise unclear. In the traditional rhetorical sense of the word, *chora* lets us take an argument and disassociate it from all of the preconceived notions surrounding it. It gives a sort of detachment from ideas that we cling to and lets us examine them in a new light—

particularly a new light that places all of our preconceived notions in the context of others' notions as well. When it comes to writing centers, there is no shortage of ideas surrounding the "idea" of what a writing center is supposed to be or do. Often these ideas are complementary, building off one another to advance a goal—but they can also be contradictory, calling out certain ideas as being counter to writing center goals and pedagogies. *Chora* allows us to look at all of these ideas in an equal light, break them apart and see where they come from and what they actually do. It lets us take an idea, in this case the writing center, look at the ways in which it fits together, turn it upside down and see what falls out. Really, in this project, that is my goal. I aim to make connections, and really create a *chora*, between the various ideas of the "writing center" in order to get at the larger question of, "What is the writing center doing and what can be done to help it do that better?" I think by breaking the idea of the writing center down into many different pieces and by examining them under the lens of these various, unrelated lights, valuable new ideas and patterns will emerge. Rice explains this very well when he writes, "Users of a given term's various meaning must actively engage with those meanings in rhetorical ways, discovering unfamiliar and unexpected juxtapositions of these meanings as they compose" (35). As I create this new *chora* of the writing center, I think a greater sense of space, and really place, will emerge and shine light on some of the interesting complexities of what a "writing center" space really looks like and does. I plan on doing this in three ways.

My first chapter examines the various ways the writing center space interacts with the institution. I open the chapter by talking a bit about a 1932 expressionist horror film

and the ways in which it portrays marginalized circus freaks operating within a “normal” world in an attempt to show parallels between much of the published work on writing centers in regards to its marginalized position within the “normal institution.” I then examine the writing center space within three instances of the institution; the English department, the administration, and libraries. My goal in this chapter is not so much to identify the “correct” or “right” place that writing centers belong in the institution, but instead of examine, through the lens of *chora*, the ways in which writing centers interact with different spaces in the institution, and to begin to look at the marginalized position of writing centers as something that is not necessarily a negative in regards to the ways in which it is situated within institutions.

The second chapter focuses on the idea of the writing center space as a center for multimodal writing pedagogy. I begin this section with a close look at the ways in which popular culture—specifically *Super Mario Bros.*—use no-traditional teaching and writing methods to teach players how play the game. Through this lens, I argue that because of the marginalized position of writing centers, they are allowed certain pedagogical freedoms that enable them to operate in unorthodox and creative ways that might not otherwise be possible in the institutional setting. In doing this I examine the benefits of marginalization as well as multimodal writing work, and then look at several instances of the ways in which these multimodal ideas can work. I separate these multimodal ideas into two sets, digital and non-digital. Examining them both allows for me to treat multimodality as its own space within the writing center.

The final chapter relates the previous two chapter's idea surrounding the *chora* of the writing center back to its original *topos*. By taking the ideas surrounding institutional relationships and multimodality, I look at the physical space of the writing center and examine how a space that encourages the best aspects of marginalization and multimodality can be constructed. This starts by looking at a short documentary on the process Blues/Pop guitarist John Mayer went through to write his song "In Repair" in one day at Avatar Studios. In particular, this video shows the space of the studio serving two purposes. One, it provides a physical space where the kind of creativity Mayer desires can be found, and second, it contains the materials—what I refer to as "pedals"—that make that creative work possible. To begin applying this, I first look at the evolution of the writing center space from its roots in the laboratory and clinic methods all the way up to today's "coffee pot" writing center space. Doing that enables me to look at the emerging struggle between form and function in the use of the physical space of the writing center. After doing that, I take a look at four "pedals" that I think can be brought into the writing center to meet the functional needs of writing centers by looking at two interesting uses of wall space at other writing centers, as well as two aspects of space at Valve Software that would help writing centers move towards a more functional use of their space.

THE WRITING CENTER SPACE IN THE INSTITUTION

In 1932 Tod Browning set out to design a new type of horror movie. Horror movies had, of course, been around since the dawn of film, but they almost always contained a villainous creature that terrorized the average populous until they met their untimely end. The Germans were the most famous for this style of film in the time following World War I with films that are still culturally significant today, including Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. What was most remarkable about these films was that the villains, despite being seemingly evil, repugnant creatures, were, for the most part, just like the populace they were terrorizing. Sure, the hypnotized man that Dr. Caligari kept in his cabinet was a giant with an unfashionable haircut, and *Nosferatu* was a vampire, but they were all decidedly human creatures. From an outsider's perspective, they were normal humans, just ones wearing funny wigs and a lot of makeup. Browning saw this as a problem for numerous reasons. First, the freaks, and really the marginalized creatures of the film, were always considered evil, despite the fact that it was really a normal person doing the really evil work. Second, the freaks in the films were never given a chance to tell their side of the story—to show the audience how they operate within the space given them in the world. With that in mind, Browning created his cult masterpiece, *Freaks*.

In a short summary, the film highlights the evil plot of the beautiful, “normal” trapeze artist, Venus (played by Leila Hyams). In an attempt to relieve one of the “freaks” (the dwarf, Hans, played by Harry Earles) of his family's fortune, she plots with fellow “normal” circus performer Hercules the Strong Man (played by Wallace Ford) to

seduce, marry, and poison Hans. However, during a touching pre-wedding dinner in which the “freaks” attempt to accept Venus into their fold, she gets drunk and hurls the “loving cup” full of wine onto the “freaks” at the table while screaming “Get away from me you dirty, slimy, freaks!” (Browning). Suspecting something is amiss, the “freaks” begin investigating the love affair between Venus and Hans and discover her plot. The film concludes with a scene involving all of the “freaks,” male, female, dwarf, midget, giant, skeleton, “pinhead,” armless, legless, and limbless teaming together to castrate Hercules and maim Venus, forcing her to become the very thing she abhors. The Marxist implications of this film are obviously evident, but most interesting to me is the way in which Browning gets his “freaks” to operate within a seemingly hostile world and look out for each other.

From a contextual standpoint, Browning made several interesting decisions surrounding the ways in which he constructed the film. Instead of using professional actors in makeup like Wiene did with Dr. Caligari’s hypnotized giant or like Murnau did with Nosferatu, Browning opted instead to use a cast that was almost entirely composed of actual sideshow “freaks.” In fact, of the almost 20 major cast members, only two were known in Hollywood—Wallace Ford and Leila Hyams, neither of whom were particularly famous—with the rest of the cast being rounded out with circus performers known for their oddities. Bernd Herzgenrath notes that, “when casting the movie, Browning had the largest conglomeration of professional freaks ever assembled trying out for roles. The use of “real freaks” denied actors and audience the safe assurance that what was depicted onscreen was “just a fiction”” (3). This refutation of the audience and

cast's suspension of disbelief plays a large part in emphasizing the spaces that both of these groups occupied in society as a whole.

Inside the movie world, however, the most interesting and relevant aspect this film has to offer is the sense of solidarity that the "freaks" create in order to make the most of their marginalized place in society. The film opens with a scrolling prologue that contains the guiding idea that is repeated often and is central to the message of the film, telling us:

HISTORY, RELIGION, FOLKLORE and LITERATURE abound in tales of misshapen misfits who have altered the world's course...For the love of beauty is a deep seated urge which dates back to the beginning of civilization. The revulsion with which we view the abnormal, the malformed and the mutilated is the result of long conditioning by our forefathers. The majority of freaks, themselves, are endowed with normal thoughts and emotions...They are forced into the most unnatural of lives. Therefore, they have built up among themselves a code of ethics to protect them from the barbs of normal people. Their rules are rigidly adhered to and the hurt of one is the hurt of all, the joy of one is the joy of all. (Browning's emphasis)

This "code of ethics" poses an interesting extra level in the context of the film. It creates a marginalized space that is unique to the freaks and allows them to operate within the greater societal space with a great deal of personal freedom. The opening scene of the film pushes the idea of the "code of ethics" onto the viewer again. The film opens with a carnival barker leading an audience of wealthy patrons to a mysterious box where he begins his frame tale of the film, saying, "They did not ask to be brought into the world, but into the world they came. Their code is a law unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all. And now, folks, if you'll just step this way, you are about to witness the most amazing, the most astounding, living monstrosity of all time. Friends, she was once

a beautiful woman” (Browning). This frame tale, of course, serves to tell the viewer that Venus is now a “freak.” The audience is immediately given the knowledge that Venus has violated the “code of ethics” and must suffer the consequences.

Now, I talked about this film at some length because I feel as though it offers a strong frame tale with which to examine the *chora* of the ways in which the writing center space operates within an institution. Writing centers often position themselves as marginalized spaces within the greater institution. Perhaps I could even go so far as to say that writing centers can point themselves as being a kind of “freak” within a normal society. I should say, however, that I do not offer *Freaks* up as an example as to what a writing centers should be doing—that is waging war with the “normal” institution. That seems rather counter productive and silly. Rather, I use the movie in a (perhaps weak) rhetorical move to highlight not just a common line of thinking about writing centers, but also as a means of looking at that marginalization as not just a weakness, but rather as a potential strength.

Of course, in order for a space to be considered marginalized, or, as I will also say, existing on the periphery of an institution, it has to be placed within the context of something that is not marginalized. In general, I would consider a non-marginalized space within the institution to be one that has two things. First, a physical space within the institution that is ideal for the work being done there. Second, a line of tenure-track faculty positions that are respected for the research and academic work they do. These two things lead to the establishment of a clear location within an academic institution. Carol Haviland and others write that when it comes to space, “Location is political

because it is an organizational choice that creates visibility or invisibility, access to resources, and associations that define the meanings, uses, and users of designated spaces” (85). In short, Haviland and her co-authors seem to be saying the same things as I am—that the space a program has within the institution is reflective of their position within it. Those programs that have full-time faculty members and clear spaces like departmental offices exist within the institution and not outside of it. Those programs that don’t have those are often “invisible,” or marginalized.

When it comes to writing centers, however, we are all too aware of how invisible, or “freak-like,” they can be at times. Even within many English departments and writing programs within them, the writing center seems to be a bit of a joke. In a 2004 article for *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, Melissa Nicholas wrote about her experiences looking for a tenure-track position as the director of a writing program. She writes:

The unofficial message I received...is that while that institution would love to have me on staff, [they] cannot understand why someone with my “talent” and “credentials” (their words) would *want* the position...I had to convince the search committee that writing center work was my first choice and that I was not some literature scholar in disguise, taking a writing center job until something “better” came along. (Nicholas’s emphasis 11)

This is not a strange occurrence, either. In a study done by the Writing Center Research Project, well over 50% of all writing center directors were in non-tenure track positions at their respective institutions (Nicholas 11). Even within their own disciplines, the scholarship of writing centers has trouble being recognized. They are seen more often than not as tutoring services that employ students and contribute little to the academic standing of the institution. As a result, there is no reason to include the writing center in

the institution and so it maintains a marginalized space.

There is no shortage of research out there on the relationships writing centers have within the university system. I think almost since the very beginning of writing center scholarship there has been a noted crisis of identity, and it may be easy to see why. Writing Centers seem to make very little sense to an outsider. To someone looking at the task of writing and learning to write, it is very easy to say that the work writing centers do is already taken, usually by first year composition courses. To someone looking at finances, it's easy to say that it doesn't make sense to hire a relatively large group of apparently untrained and unprepared workers to do the work that should already be being done by professional faculty. To an outsider looking at writing center claims as to what writing centers want to do, they can say that there is almost no part of it that can or isn't already being done by professional research and reference librarians. Perhaps because of this, writing centers have never really "belonged" anywhere on a university campus. They do work that ties them to English departments, student success centers, and libraries to name a few. They exist in a marginalized space that I would argue could work for and against them.

If we rely on *chora* to make connections, then this chapter tries to look at the connections that are formed around the writing center space within the institution. *Freaks* gives us the opportunity to look at the institution through the lens of a kind of frame tale—one that begins to emphasize the kinds of connections that I want to begin to introduce. *Chora*, as I use it, relies on our ability to look at a space and see the various ways in which the writing center space interacts with the spaces around it. In this section,

I want to look at three kinds of relationships writing centers have within the institution and determine how the writing center space fits, or doesn't, into them. First, I want to look at writing centers in the context of English Departments and writing programs and the ways in which the two interact. The sake of simplicity, and for the scope of this paper, I will be referring to writing programs as they exist within English Departments only. While there is traditionally a three-way relationship between these entities, I think the interactions between writing centers and English departments are similarly reflected in the interactions between writing centers and writing programs that exist within those departments. There are, of course, many different organizational paths the three entities can, and do, have, but the scope of that is outside of this thesis.

Second, I want to look at how the writing center space operates within the context of administrative views. In my view, this combines the work done both at an upper level administrative view—that is, the work done at the VP/provost level—with the work being done by administrative programs that are not directly affiliated with an academic department. I do this because both of these spaces exist outside of the work done at a departmental level and therefore represent a space within the institution that is not wholly academic, but also very structured and bureaucratic. Finally, I want to look at the relationship that has seemingly formed between writing centers and libraries and why this is the case. In this context, I want to be clear that I don't mean space as the physical location of writing centers, although that is a part of it, but also I mean space as the ideological and pedagogical space writing centers inhabit within the university setting.

The Writing Center Space Within Writing Programs

At the beginning of his article, “What Should the Relationship Between the Writing Center and Writing Program Be?” Mark Waldo shares a personal anecdote that highlights a major tension that exists in defining the role, and perhaps “space” writing centers inhabit in the context of an English department. In it, he writes that during an interview with a potential new rhetoric and composition hire, a member of the faculty on the hiring committee raised some concerns with the role of the writing center. Waldo writes:

Prefacing his first question, a committee member pointed to me as Writing Center Director and then said to the candidate, “Maybe you can mediate between us. Mark says it’s not the Writing Center’s responsibility to teach grammar, I say it is; I’ve got better things to do than take up composition class time teaching it. Who is responsible for teaching grammar, the writing center or writing program?” (168)

As Waldo notes, there are numerous interesting things going on in this rather loaded question. Certainly we could question the appropriateness of this kind of accusatory claim, or the very ideas of composition pedagogy that it puts forward, but most interesting to Waldo and myself is the perspective this faculty member puts forth regarding the roles of what should go on in the writing center space vs. the composition classroom space. In this question, he seems to be arguing that grammar is an act that is somehow below him, on par with the kinds of work that students should be doing in writing centers.

Unfortunately, I don’t know that this kind of opinion is that far off of the normal views that can be shared between writing centers and writing programs. As writing

centers strive to be recognized for the work that they do, there is still a huge missing step in communicating what it is that work is and how it can benefit writing programs at large. Waldo says that he sees, in a perfect world, the “relationship between writing center and program...as almost symbiotic. These programs work in close association, each benefitting the other and both forwarding writing as a powerful tool for learning. A purposeful bonding, this type of relationship makes the program and center essential to the academic mission of the university, not peripheral to it” (170). Of course, the world is not perfect, but there are a couple items that Waldo mentions that I find interesting. Most interesting to me is this idea that writing centers and writing programs can operate as equals. While it may be possible, as Waldo advocates, for them to share goals, I am not convinced that writing centers will ever be able to operate to the fullest of its abilities solely within, or alongside, a writing program. Doing so limits not only the types of work that writing centers can do, but also, in my mind, hinders the broadened worldview and tools that make writing centers special.

Waldo addresses this tension when talking about his own time at Montana State University—Bozeman. While in his article Waldo does give a glowing review of his time at MSU—a time from 1983-1988 in which the number of student visits to the writing center doubled, the number of different courses seen in the writing center quintupled, and the writing center was able to establish a relationship with 60% of the 500 faculty member on campus—he does identify the close relationship between the writing center and the writing program as a problem. He notes, “The Writing Center was vitally bound to the Writing Program...If there was a problem with Center relationships at MSU...it

appeared to some within the English Department, by which the Center was funded, that the Writing Center received more attention from the University than the English Department” (174). This, I think, highlights some of the risk that comes with intersecting the two spaces at an institutional level. At their heart, perhaps, there will always be a sense of competition between the two types of program. At its best, this competition can be friendly and productive—a competitive spirit driven to improve student writing—but at its worst, this kind of contest can lead to jealousy of the progress and pedagogy of the other. Waldo notes this when he writes, “The Writing Center Director’s position at MSU offered a greater variety and possibility for creative action than did the position of the Director of Writing. Therefore, when I left, the Writing Director took my job” (174). The amount of creativity and variety that writing centers can display is one of their strongest attributes, and while I don’t think writing programs are or should be devoid of creative and varied pedagogies, they are somewhat more limited solely because of their place within the institution. Unfortunately, I think that it often occurs that when a writing center and writing program become too closely attached to one another that they tend to try to encroach on each other’s territory and create a conflict of interest similar to the one that Waldo’s essay starts with.

Of course, we can’t solely point out the problems of a single program or conversation with a single faculty member when we consider the bumpy road that has come from tying writing center work with writing program work. In 1988, Diana George wrote an article entitled “Talking to the Boss” for *The Writing Center Journal* that attempted to address and mend what Karen Rodis calls “the damaged road” between

writing centers and English Departments (45). Rodis recalls that George's solution to this problem of miscommunication between the two spaces was simple, "Her method of mending the damaged path is to talk: to tell our colleagues in English departments (and perhaps in colleges and universities at large) what we do" (45). When it is put like that, it makes me wonder if and when this didn't happen. Ever since the very first "writing clinics" were being formulated, English departments have known what writing centers are for: mending bad and broken writing. There has been a common definition of writing centers floating around English departments around the country for a century now. The problem seems to me to not be a problem of broken communication, but one in which the writing center space within the institution has evolved, and the majority of English departments haven't kept up with the changes.

Rodis presents a similar argument to mine in response to George. While George says that simply talking to the boss to redefine the roles of the spaces within the institution will solve the problems, Rodis argues that this is perhaps not the correct way to go about fixing these issues. She writes, "Talking with the boss, however, is perhaps not the most effective way to eliminate these inequities. We have been talking for many years now, and misperceptions persist. Moreover, to believe that enlightening the boss will bring an end to these inequities implies that the responsibility for these inequities, as well as the power to correct them, lies primarily with the boss" (46). This response is almost completely in agreement with my assessment of the relationships between the two spaces. By giving the control to the department, it is then assumed that writing centers are subservient to their masters in the English department. It creates an unequal power

balance that places one set of pedagogies over another—a combativeness that is exactly what most people in English departments and writing centers try to avoid. Where Rodis loses me, however, is when she indicates, as Jeanne Simpson points out in regards to Central Administrations, that English Departments “prefer to keep writing centers powerless and marginalized” (Simpson 48). At risk of making English departments out to be a super-villain the likes of which Gotham City has never seen, I want to take a step back and say that this view is in not indicative of how all English departments regard their writing centers, or that it is at the heart of an evil plan to keep writing centers powerless. That would be crazy. However, the fact remains that writing centers are traditionally ranked much lower on an institutional totem pole as a result of their association with working with remedial writing problems.

I think that Rodis’s work with tutors and clients provides at least some evidence to support that claim, though I don’t think she does enough to prove that marginalization is a bad thing—something I will argue against later. She calls this disingenuous relationship between English departments and writing centers a result of an “Expectation Conflict”—that is, “the many conflicting expectations that a tutor at a writing center encounters each and every time she tutors a student” (46). What’s most interesting to me here is that she places tutors and students at the center of this debate regarding institutional space, not directors or professors or instructors. By placing the space in the worlds of the students and the not-quite-students, she emphasizes the marginalization that can occur even within our own writing centers and showcases those really effected through the institutional posturing. She says that:

Conflict of expectation usually begins with the English department, whose members are often vague as to what they expect of their writing center...The instructors of composition, even when they are not members of the department, will often echo these sentiments: writing centers provide a place to send students who have serious syntactical and grammatical problems with their writing...However, it is perhaps time to examine our own part in Expectation Conflict, to see precisely how much of the responsibility lies with us. (46)

Rodis's findings, though admittedly unscientific due to their lackluster sample size, paint an interesting picture of the roles writing centers play within the institution at a departmental level. Of particular note is that often writing centers are fulfilling a prophecy they made themselves in regards to the remedial emphasis placed on them.

Of the three universities that Rodis examined in her survey, she noticed that a similar trend emerged between all three regarding a conflict in pedagogy and practice with remedial writing. She writes, "And yes, [the writing centers] did offer some remedial help—because [they were] conceived of as including that, too. Often, however, those of us who are attempting to set up writing centers find that the only way we can sell our idea to the administration is to call it remedial: after all, instructors do need help teaching these issues, and students need help learning them" (54). In effect, Rodis is showing that writing centers cannot put the full blame of their inability to fully operate within the writing program on the backs of those in English departments with narrow views of the jobs of writing centers. Often writing centers encourage and endorse those behaviors as a means to claim validity in the eternal struggle for legitimacy and funding. Additionally, Rodis noticed that traditional public relations moves were not effective in improving relationships between writing programs and writing centers. She writes, "While newsletters and commercials seems to do very little to change departmental

perceptions of writing centers, they are very effective in attracting students” (55). In effect, public relations outreach programs simply don’t reach those that need to hear about the shifting goals and pedagogies of writing centers. Because of this, the struggle between writing programs and writing centers continues despite their similar interests and goals.

In effect, I think that rather than living together symbiotically, writing centers and writing programs force the other to operate outside of their comfort zone. At once, the “freak” writing center is trying to live in the “normal” realm of academia, and the “normal” writing program is being force to coexist with the “freak” ideas of the writing center and, by trying to face the two programs into the same space, many of the best aspects of the two programs are limited. Once again writing centers find themselves fighting their marginalized position to the benefit of no one. This is a habit that crops up again when writing centers are looked at through the perspectives of their existence within the administrative space.

The Writing Center Space Within Administrations

If operating the writing center space within a department is seen as a necessary evil, then the popular opinion of the writing center space within the administration is often seen as living on the doomed planet Alderaan under the shadow of the Death Star. In her essay, “Perceptions, Realities, and Possibilities: Central Administration and Writing Centers,” Jeanne Simpson attempts to address and look at some of the preconceived notions that writing centers tend to have about the roles of the

administration in their space, as well as how justifiable those preconceived notions are.

As mentioned previously, Simpson outlines six common perceptions that writing centers have about central administration. She says they are:

1. Central Administration (CA) prefers to keep writing centers powerless and marginalized.
2. CA is where all the power is concentrated.
3. CA's distribution of funding support within an institution is unpredictable at best, capricious at worst.
4. Faculty rank and the situating of a writing center within a department accrue important prestige in the CA.
5. Major curricular decisions are made in the CA.
6. Retention, tenure, and promotion decisions are determined primarily by CA. (189)

First, I do think I need to be clear about how I am reading Simpson's use of "Central Administration." For me, this idea of the CA is reflective of the type of administrative work that is being done by Deans and Provosts, but also by the assorted Vice Presidents of institutional entities like Student Success or Facilities or Budgets. In short, this "Central Administration" is representative of the parts of the university that are centrally located, but do not belong to a specific department. Now, the marginalization of the writing centers I have mentioned before, and will address at greater length further on in this paper, but there are still several interesting ideas floating around in this list that greatly effect how writing centers see their space as operating within the institution. The

two that interest me the most are the ideas that central administration control most of the power within the institution, and therefore have a large effect on the space of the writing center, as well as the idea that the situating of a writing center has a direct influence on the prestige allocated by the central administration.

Simpson points out that the relationship between writing centers and central administrations is much more complex than most writing centers would like to believe. While it is common for writing centers to think of central administrations as being the overlords of power within the institution and the writing center, for the most part this is not the case. Simpson writes, “Administrators, by and large, are more burdened with paper pushing and meeting schedules than faculty imagine, so that opportunities to get out and visit campus facilities may be governed by crisis, not by desire to acquire knowledge” (190). Given that, it becomes more reasonable to look at the relationships between writing centers and central administrations as being a little further spread than originally thought. After all, writing centers are rarely scenes of any real campus crisis, so for the most part they fly completely under the radar of central administrations, allowing for that feeling of marginalization. In fact, the only information that administrations receive from writing centers comes through the reports that are sent to them by the writing center. These reports, often dense and full of justifications and quantitative analyses of student numbers, class visits, tutor hours, etc., tend to do very little to help the administration formulate any kind of view of what actually goes on in writing centers. Simpson addresses this when she says, “Thick and detailed reports are not the solution to this problem [of perception]. Rather, careful planning of what goes

into the required reports and carefully timed invitations to Central Administration would be a more effective solution. The point is that writing centers have more control over what Central Administration knows about them than is perceived” (190). In effect, Simpson argues that the power structure at the heart of the writing center space is more complex than writing centers often realize. In many ways, there is a great deal of power in existing in the peripheral vision of the institution because it allows writing centers to construct and maintain a space that is representative of what they want to be able to show.

Perhaps because of the peripheral or marginal placement of the writing center space within the institution, there is no shortage of opinions regarding the allocating of prestige and faculty rank done by the central administration to writing centers within departments. However, as much as writing centers would like to believe that this is often a personal verdict done on behalf of their judgment of writing center work, Simpson argues that “departmental affiliation is not seen by Central Administration as a prestige issue but as a mechanical/organizational/ logistical issue” (191). What I think Simpson is trying to get at here is the fact that writing centers do not operate in conventional ways. They are not often affiliated with other student support services, but do not, as I just looked at, often fit in particularly well within departments either. Because of this, administrations are often forced to look at writing centers through conventional means, even if they don’t fit very well. Simpson notes the writing centers position in this liminal space when she writes, “A frequent difficulty for writing centers is that they do not easily fit the conventional structure and yet are jammed into it because it is familiar to both

Central Administration and writing center staff” (192). Again, Simpson and I agree that the space that writing centers inhabit within institutions is complicated because of the fact that writing centers are not normal spaces within the institution. They break all sorts of “normal” barriers because of the ways in which they operate in between academic and support services.

There does seem to be a movement, however, within writing centers to distance themselves within the institution from the academic side of their work and see what they can learn from the supportive side of what they do. In their article, “Creating Alliances Across Campus: Exploring Identities and Institutional Relationships,” Maggie Herb and Virginia Perdue look at what the writing center space can learn not just from academic alliances within the institution, but also from the non-academic offices that writing centers often share goals with. They write, “Rarely...do writing center administrators hear about outreach to non-academic offices, to counseling services, disability support services or other student affairs units...yet, if we stop to think about it, the professionals in these offices certainly have contributions to make—maybe not to our financial stability, but certainly to our tutor training” (75). This creation of a novel institutional relationship—that is, one that includes tutor training outside of the normal composition workshop material that usual encompass tutor-training materials—makes interesting implications about the writing center space within a different administration. The tutor training that Herb and Perdue had their tutors get involved in relied heavily in how to establish an understanding and relationship with clients facing issues ranging from multilingual difficulties, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender identification, and students

dealing with emotional trauma in their writing. More interesting to me was not so much the actual nuts and bolts of the training that this cross-institutional endeavor encouraged, but rather in Herb and Perdue's reflections and outcomes from the project.

What they discovered, perhaps unsurprisingly, was that their students and the other administrators were unsure about the effects of the training. Herb and Purdue note:

Our assumption that all tutors would respond to each presentation with the same interest as we did prevented us from realizing that these sessions covered complicated ground that our diverse group of tutors would respond to very differently. In our eagerness to collaborate with our colleagues, we did not adequately prepare the tutors for the meetings, especially with respect to our goals. (83)

Most interesting to me here is the fact that Herb and Purdue almost certainly overestimated the interest and acceptance of the tutors to this new way of looking at their place within the institution. There has been quite a bit of research published about the roles tutors can play as councilors, but all of it seems to assume that tutors are able to maintain an objective role and not acknowledge their own emotions—a situation that many professionals far more highly trained than writing center tutors struggle with (Herb et al. 78). Despite these problems, however, Herb and Perdue determine in their reflection that the exercise with worthwhile if only because, “we discovered that the writing center community has not adequately considered how tutors and administrators alike might attend more carefully to making our writing centers safe places for GLBT students as well as for those who write or talk about traumatic experiences” (83). In short, they seem to be saying that writing centers haven't done enough thinking yet about how their space in the institution intersects with the administrative spaces outside of the departmental setting within the institution.

Continuing that line of thought, Herb and Perdue note in their outcomes that the realization of a tangible relationship between writing centers and different administrations has a long way to go. They note, “In the intervening months since these visits, neither we nor the faculty in these student services offices have pursued further official contact. However, changing circumstances, not a lack of goodwill, have discouraged further collaboration—at least for now” (84). In a way, this makes sense. Although the relationships student support services share within the institution fall well outside the scope of this paper, I don’t believe I am reaching too far in suggesting, as Herb and Perdue do, that those programs suffer from many of the same level of identity crises that writing centers do. Because of this, they are surely following the same institutional moves that writing centers are—shifting continuously to maintain their position within the greater administrative institution. As Herb and Perdue note, “These internal and external changes serve well to remind us that collaborative efforts across campus will ebb and flow as conditions warrant” (84). With this in mind, it may be that the position writing centers inhabit both in central administration as well as other service administrations is not as unique a phenomenon as we would sometimes like to think. While I would argue that writing centers do exist on the periphery of the institution, perhaps we are not as alone in the margins as we sometimes believe.

The Writing Center Space Within Libraries

In the same line of thinking as above, I think it can be helpful to look at writing center space within the space of another increasingly marginalized environment—that of

the university library. Just as Waldo sees a symbiotic relationship existing between writing centers and programs, I see a very similar relationship that I think has been fairly well documented between writing centers and libraries. In many cases writing centers inhabit space within the walls of libraries, as is the case at Black Hills State University, Seattle University, and The University of Washington. However, even in places, such as Montana State University, where the two are separate entities, they still often interact and depend on each other. Several times the writing center at MSU has been visited by one of the reference librarians for various presentations to both tutors and clients, and the writing center has been invited into the university library in order to participate in end of the semester “Write Nights.” There is even a small satellite writing center inside the library that is only staffed by one tutor at a time a few hours a week. Given, then, that this relationship seems to exist, and that these two spaces seem to interact so closely, we have to ask ourselves why this is so.

In his article, “Locating the Center: Libraries, writing centers and information literacy,” James Elmborg seems to be saying that this relationship exists because of a collision that is occurring between what we tend to consider “traditional” academic writing that occurs in first-year composition courses and the considerable research demands that students encounter as they dive further into their academic specialties. He writes that we traditionally look at these two worlds as being separate by saying, “Writing instruction involves the writing— which focuses on language usage, disciplinary discourse, and questions of academic genre—while information literacy involves the research—which focuses on the construction of good search statements, the

evaluating of sources, and the assembling of bibliographies” (7). In short, he says that we have created a separation between these two worlds that means that many in composition studies and information literacy struggle to bridge. He goes on to argue, and I agree, that separating these ideas is doing no favors to anyone—not to the students who are taught that academic writing and research are separate, or to the professionals who are walled in such a way that their respective specialties are unable to communicate with each other even though they do that communication in their own writing every day.

Elmborg’s idea here is centered around the concept that this artificial separation is caused in no small part because it is possible to view of the roles of libraries and writing centers as something very separate from one another even though they can often occupy the same space and, even if they don’t, interact and overlap on a very regular basis. He writes, “By treating these two domains as separate, we create a disconnection that serves neither students nor our respective professional identities well. In fact, by recognizing that writing and research are one single activity, we might reinvigorate the discussion about writing process and how the search for information is shaped by that process” (7). In short, the main idea here seems to be that writing centers and libraries are now becoming more and more involved in each other and can only benefit from working together at an institutional level. This closeness seems to be stemming from the idea that as more and more research work moves online, both writing centers and libraries are being forced to adapt and the lines that used to separate them are becoming more and more blurred. Elmborg writes, “In the emerging networked learning environment, many of the traditional expectations for faculty and students about where and how learning

occurs have become unstable, and traditional measures of quality are no longer relevant” (7). It would seem to be safe to say that the “networked learning environment” that Elmborg speaks of has moved beyond the point of “emerging” and is now completely emerged. So then, if we acknowledge that writing centers and libraries have a common goal, we have to ask ourselves how they fit together and work at that institutional level in an increasingly digital world.

To help approach this question, Elmborg turns to Brenda Dervin and her ideas regarding the ways in which students seek out information in a way she calls “knowledging” (Dervin 38). If we think of writing centers and libraries as acting separate from one another—that is, if we think of a writing center as a place where writing happens and libraries as a place where researching happens—we fail to really understand the interconnectivity of the two. Elmborg writes, “As students write, they are “knowledging,” engaging actively with new sources and also with prior knowledge drawn from sources. They use those sources to build bridges to cross gaps in their existing knowledge” (8). In short, it seems silly to separate the two activities from each other because the person doing the writing does not really ever think them of as separate. A somewhat troubling thought is that this is something we do regularly, even at the highest levels of academic writing. In his article, “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae addresses this separation that Elmborg calls a “bifurcation” in a completely different way by looking at gained knowledge versus written ability. Bartholomae writes that in history classes, “a student can learn to command and reproduce a set of names, dates, places, and canonical interpretations...but this is not the same as learning to ‘think’

(by learning to write) like a historian” (633). Really, what Bartholomae seems to be doing is pushing against this idea that research and writing can be seen as linked activities, and that because they are so different, we can’t expect students to learn them both at the same time.

At an institutional level, I don’t think this kind of thinking is uncommon. At Seattle University, for instance, the Writing Center shares a floor in the university library with not only other tutoring services for different disciplines, including a math lab and a generic set of “Learning Assistance Programs” but also with a “Research Support Services” center that is staffed by its own Research Services Librarians. Perhaps most interestingly, the Research Support is on the opposite side of the floor

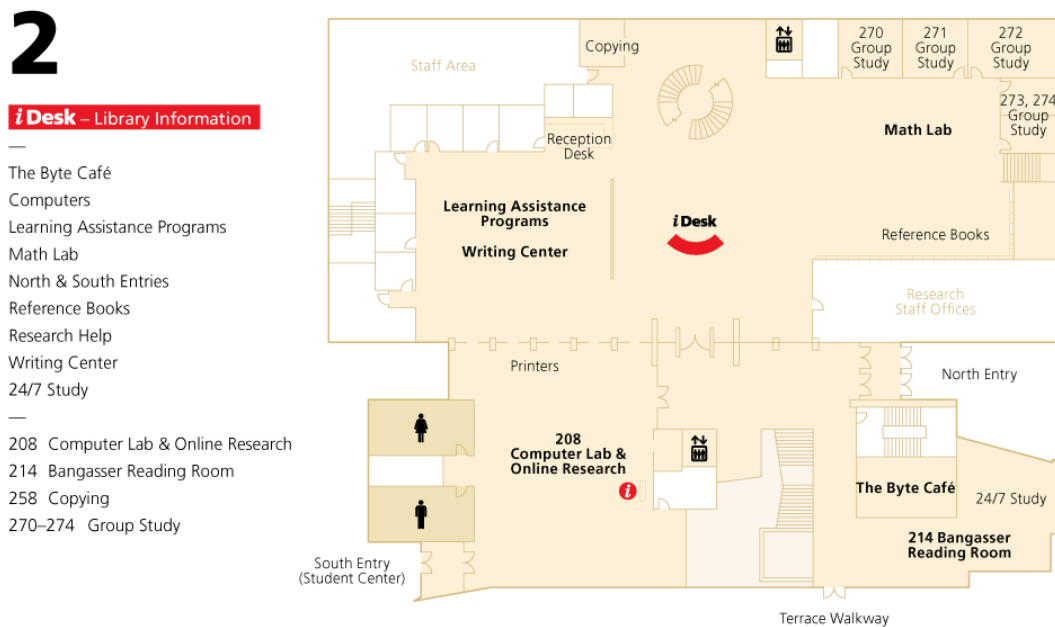


Figure 1 – Lemieux Library Second Floor Plan (Seattle University)

In Figure 1, you can see the general layout of the “McGoldrick Learning Commons” on the second floor of the Lemieux Library at Seattle University. The one difference

between this diagram and my recent visit is that the Math lab now cohabitates with the writing center and the rest of the learning assistance programs on the west side of the floor and the section labeled “Math Lab” on the east side of the library is now the location of the Research Support Services. In between the two there is a beautiful set of mirrored spiral staircases, a help desk and a very large, wooden slat wall. There is no doubt that the two services are seen as distinctly separate.

This separation is seen even more clearly in looking at the services offered by the Seattle University writing center on their website. Under the major headings on the “Resources” page, there is information on brainstorming, outlining/thesis development, drafting/revising, and editing (Seattle University Writing Center). Researching is curiously absent from any reference to the writing process. In fact, the only link on the page that even mentions researching links to a page on the Purdue OWL website. There isn’t even a mention that there is a service available to students to help them with research that is less than a hundred yards away. Likewise, the information available about the research services is absent of any mention of why a student would want help with this or any reference to research as taking part in any writing process. There is an underlying tension here that is very obvious.

This tension is not unique to Seattle University by any means. In a recent visit to the writing center at the University of Washington, I again encountered this separation, although they were in the process of working with the library to do something about it. One thing I found particularly interesting was that the UW writing center doesn’t label itself as just a space for writing, but rather as the “Odegaard Library Writing and

Research Center” (OWRC). When I asked the director of the OWRC, Jenny Halpin, about this distinction, she was quick to explain that they were not officially supported in any way by the library, and that the vast majority of their funding comes from the College of Art and Sciences.

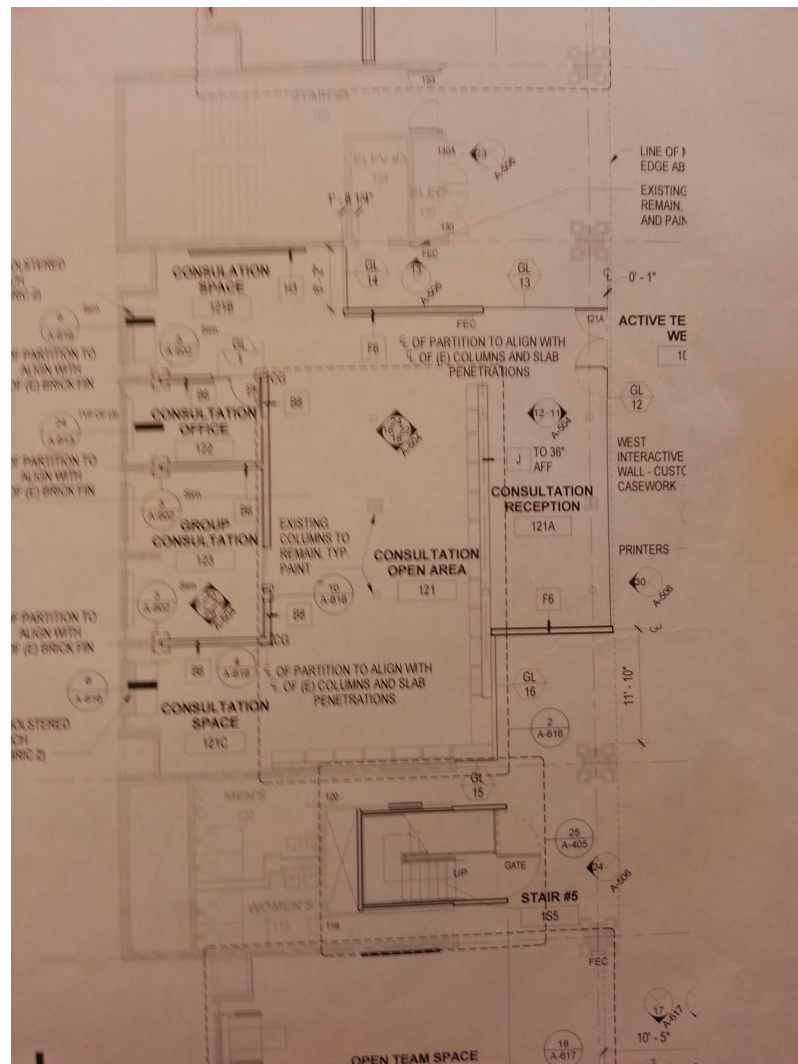


Figure 2 – Floor plans for the new OWRC (University of Washington)

However, she did clarify that despite the fact that they existed in a closed off room on one of the upper floors of the library, they were working very closely with the library, and

specifically the research librarians, to integrate each other into the new OWRC space that was under construction on the first floor of the library. In Figure 2, you can see this new space off the main entryway of the library that is immediately adjacent to the reference librarians. Most interesting to me was the large, open space in the middle of the floor plan between the “group consultation” spaces and the “consultation reception” space. Against the east wall, the library is equipping the new OWRC with a long set of computers and a librarian solely for the purpose of research assistance during the course of sessions, as well as enhanced tutor training regarding research methods and practices.

In these two examples, I think it is apparent that both writing centers and libraries operate within similar places in the institution, but can handle it in different ways. At worst, they coexist in a kind of grudging respect that acknowledges that both are necessary, but live in fear of encroaching on each other’s territory. At best, they can work together to promote the kinds of blended “knowledging” that Elmborg endorses. However, I think in order to continue understanding how libraries and writing centers interact it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that they do exist, together, in a liminal space in the university. As has been written about ad nauseam, writing centers live in an often-marginalized space between faculty and students. As Elmborg notes:

They see the best and worst of students and faculty. From faculty they see instructors who work tirelessly to create dynamic, engaged learning environments for students, and they see faculty who seem determined to work against the best efforts of students and those who support them, creating assignments that almost encourage cheating and lazy shortcuts. From students, they see hard work and commitment that faculty sometimes doubt exists, but they also see students who want their work done for them through proofreading and bibliographic services. (Elmborg 8-9)

However, Elmborg continues, and I agree, that we can often see libraries operating within the same constraints. They interact with faculty and students on much the same level as writing centers do. Much of the time spent by librarians, as well as writing center directors, is spent in service to other faculty and students, and not as equal participants in either field. This creates a natural disconnect between them and the rest of the university setting. It is easy to marginalize either space, by both faculty and students, as operating in a different part of the university. It is because of this that it is becoming more and more important for libraries and writing centers to come together and recognize those instances where they can work together towards similar goals.

As Elmborg notes, the prime example of how this can work best is showcased by The University of Kansas through the work of (now former) writing center director Michelle Eodice and librarian Lea Currie. He writes, “Eodice and Currie find their partnership held up [by the university administration] to the campus as an example of resource sharing and creative problem solving, and they find themselves on the forefront of defining what collaboration and interdisciplinarity look like” (Elmborg 9). Really, the two spaces have acknowledged the importance of cohabitation and cooperation. They have recognized that they both have the ability to complement each other in mutually beneficial ways, much as The University of Washington is doing and Seattle University is still struggling to find. Elmborg attributes this phenomenon to the changing nature of academic space. He writes:

Libraries and writing centers have unique needs in relation to the creation of academic space. Writing centers often contend with bad space, assigned as they are to isolated, hard-to-find offices with insufficient technology. Libraries, meanwhile, are undergoing a crisis of space. As collections

become increasingly virtual, the nature of library space is changing and libraries are actively exploring ways to create space for collaboration and education. (Elmborg 9-10)

In short, he seems to be saying that writing centers are approaching a point in time in which their presence is in need of substantial growth while libraries are approaching a point in time where the very purpose and definition of the idea of the library space is changing. However, I think it goes deeper than this, and I think Elmborg hints at a real cause of collaboration with two key phrases: the “insufficient technology” of writing centers and the “increasingly virtual” nature of libraries.

The *chora* that this chapter represents is not, of course, a complete picture. There are undoubtedly writing centers that buck these trends—that fit neatly within their departmental or administrative niche—but the examples given in this chapter are representative of the types of writing centers being discussed in the writing that is going on today about the situation of the writing center within the institution. Given that these short examples are representative of the kinds of spaces that writing centers are being forced to occupy, the question becomes a matter of what the implications of this situation are. After all, if *chora* is supposed to be used to hold something upside down and see what falls out, then we have to make some conclusions. Really, I think that this section showcases the ideas highlighted in *Freaks*. Writing centers have long been acknowledged as being marginalized. There is a struggle in trying to see how writing centers can fit into the institution. The work that writing centers do does not, at times, fit in especially well at a departmental level, but demands a level of scholarship that is not accessible or important at an administrative level. Writing centers have an existing relationship with

libraries, but it is changing as technology redefines the roles played by both spaces.

Chora allows us the chance to see how these examples interact to reflect this existing work on the marginalization of the writing center space.

CHAPTER 2—THE WRITING CENTER IN THE MULTIMODAL SPACE

I would argue, and I don't think I am alone in this, that the first stage of the first world in the original 1985 Nintendo game *Super Mario Bros.* represents what may be the pinnacle of video game level design. Pre-1986 video games—known as the “classic” era of video gaming by organizations like the American Classic Arcade Museum—are most notably known for both their sometimes-hilarious levels of difficulty as well as their incredible programming efficiency. Computers at the time were limited to 256 bits of memory, which meant that every bit of data had to be put towards a very specific function. If the system ran out of room in its memory the results were often reflected poorly in the game. For instance, both of the classic games *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man* contain 256 stages, but because some of the memory in the game had to be devoted to things like character animations and non-playable character path finding, the 256th stage is jumbled and unplayable because of a lack of system memory, making the games unbeatable. In *Super Mario Bros.* this meant that the only text that could be in the game was restricted to “Mario,” “World,” and “Time” on the top of the screen. Unlike the games of today, this meant that there could be no textual explanations or dialogue to help the player through the game. Every instruction had to come to the player through common intuition and trial and error and not a traditional written tutorial.

This lack of common textuality is what really makes the first stage of *Super Mario Bros.* so remarkable. Without instructing the player to do a single thing, the game teaches the player to play through a series of perfectly constructed obstacles that force the

player to interact with the world that they are in. Below, Figure 3 shows the first obstacles of the first stage.

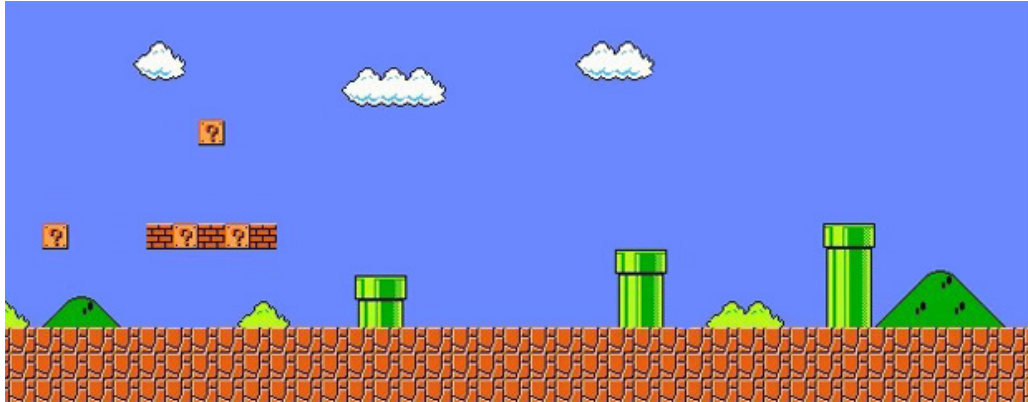


Figure 3 – World 1-1 in *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo)

When the player first begins a game, they find themselves standing on the far left edge of a largely empty screen. This opening, danger-less area serves as the perfect place for a new player to explore the controls. Of course, this game only had two buttons aside from the directional pad. Presumably, the player would use this screen to discover that one button doesn't do a whole lot except, if the new player is particularly observant, move Mario a little faster than normal, and that the other button makes Mario jump (!). The player then takes stock of the screen, perhaps tries to move to the left, and realizes that the screen doesn't move. Ok, so the player moves to the right, and sure enough, the screen moves with them. Soon, they come across two things: a glowing block with a question mark and a small brown mushroom man scooting towards them. Using their newfound knowledge of jumping, they try to avoid the mushroom man by jumping over him, but the position of the question mark block gets in the way, shooting a coin into the air and the player down in front of the mushroom man to die an untimely, early death.

Right off the bat, without writing a word, the game has taught the player two things. First, jumping up into question mark blocks rewards the player, and hitting the brown mushroom man punishes them. So the player tries again. They move to the right, and this time wait for the mushroom man to pass underneath the block before jumping. However, the player has never jumped over anything before, so they jump straight into the side of the block and on top of the mushroom man, killing him. Suddenly the player has learned that the perhaps unintuitive move of jumping on top of an enemy will kill it. Moving forward, then go and attack the next block to get a new reward. However, the next block, instead of giving the player a coin, spits out another mushroom—this one orange. Players now know that mushrooms are evil and should be avoided, so it is a good thing that the mushroom is heading away from them...but wait! Some dastardly game designer put a giant green pipe in the way, sending the scooting orange mushroom straight at the player. Panicking, the player attempts to jump over the mushroom, but instead hits their head on the bricks and is bounced down once more in front of the mushroom. However, this time this provides a different result. Rather than dying, the player grows to double the size. The player has learned another new thing: brown mushroom men are bad, but orange mushrooms are good. So the player moves forward again, jumping over the first green pipe with ease before coming up to another green pipe that they can't just tap the jump button to get over. So they are force to try again, this time really laying into that poor button, and they discover that holding the button longer makes Mario jump higher.

As the first world continues it goes on to teach the player every game mechanic that they will need to progress through the entire game, without ever telling the player a single thing explicitly. I spend the time talking about this because I think in a perfect world of writing center pedagogies, we would like to create a space that does the same kind of teaching and learning that goes on between the player and the game in *Super Mario Bros.* After all, a common theme in writing centers is to remove students from the traditional “academic” environment and create an atmosphere of learning that is instead reliant on non-traditional means of learning to write—namely collaboration and conversation. In a way, the space that Shigeru Miyamoto created in *Super Mario Bros.* is reflective of one aspect of the writing center *chora* that I think is becoming a major focus of writing center spaces. I think this is possible for one very simple reason. As I examined in the first chapter, writing centers operate within a marginalized space in the institution, though they often fight against it. Because they don’t really have a place in the institution—at least not wholly in English departments, administrations, or libraries—they are able to create and look at the acts of writing going on around them in a completely different way.

If *chora* allows us to make connections, then a step we can take is to look past the marginalization of writing centers and make connections not only with what that marginalization prevents, but also with what it can allow. Because of the abilities of *chora* to move fluidly around an idea, it becomes possible to not only explore ideas, but build off of the results of that exploration. To me, this marginalization of writing centers is the perfect place to begin looking at what can be done because of that marginalization in

terms of new and interesting pedagogies and ideas about the purpose of writing centers. Due to this, the *chora* of this chapter looks at ways in which non-traditional modalities are in many ways good fits for writing center pedagogies. In a way, it is a connection both with the ideas presented in the first chapter as well as with the ideas inherent in *chora*.

The Marginalized Writing Center as a Multimodal Space

Now, I am certainly not the only person to see the marginalization of writing centers as a good thing, Beth Boquet (1999), and Jane Nelson and Kathy Evertz (2001) have all written about this phenomenon extensively. In William Macauley and Nicholas Mauriello's collection, *Marginal Words, Marginal Work?*, they state this basic idea the most clearly. In their introduction to the collection they write, "instead of thinking of marginalization as exclusively pejorative, [they have] found value in reconsidering work from/in/of the margins without that judgment" (xiv). In short, they say that being marginalized within the institution is not necessarily a bad thing, and in fact acknowledging our marginalized space can prove to have beneficial elements to it. In her article "Why There is No Happily Ever After," Melissa Nicholas highlights then when she urges writing centers to "move from the passive Cinderella figure waiting in the basement to be rescued [and to] actively dictate the conditions of our next generation of work" (14). Just like Cinderella, writing centers have been stuck waiting for a very late Prince Charming to come realize our potential within some facet of the institution and take us off to their land so we can rule in peace and prosperity. However, unlike

Cinderella, Nicholas argues that waiting any longer is a waste of time. Writing centers are what they are, and perhaps the time spent in the margins have had a large impact on where they are now and where they are able to go from here. A big part of that, I argue, lies in realizing the potential ability this marginal existence gives writing centers to interact with new and exciting ideas surrounding multimodal writing.

I don't know that there can be any real argument against the idea that both writing and research are in the late stages of a process in becoming wholly digitalized. This digitalization of literacy is, I would argue, at the forefront of multimodal education efforts. Perhaps Johndan Johnson-Eilola was ahead of his time when he wrote in 1997 that:

The growth of technologies requires us to rethink what we mean by composition. We cannot merely add these technologies to our classrooms and theories as tool with which our students arrive at their primary task...we must take these forms of communication to be at least as important (and often more culturally relevant than singly authored papers. (7)

Now, I say Johnson-Eilola was ahead of his time because this line of thinking was not what I would call widely believed at the time of his writing. Many others in the field of composition studies and writing center theory were arguing pretty much the exact opposite—and some still are. For example, Muriel Harris and Michael Pimberton wrote in an article written just a couple years prior, “There are losses as well in this faceless, disembodied world, as the lack of personal contact may seem to dehumanize a setting that writing centers have traditionally viewed as personal and warm” (156). This line of thought, what Jackie McKinney refers to as “dehumanizing” thought, is also seen in the works of Eric Hobson (1998), Scott Russell (1999), and David Carlson and Eileen

Apperson-Williams (2007) (204). However, despite these arguments to the contrary, I am forced to argue that digital, and really totally multimodal, literacy work is at the forefront of defining the new space of the writing center in the university setting.

I will be the first to admit and acknowledge that the traditional paper format is still, and likely will remain for the foreseeable future, the dominant discourse of the humanities. Despite the emergence of digital journals like *Kairos*, a multimodal journal for rhetoric and writing pedagogy, the majority of writing done at the institutional level is still done with print-and-paper modalities in mind. Because of this, the majority of the writing done by students for class work will likely remain grounded in the realm of 8.5 x 11 inch white, double-spaced papers. This paper itself is evidence that such discourse is still the dominant one. However, this doesn't mean that we should simply allow the teaching and thinking of writing to be constrained by the same limitations. In the introduction to her book, *Towards a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka argues that our increasingly digital age calls for a revisiting of our ideas concerning multimodal pedagogy. She writes, "One impetus for curricular change has to do with bridging the gap between the numerous and varied communicative practices in which students routinely engage outside of school versus the comparatively narrow repertoire of practices typically associated with the writing classroom" (5). Now it would certainly seem true that the majority of writing classrooms are constrained into what I'm sure Shipka would call outdated modalities, but I can't help but wonder if that isn't the case simply because of the institutional expectations that are placed on those writing classrooms are identical to the ones I mentioned before. So, then, the question becomes a matter of wondering

what writing centers, as a marginalized space, can do to help begin to bridge the gap that Shipka mentions in bringing the kinds of writing and thinking students do outside of school into the institution.

I think one of the key things to think about when considering the possibility of digital spaces of writing centers within the institution comes from the very nature of what writing centers are designed to do—namely (and perhaps idealistically), be centers for all types of writing. Robert Samuels argues that if we want to talk about writing we must acknowledge all of the types of writing that go on in students' varied lives. He writes:

Even if [students] do not realize it, writing is at the center of many of their academic and leisure activities. Whether they are flirting online, instant messaging each other in class, or playing computer games, these students are constantly interacting through writing and technology. Yet many of these same students still equate writing with composing essays or grammatical correctness. (3)

In short, Samuels seems to be saying that students equate all writing with the kinds of traditionally grounded essay assignments they are required to do as class work through schooling. They don't realize that every time they update their statuses on Facebook, swear at each other over VOIP services in video games, or spend hours texting each other they are participating in much the same kind of writing that their writing teachers are encouraging (sometimes). Even with these examples, however, both Samuels and I fall into the trap of restricting ideas of multimodal writing to screen-based realms. Suzanne Miller addresses this in her article, "English Teacher Learning for New Times: Digital Video Composing as Multimodal Literacy Practice" by quoting Gunther Kress. She writes, "The 'new landscape of communication' is marked by the emergence of domains besides language at the center of everyday communication—particularly multimodalities

such as images, music, and body movements” (62). Really, there is no reason to limit our multimodal thought in terms of screen-based or digital realms, as they can exist in any art form—whether it is music, dance, art, or any hybrid that hasn’t been created yet.

So the questions that arise then are twofold: how do you even bring this into a writing center, and why? After all, the work that writing centers primarily do involves a great deal of treating existing documents that have been crafted with traditional assignment structures in mind. Shipka, I would argue, begins to address this when she addresses Paul Prior’s idea about our traditional desire to treat texts in terms of being nouns rather than verbs—that is to say a static idea rather than something in motion. She writes:

Prior’s point and the point I would echo here...is that theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical frameworks that fail to trace the complex ways that texts come to be, and overlook how writing functions as but one ‘stream within the broader flows of semiotic activity’ cannot help but fail to illumine the roles of other texts, talk, people, perceptions, semiotic resources, technologies, motives, activities, and institutions play in the production, reception, circulation, and valuation of seemingly stable finished texts. (13)

In short, Shipka—through Prior—seems to be saying that it is a natural mistake to assume that writing is ever solely done through traditional mediums. Even if left completely undirected, there is a huge amount of active influence being done on any student’s work that is being derived from the world around them. Their works are being shaped by who they are talking with, what texts they are consuming in other classes and in everyday life, their extra curricular activities and even the institutional relationships they are—perhaps subconsciously—picking up on. Imagine then, the strength that can be garnered if a writing center was able to step forward and direct those kinds of active

writing impulses. If a writing center was able to even partially make a student aware of these kinds of shaping mechanisms and introduce them to methods of directing and influencing their own writing processes they could enable a student to leave a session with a whole new repertoire of tools when it comes to the act of active, engaged, multimodal writing. The final product may be entirely traditional, but the process is completely revamped.

The Digital Multimodal Writing Center Space

On the practical side of this line of thought, we can see this kind of active engagement taking place in Jackie McKinney's article, "Making Friends with Web 2.0: Writing Centers and Social Networking Sites." In her article, she begins with a short vignette of an exchange she shared with a client of her writing center:

Client: I know, I have already met you
 [McKinney]: Oh, really, I am sorry I don't remember meeting you. Have I tutored you before? (I was sure I hadn't)
 Client: No, we have never met in real life. I met you on the Internet...on Facebook last night. (203)

As I mentioned before, a real fear of moving into untraditional modalities in writing centers is a fear of losing the human connection. In fact, many writing center directors would probably agree with me in saying that relationship building is one of the foundations of writing center work and something that writing centers both depend on and take great pride in their ability to do. However, McKinney highlights in her first vignette a real strength of the multimodality of writing centers. Before she has even ever met this student, their relationship had started. The use of social networking websites,

like Facebook, tumblr, Twitter, as well as additional applications with social networking integration, like Spotify, last.fm, and Steam, poses an interesting counterpoint to the fear of the dehumanizing nature of technology. McKinney notes, “Social networking sites [have] attracted considerable attention from writing center professionals, perhaps, because the express purpose for such sites is to foster relationships. On the surface, it solves the dehumanizing technology problem: it may still be a disembodied technological land, but it isn’t faceless” (204). Of course, this kind of use of technology and multimodality in writing centers is not a cure-all for technological integration. It has its strengths and weaknesses, most notably that while it does enable a new level of interconnectivity, it also raises concerns about both the privacy of individuals as well as the roles both tutors and clients play in professional and personal spheres.

A real potential strength of using social networking sites as a form of multimodal interconnectivity is that it begins to create the kinds of relationships writing centers want before a student even has to set foot in the writing center. The very act of finding people on social networking people on sites like Facebook and being able to explore their lives is called “friending.” danah boyd notes in her article “Why Youth <3 Social Networking Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life” that “social network sites’ primary use is not networking but maintaining a personal network” (McKinney 206). Because of this, we can make a bit of a logical leap and begin to assume that when students use social media to interact with people they know they will be working with professionally, they are seeking less of a professional knowledge of the writing center and more of a personal knowledge of who they will be spending time with discussing

something that may be personal to them. A fear of this, however, is created due to the idea that someone else can explore your life without your knowledge or permission. This is highlighted after McKinney's first vignette when she writes, "The look on my face was probably priceless. Then, the session got started as normally as I could, while in shock. They next time I logged onto Facebook I made my account more limited and private" (203). This is obviously (and perhaps rightfully so) a real fear amongst many in the social networking world. We would like to believe that those interested in our online selves are only our friends and relatives, not a person that we have never interacted before. This does, however, bring up an interesting question about the roles these kinds of relationships can play between two people—namely students and tutors—who are approaching this multimodality on equal footing.

When we consider writing centers as new centers for multimodal communication and work, we have to consider that writing centers possess a tool that few other realms in academia do—workers who come from the same background of multimodal consumers and creators that their clients do. Often, as Miller notes, "As a result of the 'social and cultural revolution' ushered in by new technologies, more students who are 'digital natives' arrive at school more competent in multimodal literacy practices than their teachers" (64-65). When we consider the roles in which multimodality can take in the writing center we have to consider that it may be the case that tutors are naturally better equipped to handle issues of multimodality than directors and other faculty are. Miller continues her line of thought by writing, "From one perspective, teachers are largely 'outsiders,' often baby boomers who have grown up, studied, and worked in a print-only

world while current students and largely ‘insiders’ who are growing up in a digital world of new multimodal literacies where, for example, the Internet with its print-mixed web pages has always existed” (65). And while teachers—in this I am including faculty instructors and writing center directors—often try to train themselves to catch up with and perhaps utilize the technology in more “efficient” or “teaching-oriented” ways, they will, I think always naturally lag behind those who have literally spent their entire lives surrounded by new media. To perhaps add a human element to this I have a short vignette of my own to highlight this.

Now, I will be the first to admit that I grew up at the very beginning of Miller’s “social and cultural revolution,” and as a result computers have always been included in my education. In third grade, my friend Jeffery Luoma and I were tasked with creating a multimodal Power Point presentation on the solar system to present to the school board (on which both of our parents were members) in order to showcase the applications for these newfangled devices and, I’m sure, try to entice the school board to purchase a whole new fleet of computers and digital projectors. Perhaps because of this, I grew up in the dawning of accessible technology with an intense interest in it. I spent my entire time in middle and high school being the student who, when teachers struggled perennially with technology, silently shook my head in embarrassment at their inability to operate something as simple as a DVD player and remote until I couldn’t take it any more and got up to help them. This established gift, however, is not without a sense of growing irony.

Recently I went through the process of re-vamping my Writing 101 course to include multimodal aspects of popular culture to use as texts to discuss and write about. This involved losing the classic text in many cases and bringing my laptop to class and working with a smart podium and projector of my own. Over the course of the year I have done this, I cannot count the number of times something has gone horribly wrong with the technology to leave me there at the front of the room, shaking my head and jiggling wires while my students sit silently in their seats and shake their heads. And this chain of events always ends the same way: I end up asking for help, one of my students (who, it should be mentioned, were born after the popularization of the Internet and have never known a time without it) comes up, jiggles a different set of wires, checks or un-checks an options box that I missed and gets the class rolling again. I have become the very person that drove me so crazy when I was sitting in their seats.

As I mentioned before, while this newfound connection between writing centers and users certainly has its benefits, there are of course natural drawbacks as well, not the least of which is it suddenly collides the professional world that tutors suddenly find themselves in with their private personas. McKinney quotes a WClisserve post of a former director of my own at Black Hills State University, Deaver Traywick, in an instance of conflicting personas. Traywick wrote, “A consultant comes in to tell me about the public Facebook page of another staff member. The consultant is bothered because this person listed his/her work in the Writing Center with a description along the lines of, “I helps people lern too right goud.” In the words of the offended party, “That’s not cool” (Traywick). Like McKinney, I find this short entry very interesting for several reasons.

First, there is an expectation of professionalism even within this seemingly private realm. With a movement online, tutors suddenly find themselves marginalized between two already marginalized communities—that of being not quite a normal student any more and that of being not quite a professional. Of course, this is a phenomenon that far precedes social media; John Trimbur covered it quite extensively in his essay, “Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?” by saying, “Peer tutoring invariably precipitates a crisis of loyalty and identity for the undergraduates who join the staff of a writing center” (Trimbur 25). On one hand a student or tutor wants their online self to be an object of their personal lives, but the other hand says that in our increasingly digital professional culture, there might not be any such thing any more.

A second problem with social media integration that this short entry shows so well is that it can destroy the sense of “peer-ness” that so many writing center tutors crave. Trimbur suggests in his article that directors can either strive to create professional apprentices of themselves or seek to emphasize the peer roles of tutors first (27). This is obviously complicated when we create an online space that has students, both tutors and clients, who are afraid of being themselves because of the professional judgements that might be made. Even in the course of my time on Facebook, it is obvious how the location has changed. When I first created my Facebook “self” in 2006, it was a seemingly “elite” place that required a “.edu” email address to even join. It was a clubhouse for those in college with all of the content being constructed by those in college. Now, in 2013, I am friends with not only every college roommate I had, but also with numerous professors, past and present, as well as my father, much of my significant

others' family, and many of my friends' moms. Talk about a conflict of persona. In 2006, the range of people on Facebook seriously limited the number of people a student had to be down to one: them as student. Now we are forced to create a space that serves the purpose of creating multiple selves that we are not afraid of showing to everyone we've ever known.

It should be noted, of course, that there are more potential uses for digital modalities than simply integrating Facebook pages and creating Power Point presentations. Michelle Miley has been working steadily at creating a new type of online writing space that serves to do more than the traditional message board or social networking site by creating a place of recursive, revision-based writing that can be participated in real time—what she called in a presentation at MSU a “Third Space Online Writing Studio” (6). Of course, the studio model of writing center work dates back, as Peter Carino covers exhaustively in his article, “Early Writing Centers: Toward a History,” to the 1930's or '40s—then under the name of name of writing labs, though they served roughly the same function of being a space within a writing-intensive class in which writing help is provided in an open, yet controlled, environment to all students within that class (105). In the process of moving this writing studio online she reports that this seemingly pedagogical move that is opposition of so many traditional views of what works in a writing center environment really had several interesting results. She said, “As it turns out, transitioning studios to an online environment not only “worked,” it also had some real benefits. Because the conversation is asynchronous, writers can come back into the boards at any time to ask or answer any questions posed. Students are communicating

through writing throughout the entire process” (9). The possibilities of this kind of online writing studio are really quite fascinating. The creation of this new online writing center space allows not only for greater institutional outreach, allowing the writing center to even be an integral source for much of the writing all students do in their coursework, but also for allowing students and tutors to think about writing in an entirely new way.

The Non-Digital Multimodal Writing Center Space

But, of course, there is more to creating a multimodal writing center space than social networking or online writing studios. In fact, if I can move another step back, I don’t think that there is a limit in saying that a big step in what is required to move forward with multimodal writing center spaces needs to be seen as digital. As I mentioned before, a major benefit in the space writing centers occupy at an institutional level—that is existing somewhere between students and faculty—is that it is allowed a little more leeway in how it approaches the learning that goes on in them. In her article, “Drawing the (Play)Spaces of Conferences,” Anne Geller attempts to give another look at the kinds of alternative thinking that can go on in writing centers beyond the usual pen-and-paper work that is usually accomplished. She uses drawing in order to help both tutors and clients understand the work that is going on in a different light. She begins to defend this line of thinking by quoting Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell’s work with teaching education candidates. They write, “Drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sensemaking than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the non-yet-thought-through,

the subconscious...That which we might censor from our speech and writing, often escapes into our drawings” (304). What really interests me here is the idea that work can be done in the writing center space is may not be necessarily grounded in “writing” as we traditionally think of it, and even though the act of thinking is being expressed through a different medium, it can lead to interesting conclusion about ways in which we can approach writing in writing centers.

For Geller, the multimodality involved in her drawing exercises revolves around creating an understanding of the interactions that go on between her tutors and clients that she might not otherwise be privy to. Because of the drawing modality, she finds that her tutors are more willing to share things about their work that they might otherwise not if they were asked to communicate those feelings through traditional writing or communication methods. She notes, “For me, the creative and reflexive talk that surrounds the drawings is the most important part of this exercise” (163). What interests me here is the idea that these drawings can create discussion that emphasizes a creative recursive process in conversation that is so often encouraged in writing. While Geller puts her emphasis on meetings between herself and her tutors, I don’t think it is that big a stretch to see how these same ideas could be implemented in a traditional writing center session. I jump to this conclusion because of the work that Geller cites from Nancy Welch’s article “Playing with Reality: Writing Centers After the Mirror Stage.” In her article, Welch encourages the very same type of multimodal pedagogies that I have been dancing around. This “play” creates, she writes, “a creative tension between genuine constraint and genuine opportunity...[and] a potential space for trying out, not closing

out, different constructions of reality” (64). Just as Shipka touches on, Welch and Geller encourage this kind of thinking outside of traditional modalities in such a way that tutors are forced to look at clients through a new set of lenses—and perhaps clients are forced to look at their writing through a lens of “genuine opportunity” because of the change of modality.

Returning to Shipka’s work is helpful in seeing how drawing—along with other non-digital modalities—can actually work in helping with student writing. At the beginning of her section on framework, Shipka quotes John Trimbur’s article, “Composition and Circulation of Writing” in which he comments on the “uncinematic character of writing” (188). Shipka says that, “With few exceptions, Trimbur argues, writing is rarely depicted as an activity that “unfolds over time,” demanding of writers the ability to manage physically, emotionally, and temporally the complicated, highly distributed, and oftentimes, less-than-glamorous ‘busy work’ of writing—of producing texts and getting them where they need to go” (57). In short, oftentimes when students sit down to write a paper they are not seeing the process as one that unfolds through a series of events, but rather as something that they must sit down and pound out in one sitting—creating a world in a short time in front of them with no thoughts on how those words and ideas developed into the ideas that they did. As Shipka reminds us, “students’ composing processes extend to, take place in, and/or are informed by many non-classroom settings” (77). However, it is easy to forget that this is the case, and by implementing a multimodal step like the one that Geller encourages it can be helpful in getting students to realize that their writing is an ongoing process.

In considering writing as the complex and consuming process that it is, we can see that much of the learning that students do in regards to writing is going to happen outside of the traditional classroom. After all, at most students spend three hours a week in a first year composition classroom, and—if you are lucky—a few hours outside of class working on class work. Much of the rest of the time, as Shipka points out, their writing hasn't really stopped. It is being informed by what they are watching on TV, their trips to Wal-Mart, their dance classes, and anything else they do in their lives (61, 63, 71). The traditional classroom can't hope to channel all of that into a singular focus, as we have looked at previously, there are just too many other things to do. However, a writing center, positioned as it is within the institution and within itself is a perfect place to take up some of that outside work. As I looked at in this chapter, that work is already going on in writing centers, but there is more that can be done. As I move forward into the last chapter of this project, I want to shift the focus again to the kinds of physical spaces that can make this kind of multimodal work possible. Writing centers are forever re-inventing themselves with the spaces they are provided, and it can be very helpful, through a lens of *chora*, to take a step back and look at the kinds of spaces that exist and how they operate in terms of the marginalized, multimodal spaces that they could be.

In a major way, this chapter highlights one of the chief advantages of using *chora* as a theoretical lens. Because of the distancing effect that *chora* allows us to have, we are able to see trends and patterns begin to emerge that may not be otherwise obvious. It seems silly to consider at first the idea of a writing center not dealing with papers, or dealing with writing that exists outside of the traditional ideas of what writing can do.

However, *chora* allows us to view the trends of marginalization not as only a negative, as it is often portrayed, but as a positive. It allows us to examine where those positive views are coming from and what the implications of them might be. In an interesting way, *chora* is able to apply itself to so many different layers of the arguments surrounding writing centers that it becomes possible to see it as an act of looking not just at singular issues, but also much larger emerging themes that alter the ways in which we look at the work that we do.

CHAPTER 3—THE PHYSICAL SPACE OF THE MULTIMODAL WRITING CENTER

In the short documentary, *In Repair: One Song, One Day*, John Mayer lays out what it is like to work in a music studio under a constrained amount of time with nothing already laid out in front of him. He says:

Sometimes when you're in the studio you go around the block a few times and you knock on some doors, musically, and you don't find what you're looking around for. And it can get really disheartening really fast. I will always remember the "In Repair" sessions as being one of the rare times in my life where you get in the studio and an idea just jumps out and it becomes something—where within the first 30 seconds of playing it, I think everybody looked around and went, "Well this was worth doing." (Mayer)

What I think is really interesting and special about this documentary is that it offers a glimpse into the magic that can happen to a creative process when you stick the right people with the right supplies in the right space. Music, as a creative process, is very similar to writing in many regards, and the "In Repair" session really highlights that "Well this is worth doing" moment that we so often look for in writing center work. And part of what makes it work is the physical space that Mayer inhabits for that day with Charlie Hunter and Steve Jordan.

In terms of creative spaces music studios are often set pieces for ultra-creative work. They are spaces that are specifically tailored for one purpose and put every design decision towards that goal. In the video, Mayer describes the studio space in very loving terms. He says, "Avatar Studios is one of the last great recording studios in New York City...So in this occasion it became the setting...that wasn't really about the songs that I

already had written, but was much more about getting the right people together in a moment that I felt was really going to be fertile” (Mayer). Interestingly, Mayer puts the work that he wants to do in the context of the space he wants to do it in. He describes the space as being one of the “last great” spaces available for the kind of work that he wants to do. In short, the music studio is a space that refines and directs the creative process that he seeks. Of course, the ceiling and walls of the space is only a small part of what makes it so effective. Mayer, when looking at all of the supplies and gear scattered on the tables, tells us, “This is all stuff I have accumulated over the past couple years but never really seen all together and it used to live in my apartment more than I did” (Mayer). So then, in addition to the space, there are supplies and accessories that help make the space more creative. These supplies become a part of the physical space, and can come from inside the space as well as outside of it, and often—as Mayer points out—we sometimes don’t realized the options that are available until they are all laid out in front of us.

This plays a big part, I think, in the inspiration and production that Mayer experiences while in the studio in this documentary. When talking about his goals for the session, he says, “The idea today is just kind of to pick something and go off it and improv and get inspired by different sounds” (Mayer). To do this, he goes into the studio space and takes advantage of it in order to push his own creative process forward. Having a unique physical space enables him to tap into a new set of ideas or inspirations that he didn’t know he had before. He says, “Part of going into the studio without an idea is going into the studio with as many different stimuli as you can go in with, and for me as a guitar player, I really wanted to have as many different sounds as I could pull from, and

maybe see what those sounds could pull out of me as a composer” (Mayer). This certainly echoes what I said earlier, but also raises the importance that the stimuli play in Mayer’s creative process. For him, having access to the materials of the space is directly correlated to what he is capable of producing as a writer and artist.

What Mayer experiences at Avatar Studios is exactly what I want to explore in this chapter in regards to the development of the writing center space. In this paper I have explored the writing center space in two intangible ways—a metaphorical space within institutions and a pedagogical space within multimodal literacy education—but from here on out, I want to look at the ways in which the physical construction of writing centers can have an effect on the work that goes on inside them. When reflecting on his time at Avatar Studios, Mayer says, “I just remember very early on, people were still setting up drums and plugging things in and getting sounds, I put this combination of pedals together...and the guitar sounded so different through this pedal that it just fired off some different, unused part of my brain as a writer” (Mayer). In an ideal world, I think this is exactly the kind of response that many writing centers would like to awaken in all of the writers that stop by. It may be possible that a big part of this kind of inspiration comes from the physical space, as Mayer attributes it. As we move into this chapter, I want to look at the physical space of the writing center and ways in which it can promote, or sometimes inhibit, the work that goes on in them through the use of space and stimuli in order to produce the kind of creative atmosphere that Mayer finds at the studio. Using this documentary to focus the idea of *chora*, this chapter will look at space in its most literal sense. It will look at the ways in which the physical space of writing centers has

changed over the course of their lifespan, where the physical spaces are now, and what writing centers can learn in developing a new space as we enter the multimodal realms of literacy discussed in the second chapter.

Like the second chapter used the ideas presented in the first chapter to make connections through *chora*, this chapter attempts to build further off of those connections. In a big way, one of the strengths of *chora* is its ability to not just examine the ways ideas and theories interact with each other, but also to shake them up and see what falls out. In the second chapter, ideas surrounding what is possible with multimodal integration into writing centers was a major theme—however, a weakness of those ideas is that in order for those new multimodal practices to be possible, writing centers have to possess the tools to make it possible. Along this line of thinking, then, I was struck by the idea that the actual physical spaces of writing centers play a large role in the work that goes on inside of them. Through the lens of *chora*, a connection was made to further extend this examination of the writing center space.

The Evolution of the Writing Center Space

In his article, “Designing Multiliteracy Centers: A Zoning Approach,” James Inman encourages people looking to design a new writing center to not look at the design from the perspective of “What can I fill this space with?” but rather from the perspective of “What can the stuff I fill this space with *do*?” He writes:

Historically, writing centers have reflected many different designs based on the institutional context and pedagogical values of each particular center. Due to constraints of time and resources, many centers find it challenging to engage in long-term planning about how to utilize available

space. Subscribers to WCENTER regularly see posts requesting advice about center design...Hurried responses follow: ‘Be sure to include a 35-foot-long table!’ The frantic poster of the original message writes everything down, and her center ends up being a mess with a 35-foot-long table. (19)

In short, this becomes a battle of form vs. function. Inman encourages an approach to writing center design that puts function of the space above that of the form. The 35-foot-long table may look nice, but at the end of the day, he seems to be saying, we have to consider what that 35-foot-long table is doing for creative processes going on inside of the writing center. Inman makes this position clear when he writes, “Many centers appear to have designed around furnishings and technologies, rather than what clients will actually be doing. This approach poses a problem because any center exists to provide effective services for clients, not to have the grandest furnishings or technologies” (20). To start this section, then—and really when we consider writing center spaces in general—we have to keep this form/function relationship in mind. In line with this thinking, it is interesting too look back on how the physical space of the writing center has evolved as the pedagogical direction has changed to reflect the moves from laboratory to clinic to center.

In the 1920s and ‘30s, when the writing laboratory was still in its very early defining stages, the space that it inhabited reflected many of the pedagogical goals and purposes that founding professors were looking for in a laboratory. In her article “Round Table: The Evolution of the Writing Laboratory” Elizabeth Campbell talks about the physical space of her writing center between 1938 and 1942. She writes, “The only space available for the [new writing laboratory] was the reading-room on the second floor of

the library. Since it was already provided with tables and chairs, very little extra equipment was needed. Doors were placed at the entrance to the room, and the open shelves were enclosed to hold handbooks of composition and rhetoric” (399). What I love about the early writing centers was how little they seemed to think they needed. The physical space was a bare room separate from the traditional classroom only because it was in the library. Of course, it was silly at this point to think of the writing lab as separate from the traditional composition classroom because it existed as a part of those composition classes. All they needed was a door and some shelves and the existing tables to create the atmosphere that they desired. In regards to the materials, Campbell notes that they had, “Copies of Webster’s *Collegiate Dictionary* and Crabb’s *English Synonyms* were purchased for use at the tables. A copy of Webster’s *Unabridged Dictionary* was placed at the front of the room” (399). Again, the purpose of this era of writing center is clearly reflected in the sparseness and focus of resources. By only providing the students with a dictionary, thesaurus and access to a professor, the emphasis was on solitary work on writing that encouraged sentence-level revision and word choice.

The space of the writing center began to change, as Peter Carino talks about in the article I have mentioned previously, as they separated themselves from the composition classroom and began to attain the individualized—if marginalized—identity they have today. Carino states, “In the 1940s, as labs broke from the classroom, accounts of them continue to show respect for individual student abilities, with scornful rhetoric such as Ingold’s comment on defectives and delinquents almost nonexistent. But ironically the break from the classroom also fostered the view of the lab as a venue of the inferior

student” (110). This shift, or the beginning of the “clinic” period of writing center history, reflected this new emphasis on working with students who lack knowledge and are in need of having something about their writing “fixed.” As Campbell notes, the materials in the clinics reflected this change as the dictionaries and thesauri were supplemented with other texts. She notes:

To unify the course, the instructors have prepared a [clinic] manual... This is not a drill book but a guide to study. It tries to help the student solve his problems connected with the Humanities Survey by teaching him to use the library efficiently, to ready with understanding, to take usable notes on lectures, and to express himself clearly and interestingly in writing after he has reached some conclusions. (400)

Most interestingly, there is a clear shift away from the composition-only model of writing center practice, as the focus begins to include all of the Humanities courses and the work that goes on inside of them. While there is more of a focus on the remedial work, the topics that seem to be worked on seem to have expanded into research help, content and clarity, as well as revision.

As the writing center space moved into the 80’s and right up into the last few years, we have seen the extensively documented change from the writing clinic to the modern writing center. In terms of special changes, this can most clearly be seen, as Joyce Kinkead and Jeanette Harris note, as the “coffee pot” period of writing center design. In their case study of twelve contemporary writing center spaces they note, “As we read these descriptions [of writing centers] every once in a while we think we come across a characteristic that crosses the board. Coffee—instant, brewed, or café latte—seems almost universal” (236). In short, the latest trend in the physical space of writing centers has not been directly pedagogical in nature—that is to say, the changes do not

reflect any attention to writing studies directly—but rather through the physical properties within the space. Jackie McKinney examines this phenomenon extensively in her essay, “Leaving Home Sweet Home: Towards Critical Readings of Writing Center Spaces.” She writes, “In fact, in Joyce Kinhead and Jeanette Harris’ collection of twelve writing center case studies, the closest thing to a common denominator connecting the diverse centers is the coffee pot—not philosophies of writing, not methods for tutor training, but the concrete presence of the coffee pot” (6-7). This strikes me as a peculiar focal point for the contemporary writing center, but as I pondered it, it struck me as being perhaps the next logical step in the evolution of writing centers so far.

While the first transformation involved just acquiring a physical space, the second transformation involved broadening the resources available in the writing center, and this third transformation involved an evolution of that first space. At the very beginning of this thesis I mentioned a colleague of mine referring to the writing center space as the “anti-classroom,” and it is along this vein that McKinney, Kinhead, Harris and I see this trend emerging from. McKinney writes, “Writing center spaces tend to be marked with particular objects to achieve a certain mood, serve specific purposes, or send a particular message to those who use the space. Having couches or photos or coffeepots is an effort to construct a space different from classrooms and other impersonal institutional spaces” (7). McKinney argues that this trend of constructing a “different” space in writing centers is significant because it shows a “homefying” of the writing center—that is, writing centers are being described more and more in the context of being a “home” of sorts for students and tutors.

This is increasingly evident as you look at the work that has been published in regards to the physical spaces of writing centers. Ellen Mohr writes that in her Community College writing center, “The furniture was selected to create a comfortable learning environment, and colorful posters and plants help to put the visiting student at ease” (148). Muriel Harris writes that she hopes that her (now former) writing center at Purdue would create a “friendly, nonthreatening, nonclassroom environment where conversation and questions can fly from one table to another” (6-7). At Harvard, Linda Simon writes that, “Our furniture is comfortable and inviting, with two couches and several chairs in the reception area, rugs in all offices, and attractive posters on the wall” (118). Edward Lotto of Lehigh University states that in his writing center, “The plants, as well as the high ceiling and comfortable furniture, help create a welcoming atmosphere” (85). Finally, even in a description of the “ideal” writing center posited by Leslie Hadfield and others says, “The room is comfortable, with familiar eight-foot ceilings; light, calming colors; soft carpets; plants, and soft lighting—provided by cove lighting and a skylight” (171). In all of these examples there is a distinct trend towards making the writing center look like your grandmother’s living room—minus the cat hair. In short, the most recent trend of making the writing center “home” raises as many questions as it answers—while in the effort of making students and tutors feel more comfortable in this space, we must also consider why we are doing it and if it is really what needs to be done. Again the tension of form and function presents itself.

This tension seems to both McKinney and myself to be an indication that perhaps it is time for a new step in the evolution in the physical space of writing centers. Just as

we have now moved from the excitement of having a door to the novelty of the homey coffee pot, perhaps it is time to consider what this redecoration of the physical space is saying and what it is missing. McKinney notes, “I wonder about this recipe: (1) take a space, (2) add a coffee pot, posters, couch and plants, (3) relish your friendly, non-threatening, comfortable center. Sure, I think having some of these items marks a space as a non-classroom space, but I’ve seen far too many uncomfortable people in writing centers to believe that this is all it takes to make a space ‘comfortable’” (10). This, I think, echoes clearly back to Inman’s concerns regarding the 35-foot-long table. Now, don’t get me wrong, I love the coffee pot in our writing center here at MSU. I visit it almost every morning after my morning prep-work and before my mid-morning paper commenting, even when I don’t have to work in the center. However, I am forced to wonder what the space would be like without the pot. Would it lose any of its charm? Be less accessible? Truthfully, I’m not convinced that the soul of the writing center is dependent on coffee pots and absurdly long tables any more than Mayer’s music studio was. If they are in the writing center then they are in there in service to the writing center. However, it does strike me as a weak step in line with the pedagogies that writing centers strive to represent. In this next section, I hope to look at the evolution of materials in the writing center as the next step in changing the writing center space.

The “Pedals” of the Writing Center Space

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, Mayer attributes much of the inspiration that he got from his experience recording “In Repair” to not just the physical

space of Avatar Studios or the joy of working with two of his favorite musicians, but also to the sheer amount of options available to him to work with. Really, he found his inspiration through his pedals. Now that the physical space of the writing center is constructed (though it may need to be refined, surely), I will depart slightly from McKinney and Inman and their dislike—and perhaps rejection—of the “home” space, and instead look at ways in which writing centers can evolve a new sense of the “pedals” available to them. In keeping with the theme of this thesis surrounding new literacies and multimodality, I think a good place to start is a place that we don’t traditionally associate with writing models or academic spaces—the software company.

When I generally imagine the software company workspace, it looks a lot like *Office Space*—grey cubicles and desks with piles of paper in the inbox with the added benefit of complete seclusion from everyone else you may be interested in talking to. However, over the past several years I had been hearing about Valve Software, a video game company out of Bellvue, Washington that took a radically different position on just about everything workspace related. So when I took the trip I mentioned before out to see the writing centers at the University of Washington and Seattle University, I also stopped by the Valve offices for a tour of their space. Their use of space contained two things that I think writing centers can use as we consider the creation of functional writing center space: the cabal and the desk.

The format of Valve is in many ways similar to that of a writing center. At the head of the company is Gabe Newell, founding member and CEO, but underneath him everyone else is equal. There is no management structure or corporate beauracracy. This

“flatland” management style means that anyone can work on any project at any time, which is a remarkable structure for a company with more than 300 employees. This “flatland” structure is most clearly seen in the use of office space that Valve calls the “cabal” (Valve 12). In a recent presentation at the University of Texas—Austin, Newell talked about how the cabal format came to be. He said:

I hated cubicles with a passion...so I was like, ‘Okay, so everyone has their own office’ and you’ve got a door you can close...and people kept sneaking into other people’s offices. And then they started tearing doors down. So everyone had their own office, but no one was ever in it...That’s when I realized that they were doing something right...There were benefits to being closer to other people. (Newell)

Like Newell’s original impulse when first setting up Valve, there is a trend in writing centers to give solitary space to the work that we do. But, if the work that is being done is something that relies so heavily on collaboration and innovation, it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to keep it secluded from everything else that is going on in the rest of the workspace, especially if others are working on the same projects. With that in mind, the cabal was born.

Valve uses the cabal as a means of placing people that are working on similar projects together. In their new employee handbook, they say, “Cabals are really just multidisciplinary project teams. We’ve self-organized into these largely temporary groups since the early days of Valve...Like any other group or effort at the company, they form organically. People decide to join the group based on their own belief that the group’s work is important enough for them to work on” (Valve 12). What I think writing centers can learn for the cabal is that in the idea that the emphasis on organic group work. This kind of free movement throughout writing centers—that is, movement that is not

dependent on cubicles or coffee pots or really long tables—can really serve to create a new sense of “play” that Welch and Geller emphasize as being so significant in multimodal work. However, that kind of free movement is only possible if the space allows it, which brings us to what I believe may be the most valuable new pedal a writing center can work with: the moveable desk.

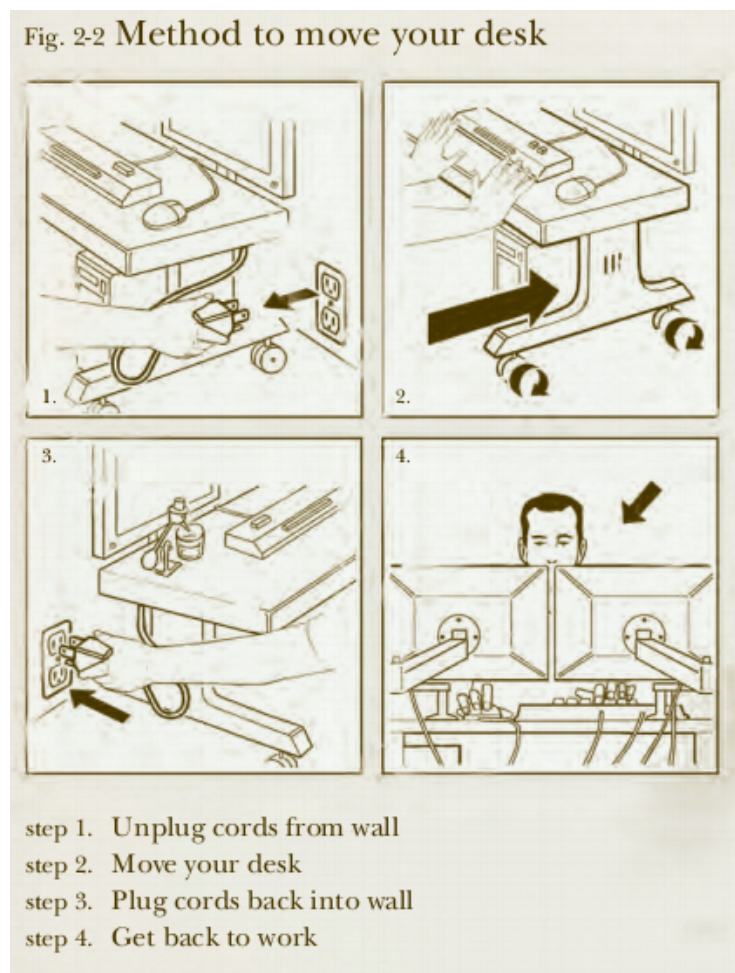


Figure 4 – Valve’s “Method to move your desk” (Valve 18)

Valve prides itself in the fact that every single employee is only tied to their location by two “contact points” and that both of them are on wheels. In their handbook,

Valve has written, “Why does your desk have wheels? Think of those wheel as a symbolic reminder that you should always be considering where you could move yourself to be more valuable. But also think of those wheels as literal wheels, because that’s what they are, and you’ll be able to actually move your desk with them” (Valve 6). Above, in Figure 4, you can see the emphasis Valve puts on the individual mobility of each employee. Everyone has the ability to be completely free in who they work with and what they work on, and the process of moving takes only a minute. To further emphasize the importance of this mobility, Valve writes, “You’ll notice people moving frequently; often whole teams will move their desks to be closer to each other. There is no organizational structure keeping you from being in close proximity to the people who you’d help or be helped by most” (Valve 6). In terms of actually working in writing centers, I definitely have experienced as a tutor a sense of “tunnel vision” when it comes to working with clients. They come in, we sit down at a desk and then we work. There is almost never any consideration about who could be helping either of us move towards a more productive session even though there are very intelligent and capable tutors with a much larger breadth of knowledge than I possess sitting and chatting with each other less than ten feet away at the coffee pot. Perhaps an act as simple as giving writing center spaces the ability to move flexibly to adapt to the fluctuating environment would go a long way towards being able to think about our own work in new and different ways.

I don’t think all “pedals” in the writing center need to be those used directly by tutors for clients, either. Often, I think, something very simple can change the way we

think about how the writing center operates and move it out of the realm of purely written text and into something decidedly more visual. When I was visiting the Odegaard Writing and Research Center, I noticed a very large corkboard on the floor with a flow chart of sorts beginning to manifest itself on it. When I asked Jenny Halpin about it, she told me that the idea had come from a tutor who had learned of a similar method of keeping track of ideas in one of her manufacturing classes. Because the writing center had been growing exponentially in recent years—growing from 12 tutors to 63 tutors studying 39 different majors in four years—it was becoming harder and harder for Halpin and her tutors to keep track of what was being worked on and where it was in the production process. As a result, the corkboard was starting to be implemented.

Across the top of the board, five categories are created—project ideas, projects in progress, projects implemented, recognition for projects, and projects that have been put on the back burner. Then, on a series of note cards connected by yarn, the projects are traced from their creation to end result. The note cards don't necessarily reflect written words either, but some include photographs of finished products, drawings of activities or plans, and plenty of smiley faces and exclamation points for a well-completed activity. It strikes me that having a board like this up on the wall of the writing center is infinitely more productive to the realizing of the writing center space than the posters that Simon and Mohr emphasized in their own centers. It may even be possible that the inclusion of a multimodal or creative wall element directed at tutors would help them to recognize the potential for such activities within their own sessions in much the same way that Valve

encourages its employees to think of their wheels as not just wheels but also as a constant reminder of what they could be doing with them.

I saw another similar project aimed at tutors in the writing center at Seattle University. On a corkboard by the main “tutor area” in the writing center, there was a collage of information that detailed some of the research that had been done by the tutors over the course of their time in the writing center. As a part of being employed at the writing center at Seattle University, every tutor was required to take a course offered by the director, Larry Nichols, on writing center theory and pedagogy. The final project of this course was a traditional research paper on some aspect of writing center theory or pedagogy, which was then compiled into a large notebook and stored at the writing center with the other reference materials. In order to remind tutors that no problems they have in the writing center have not been looked at before, Nichols had a group of tutors construct this board to give the tutors a means of looking at writing center work and its interconnectivity while also making functional use of wall space.

In Figure 5, you can see the board with its constant reminding question of, “WHO am I in the Writing Center and WHAT do I “Bring” with me to my session?” When I spoke with Nichols, he said that he put a lot of emphasis in tutor training on the idea that every tutor brings a unique approach to the work they do, and the best way to become a “great” tutor was to find out how to bring themselves and their own unique worldview into their sessions the most effectively. The board is separated into four quadrants of writing center theory: “Assignments,” “Tutor/Consultant,” “Context (social, cultural, historical, etc.),” and “Writer/Client.” Each group is assigned its own color and ribbon is

used to show connections between the research that the students have done on those topics. For instance, a paper in the yellow “Context” section on “The Culture of Connectivity and how it affects Digital Native Students” is connected to a paper in the red “Assignment” section on “Creative Writers and Writing Center Consultations.”

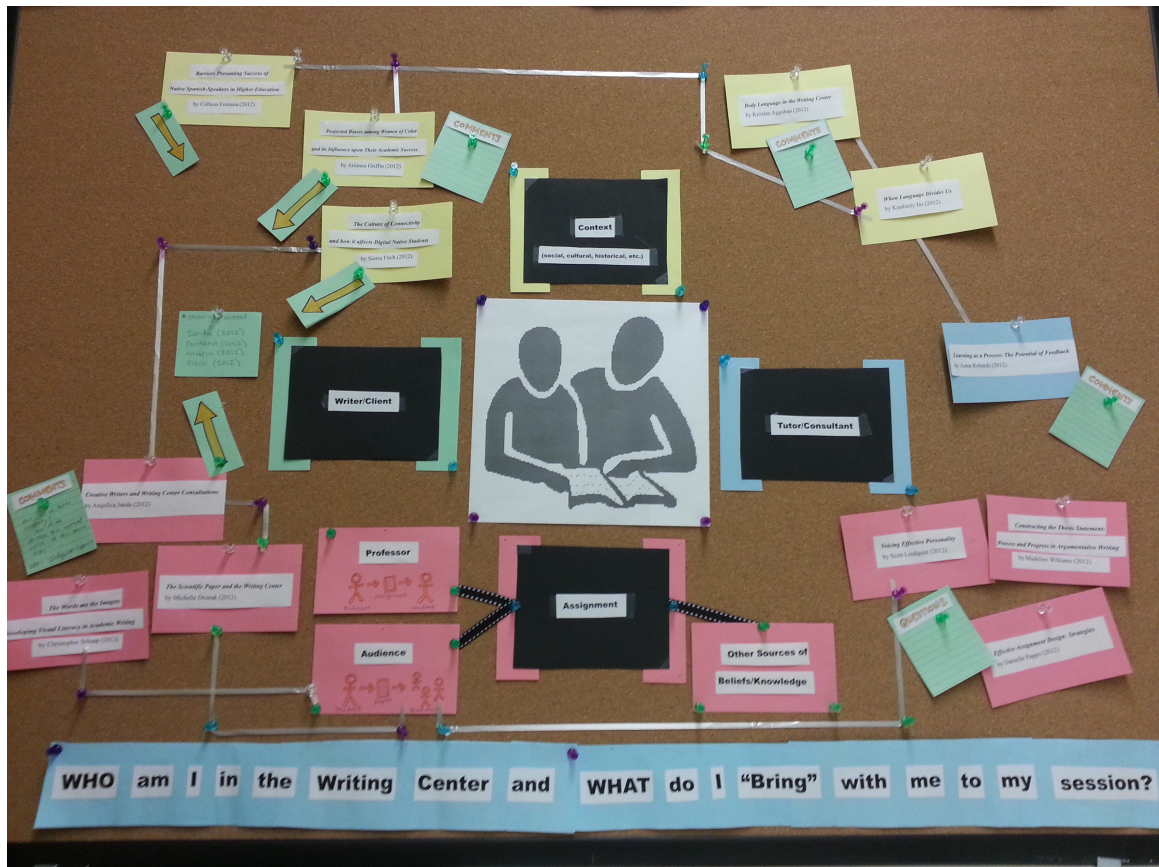


Figure 5 – Seattle University Writing Center’s “Theory Board”

There are even some drawings on the board showing relationships between professors and audience in regards to assignments that lend a multimodal aspect to the board. Presumably, having such a board taking up space in the writing center both looks really neat and can also assist tutors when they encounter a problem communicating, say, the

differences in audience in written assignments by allowing them to quickly reference and find research done by their peers on that very topic.

In short, there is always going to be a strain between form and function in places like writing centers. The fluid structure, evolving pedagogies, and high turnover means that there will always be changes as to what “functional” means. However, just as Inman says we need to avoid the 35-foot-long table, we do need to be aware of what the writing center space is doing to advance its own sense of purpose, theory and pedagogy. By engaging with the writing center space through the ideas of having “pedals” that work to advance the natural creativity and mobility of the writing center space, we can ensure that the form of the writing center is matching its function.

Conclusions on the *Chora* of the Writing Center Space

At the very beginning of this thesis I explored briefly the foundations of considering the use of *chora* as it may apply to writing center space. I quoted Rice as saying, “*Chora*, I learn, teaches me to bring together disparate events and texts from 1963. It teaches me how to make connections” (35). In the context of this thesis, I have tried to use *chora* to bring together some aspects of the many facets of the space of writing centers and begin to make connections. I did this both by looking at writing centers in the context of other writings centers and by looking at writing centers through a pop-culture lens. By using both sets of connections I was able to construct a complex view of the spaces writing centers inhabit both within a larger institution as well as within themselves.

I will be the first to acknowledge that the work I have done here is in no way representative of the whole world of writing centers. I wasn't able to focus on the people that inhabit writing centers, including student writers or student tutors. I wasn't able to look at writing centers that specialize in working in foreign countries or with second language learners. I wasn't even able to examine fully some of the ideas that I touched on in this paper. Even given that it would have been impossible to do all of that in less than a hundred pages, I do feel that by not doing so I have missed something. However, I do think the work that I have done here is largely representative of many trends of writing center theory right now, and progresses them in a thoughtful, meaningful way. I sometimes have to remind myself of the very same principles I have tried so hard to get my freshman composition writers to realize—that entering writing is entering a conversation. But that is what I have tried to do here, enter into this conversation.

In the first chapter I looked at the marginalization of the writing center space within the university setting. By looking at the example of Tod Browning's film *Freaks* I attempted to acknowledge some of the complexities that come with not being considered part of the "normal" establishment. I then broke down three different university spaces and looked at how writing centers attempt to work with or around them. The guiding idea throughout this section was to look at how marginalization works in the context of the university and how writing centers often exist on the periphery in part because they don't fit in anywhere.

The second chapter took that marginalized space as less of a negative than it is often thought of and instead looked at a possible positive of that marginalization, or the

ability to use progressive multimodal pedagogies that haven't really been able to fit into normal composition pedagogies. I started looking at these pedagogies through the lens of *Super Mario Bros.* and how that game may be the perfect example of how teaching without traditional modes of text is possible. Using that connection, I then looked at several multimodal pedagogies, of both the digital and the non-digital varieties in an attempt to highlight some of the ways these could be implemented into the writing center space.

The final chapter has looked at the writing center space as the physical place where these pedagogies can be implemented. Using the idea of the music studio as it was portrayed in the short documentary about John Mayer, I raised an emphasis on the struggle between form and function that seems to be a big piece of writing center history. I looked at the evolution of the writing center space as it has developed from a place where a door was an awesome thing to have, to a place where perhaps doors are not so necessary. In order to progress this multimodal pedagogy, I argue, we must look at the physical space of the writing center as a place where every aspect of it acts towards a common goal and vision and not necessarily towards a coffee pot. To emphasize this, I look at four examples of changes that can occur within the space that will move toward this more functional, multimodal writing center space. This included a couple things I noticed at existing writing centers, as well as a few things I believe writing centers would do well to borrow from other unorthodox workspaces.

So, then, the big question surrounds what I think about writing centers in the context of this thesis. I believe writing centers are completely unique creations on an

institutional level. They do work that I honestly think no other space on the university campus can accomplish. That derives from not only the people that inhabit the spaces, but also the physical and metaphorical location of that space. I do think, however, that because of its position within the institution, the writing center has a very clear job as we move forward into the future. That job is to continue to innovate in a way that is often hard in a place that is steeped in hundreds of years of thinking. To consistently move forward in terms of space and pedagogies and explore new ideas and concepts regarding writing and literacy that may not be completely functional yet. I think writing centers are one of the few places on campus with the ability to tear down doors rather than put up new ones and consider it progress.

EPILOGUE

Due to the reflective, observant nature of *chora* it makes sense to address some of the meta-commentary that surrounds this project. This thesis has been an endless set of challenges, which I suppose is a big part of the point of it. Over the course of writing it, I have struggled continuously with a big theme that I encourage my freshman composition students to consider—the “so what?” and “who cares?” When this paper was just in its earliest stages I was really considering the ways in which we communicate in tutoring sessions. My experience, after all, extends only to the tutoring session, so considering anything outside of that was a huge stretch for me. However, over the course of writing this thesis my ideas evolved several times, as they are prone to do during the course of research projects. I briefly considered the “magic” involved in writing center work, as well as ways in which to create a humanist Critical pedagogy of tutor training similar to the one Beth Boquet highlights in her book *Noise from the Writing Center* at Rhode Island College. In the end, however, I realized what I was thinking most about was how different both of the writing centers I have worked at were.

While their mission statements and pedagogies were very similar, their “spaces” could not have been more different. At Black Hills State University, the writing center is located solely within the library, has only a passing connection to any department and was directed by a full-time non-tenure faculty member. At MSU, I got to experience the rapid growth and growing pains of a writing center that lacked any clear leadership structure, existed within a department in an academic building and moved from a closet to a very nice new space with windows. The differences fascinated me, from the ways in

which the spaces were used, to the ideas surrounding the roles of tutors within that space to the ways in which the spaces interacted with the institution. However, when I began doing serious, focused research on the spaces of writing centers, I really struggled to find that theoretical lens that would let me tie all of my ideas together. Hindsight being what it is, this was really a sign that my ideas were still far too large in scope, but I think for this kind of project that was not the worst thing that could have happened.

In the end, it was Jeff Rice's ideas of *chora* in rhetoric that got the ball rolling. Here was an idea that was centered around the concept of tying things together. It was as if it was custom-made for my quandary. It allowed me to look at a huge topic from an outsider's detached perspective and look for connections in a world that I will fully admit I am just starting to scrape past the surface in. As I talk about in my introduction, this idea of *chora* allowed me to begin to make connections that I was otherwise afraid to make. The downside to this, of course, is that in some places it became a crutch to rely on rather than a tool that helped me advance a clear goal. When I talk about the work I've done on this project, I always start off by saying that I don't really think I ever got to what I really wanted to talk about. While at first I thought of this as a negative, I think instead it is a result of the detached narrative that *chora* gives you as a theoretical lens. In many ways I did exactly what I wanted to. I took this idea of writing centers; I broke it down into a few manageable chunks; I looked at them from a few different angles; I shook those ideas up; I saw what connections fell out. In that regard, this thesis was a complete success, because so many new ideas fell out. I was recently told that you could

tell a research project is on the right path if you are left with more questions when you are done. I can certainly say that that happened here.

Another thing that I have found myself saying over and over again is that I wished I could start this whole project over. This is due, I think, in large part to the fact that those ideas that fell out of my work on this thesis are in many ways much more interesting to me than the ideas I started with. If I were to start this whole project over—or, more realistically, move it forward into a refined writing sample or future research project—I would undoubtedly focus on several different things. First, I am really interested in the ideas surrounding multimodalities in the writing center. The work I did in the second chapter did not do justice to the sheer amount of creative and innovative work that can be done with multimodal writing practices in the writing center. I touched on ways in which multimodalities can work within the writing center space, but not at all within the writing center session. That is really interesting to me. New questions emerge for me in regards to what is out there for working, for instance, with iPads and Smartboards, or digital media production and creation. Would it be possible to create a writing center space with tutors that are just as able to help you record and edit podcasts or vlogs as work with traditional humanities papers? What kinds of tools are out there for that kind of work? Could tutors have a hand in creating apps that are useful for creating an atmosphere of interactivity and collaboration within sessions? All of these questions I think are grounds for a great deal of exploration.

Second, and going along with those ideas, are the ideas concerning the creation and functionality of spaces like that. I never got the chance in this project to really get

into the work that is being done in the Clemson Class of '41 Online Studio space or the creation of the multi-million dollar writing center space at St. John's University in New York. There is so much work to be done in considering the constant struggle between making a writing center a space that is separate from traditional academic modalities while at the same time making it a space that remains functional in its goals as a place for learning. I am left wondering about aspects of the physical space that extend beyond wheeled desks and management boards. For instance, what about walls and windows? There is no shortage of writing out there about the roles windows play in writing center work, I know, but I'm curious about learning more about their impact on not just how they make writing centers look, but also about how they make writing centers function. Along the same lines, I'm curious how having walls—cubicle, sheetrock, or movable—effects the ways in which we approach writing center work in terms of collaboration. I'm also interested in exploring what happens when all tutors have access to technology at all times during their session. If computers were available during sessions, would it change the way they are run? What would a session look like if students only brought digital copies of their work to the writing center and they were projected up on a wall or shown on a dual-monitor setup? Again, there is just so much work to be done in that area.

I think that I should reiterate and perhaps make it clearer that I don't think that the fact that I am left with these kinds of questions is a sign of failure of any sort. If anything, it shows me that *chora* did exactly what it was supposed to. Because the ideas in *chora* are about working in a largely undefined, amorphous concept of space, it makes sense that the formation of solid ideas emerging from that space is the result of such a

theoretical approach. I do think that it is a sign that in future projects it would be beneficial to leave *chora* behind. At its heart, I think it is a useful tool for exploring ideas in a context that is not looking for a concrete answer, but falls short when it comes time to answer the questions of “so what?” and “who cares?” However, this is not an indicator that those questions aren’t addressed. In a very real way, those are questions were not the aim of *chora*, but rather the result of it. If writing is a conversation, then the act of examining something like writing centers using *chora* is perhaps the way in which to identify and inquire about those questions and move this conversation forward. As a result, this project serves very much as a launching pad for many different directions that the conversation may go. At the end of the day, I’ll call that a success.

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