In “Who’s Going to Cross the Border? Travel Metaphors, Material Conditions, and Contested Places,” Nedra Reynolds draws on individual accounts of occupying places and moving across locations to demonstrate the limits of metaphors of travel in the discourse of composition studies. As Reynolds explains, the metaphor of travel carries with it conditions of privilege—specifically, traveling is an activity that requires ready access to the kind of leisure time and disposable income that many do not have. She also explains that the movement across vast and unfamiliar territory that characterizes travel is rare, that most people live most of their lives within small areas that do not demand from them extensive travel. This being the case, Reynolds concludes that uses of travel metaphors to conceptualize, explain, and enact theories and practices of writing place undue emphasis on the privilege of easy movement across multiple borders, misleading us about how writers really do occupy the spaces of writing. As she suggests, “rather than advocating travel to get us away from the discourses of territoriality, we should work toward an understanding of the contested spaces that keep people divided” (560).

I find this a provocative conclusion. On the one hand, Reynolds recalls us to the discourse of territoriality; on the other hand, she pushes us past old debates about the boundaries of discourse and provides ways for us to continue discussion of the important issues of identity, difference, and territories of writing. To explain what I mean, I recall here that Reynolds begins with Gregory Clark’s claims for the advantages of travel metaphors in composition studies. As she observes, Clark came to travel metaphors as a response to the collapse of talk about discourse commu-
unities. Talk of discourse community proved too static to be of much use in describing practices of writing. No opportunity existed for writers to move out of or into any given discourse community—at least as the term was used and developed. Yet, every day we experience and observe movement across, into, and out of multiple discourses that appear, if not geographically bounded, then certainly conceptually bounded. Given the mismatch between a dynamic reality and a static theory, the language of travel—already well theorized in anthropology, cultural studies, and literary theory—seems a good choice. As Clark concludes, the value of metaphors of travel in the theory and practice of composition lies in their capacity to communicate the dynamics of process:

My suggestion is that we can remember to acknowledge the reality of both difference and reciprocity in social interaction by imagining discursive collectivity as not a kind of place but as a kind of process, and that we do that by exploring the conceptual resources provided by the metaphor of travel. If we envision the collectivity that is constituted in a discursive interaction as a place, its participants occupy a territory where they must assume and negotiate conflicting proprietary claims and where the object of their cooperation is the establishment of boundaries. If, however, we envision that collectivity as a pragmatic encounter of fellow travelers whose itineraries are their own but who find themselves sharing temporarily some problems and some opportunities, our students might learn to read and write as if they were embedded in an expansive social space where they must confront and account for relationships of agency, obligation, and interdependence. Competent writers and readers who are also constructive citizens might emerge from our classrooms if we were to abandon territorial rhetorics for a concept of discursive interaction that renders its participants necessarily transient. (22-23)

I quote Clark at length to draw attention to what seems like a return by Reynolds to the same static and unhelpful territorial rhetorics that Clark, and others, have persuaded us to abandon. If we look closely at Reynolds’ argument, however, we see that the appearance of a return proves to be an illusion. I want to be clear here. Even though I think Reynolds has recalled us to terms once thought empty, I do not think her invocation of place has the effect of simply moving us away from troubled travel metaphors and returning us to less troublesome territorial rhetorics. Reynolds is doing much more. That Reynolds is doing more than reinvoking discourse communities is apparent throughout her essay—specifically, in her observation that writers “work in places that inform
their identities as writers, and we don’t know enough yet about the conflicts and resistances that go on in the interaction of place and identity” (560). But doesn’t Clark’s appeal to travel metaphors also address the conflicts and resistances of interactions? Yes and no: yes, because, as Clark demonstrates, travel metaphors facilitate an understanding of the conflicts and encounters of individuals in social spaces; at the same time, no, because, as Reynolds demonstrates in her critique of travel, more is going on in social space than the metaphor captures. One of the reasons compositionists don’t know enough about the interactions of place and identity is that the theoretical language we have used has been too metaphorical. “Discourse community” didn’t work for the same reason that “travel” doesn’t work: because we have expected too much of metaphorical language, looking to it as an adequate map for the actions engaged in, as well as the meanings of, the material terrain of writing practices.

Reynolds’ contribution is to borrow on the less metaphorical language of place and space in cultural geography and cultural studies to point out new directions for researching writing as an embodied practice. This is not to say that the talk of space and place in geography and cultural studies is unmetaphorical. It is to say that different uses of the language of space and place make more of the physical activities and material conditions with which our writing practices intersect. Thus, placing attention to boundaries in opposition to an emphasis on places, Reynolds makes this proposal:

From one-inch manuscript margins to the differences between business writing and technical writing, we recognize and abide by dozens of spatial practices in the everyday. The clearer the boundaries, the more confident we are about keeping some out or letting some in; however, this “border mentality” has made boundaries more important than the places themselves. . . . Places—whether textual, material, or imaginary—are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of habitus. Theories of writing, therefore, should reflect this deeper understanding of place. Writing is an act of inhabiting discourses, not just moving through stages of a process. (560)

Here, even though Reynolds echoes the terms of a discourse community that Clark and others have steered us away from, she is more significantly shifting our talk from theoretical reflection toward a materially grounded research practice. This shift has consequences for what we can expect our
Clark proposes a kind of theoretical talk that aims at providing ethical paradigms for conceptualizing what we want from writers and their writing. Reynolds proposes a kind of theorizing that takes greater account of material conditions—that is, the daily lived experiences of writers. As she puts it, “current theoretical notions of travel, journeying, and border crossing must be tempered by the material realities of people’s lives” (541). Not that Reynolds isn’t aware of the discriminatory or prejudicial uses to which people put space. Not that she would argue against using our theories to intervene in discriminatory and prejudicial uses of writing. Rather, she argues for a better understanding of the spatial organization of discrimination and prejudice and for uses of authority and power that are grounded in a better account of writing as a spatial practice. The argument for a materially grounded theory may reinvoke territorial terms, but it moves beyond the simple opposition between territoriality and travel. Clark does not argue for a material ground. He keeps his remarks at the level of metaphor, and the thrust of his argument pertains to how metaphors align our perspectives and how these alignments promote our interactions. His is an ethical, normative argument, not a descriptive argument. Even though we cannot make arguments about what to do solely on the ground of what is, this does not mean that we are prevented from arguing about what to do from where we are located. The question that Reynolds raises concerns the force that our language does have and can have, not only over our points of view and the ethical reach of our practices of reading and writing, but also over how we actually do occupy spaces, whether we form communities or travel. This is a question for Reynolds, as well as for Clark, and therefore for composition studies more generally. How do spaces occupy our discourses? How do we occupy spaces through our discourses? It is not enough for Clark to understand students learning to read and write in his words, “as if they were embedded in an expansive social space,” because they already are embedded in, and embody, multiple spaces (23). Similarly, it is not enough for Reynolds to counter travel metaphors on the grounds of “embodied practice” because our current embodiments aren’t necessarily our most reliable guides for making claims for ethical writing practices. For our theories to do the work we want them to do, they must function in a kind of “as if” capacity, asking us (along with Clark) to reimagine the reality of embodied practices that we are given (as documented by Reynolds). At the same time, our theories and practices must respond to material constraints and embodied practices if they are to do the critical work we expect of them. Clark wants a way of talking that can have
consequences, real consequences for the shape and character of our literate exchanges. Reynolds wants to constrain our ways of talking about those literate exchanges so that they explain more precisely their socio-spatial embodiment. In her interviews with students, she shows how talk about communities and their boundaries can be occupied by experiences of fear, anxiety, class solidarity, and racial antagonism. She shows that we occupy spaces fearfully, anxiously, and antagonistically, forming solidarity with these people and not with those. Given this occupation of our discourses, we cannot trust completely in the materiality of our talk. But what might compositionists say about the relationship between what we say, what we do, and the spaces of our encounters? How do saying, doing, and the spaces of being inhabit each other?

These questions have long been the preoccupation of spatial design fields (such as architecture) and spatial organization disciplines (such as geography and urban planning). There exists in these areas a wealth of literature that has been isolated from literacy theory and rhetorical studies through the disciplinary organization of modern knowledge in American universities. While Reynolds and others in composition studies are increasingly turning to this literature, it is worth noting that teachers and researchers in architecture (Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley), geography (Edward Soja), and urban planning (Leonie Sandercock, John Forrester) increasingly invoke the discourse of communications, literacy, and rhetoric to do the work of building and planning spaces that people occupy. The motions toward each other of composition studies and architecture, geography, and urban planning point to a widespread recognition that words and spaces occupy each other. Yet, these occupations do not devolve into identifications. Spaces and words are variously articulated, with a range of consequences that are both material and discursive. One set of consequences that concerns architects may not concern compositionists who for disciplinary reasons are attentive to other sets of consequences. Thus, in turning to fields that are now turning to literacy and rhetoric, compositionists must take care to keep focused on the points of contact and on the purpose and the value of space and place in studies of writing. To keep composition studies from becoming architecture, to keep urban planning from becoming rhetoric, each field must articulate the dynamics of language, material conditions, organization of identities, and justifications necessary for appropriate action within those fields.

The important questions about the articulation of language, conditions, and identities are interrelated questions regarding the metaphorical
reach of language and the material consequences of language. How does the language we use effect, as it is effected by, the realities we occupy? Unfortunately, Reynolds does not propose an answer to this question. Nonetheless, she has brought into orbit a number of key theoretical concepts that deserve further attention, concepts that can be used to ask and answer the question just raised. Specifically, she has demonstrated that boundaries and places are relational, that they have significance in terms of each other, that their significance is constructive, and that boundaries and places are embodied in acts of inhabiting and occupying that we can understand as structures of feeling and the sedimented features of habitus.

Here I measure the heuristic strength of Reynolds’ claims through comparison with other concepts of embodied acts of occupation from other fields—specifically, the concepts of placemaking (from architecture) and of preserving (from feminist philosophy). As Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley use the term, placemaking is a material act of building and maintaining spaces that is at the same time an ideological act of fashioning places where we can feel we belong, where we can create meaning, and where we can organize our relationships to others. In Schneekloth and Shibley’s view, placemaking “embodies a vision of who we are and offers a hope of what we want to be as individuals and as groups who share a place in the world” (191). We become aware that how we speak, what we say, how it is heard, and what consequences this rhetoric has structure the places we occupy, at the same time that the places we occupy determine our rhetorics. Words and our uses of words assign significance to the places out of which and about which we speak. Our words also establish relationships between ourselves and those others we encounter in social spaces. We justify going here and not there. We convince ourselves of the need for a road here or a wall there. More than this, the concept of placemaking suggests that our justifications, convictions, and beliefs are as much a function of what we do and where we are as they are of what we say and who we say it to. We go here and not there, and we acknowledge these people and not those, because our environments constrain our choices. Schneekloth and Shibley demonstrate the advantages of using placemaking as a means of building less constraining environments.

The physical places that we occupy cannot but direct our attention here instead of there, although we also occupy those physical places by bringing our attention into them. Our spaces and our identities do, as Reynolds observes, inhabit each other. Some anecdotes here serve to
illustrate the issues raised by Reynolds and the manner in which her discussion enlarges and enables the articulation of our inhabitations of places and words. My grandmother often remarked proudly that she only lived in two houses her entire life: the one in which she was born and the one in which she raised her children. These houses were only about a mile from each other on the south side of Chicago. In a real sense, my grandmother's life affirms Reynolds' point that most of us live close to home and that gender privilege is associated with travel. Indeed, the gender privilege we accord to travel is made real to me almost wherever I go. I have almost routinely taken to carrying a map with me whenever I travel to another city because people typically will ask me for directions. Even in foreign countries, people will approach me and ask directions. So that they don't walk away still lost and disappointed, I take out my map and we find the place they are looking for—not that I always know where I am going (just ask anyone who rode across Pennsylvania with me after the last Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition).

The command of travel and public space granted me and the tightly bounded private realm within which my grandmother lived are both vulnerable to ideological critique. And if we attempt to draw from these anecdotes metaphors of embodied writing—travel based or grounded in homeplace—then we miss how I take up the role of traveler and how my grandmother took up the role of caretaker that she was so proud of. This is the point made by political philosopher Iris Marion Young in her revision of the concept of preserving. Young argues for a revaluation of home as a material, political, and personal necessity. Young draws on Heidegger's distinction between constructing buildings and preserving a place to live through activities (such as cleaning and cooking) to engage, on the one hand, feminist arguments that reject the home as a prison caught in the personal/public binary and, on the other, those that assert the value of home as a site of resistance. As Young observes, the work of construction may be privileged over the labor of preserving, but preserving plays a critical and constructive role for everyone. Young proposes a redefinition of homemaking: a living in and through the home, an interacting through bodily habit and daily routine with objects that are sedimented with meaning, and through this interaction preserving the sedimentation while at the same time constructing the place of the present and the possible spaces of the future. I read in Young echoes of Reynolds. Young's conception of homemaking as a daily interaction with objects that extend bodily habits and that support daily routines matches Reynolds'
proposal for attention to structures of feeling and sedimented features of habitus. Furthermore, I think it is important to note the similarities between Reynolds and Young because Young's work on the politics of difference has been influential in much composition research on discourse communities.

The heuristic strength of Reynolds' insight is that it functions simultaneously at a variety of levels and through a range of locations. As anyone knows who has paid attention to first-year college writers that physically struggle to freewrite for even ten minutes, bodily habits have everything to do with composition studies. Students do not typically have the bodily habit of writing with pen and paper for extended periods of time; they do not occupy their world in this way. Hence, a point of view that takes account of what Reynolds refers to as the immediate materiality of composing is valuable. As important as such research is, I am more interested in other bodily habits through which we occupy space and preserve literacy as a practice and through which we organize our world, interact with each other, and decide what is valuable to think and do. For some time, ethnographers of literacy have observed the need for researchers and teachers to pay attention to bodily habits. In Other People's Words, Victoria Purcell-Gates most clearly documents the consequences of literacy on our occupation of the world. Purcell-Gates describes a family living in Cincinnati in which both parents are functionally illiterate. They occupy the world differently as a result of their capacity with written language. In one particularly telling anecdote, Purcell-Gates explains how puzzled, and how hurt, she was when the family did not mention the postcards she had sent them while she was away. Inquiring about the postcards, Purcell-Gates discovered that the family simply did not understand the cultural significance or the expectations tied to the cards. The family simply did not occupy a space, through their interaction with the objects of literacy, that takes up the daily habits and ritual practices that make either literacy or its artifacts meaningful.

But there is more than just learning the habits and expectations (the preserving activities) of exchanging postcards, or of reading food labels, or of deciphering bills (the other of Purcell-Gates' examples). There are the ways that our material world is built to constrain access to learning literacy habits. Children who must traverse the threat of unsafe streets in order to get to school or women who, as Reynolds explains, have no time or place to write because they are forever obligated to care for others necessarily develop bodily habits and daily routines that run
counter to their acquisition of the privileged practices of standardized literacy.

A materially grounded perspective on literacy, rhetoric, and writing provides ways of engaging these constraints without making them the problem of those students and women and without reducing the solution to one of simply making more available to those who have less. As Young explains, it isn't simply a problem of access. It is primarily and most importantly a problem of how access is made unevenly available through the institutionalization of bodily habits and the routinization of daily life, for the places that we make for preserving the privilege of these bodily habits and those daily routines also make the places that contain marginalized habits and routines. This is important to recognize. We must make streets safe so that children do not feel threatened as they walk to school; we must provide women space and time so that they do not feel overburdened as they write. These measures alone are not sufficient. The places of city and home are too overdetermined, too occupied by objects and practices entangled in narratives that are individual (personally experienced) as well as ideological (materially structured and socially organized). The insight provided by a materially grounded rhetoric that focuses on habits and routines is that the spaces are locally lived even as they are globally inscribed. Thus, any work in composition studies must work from two directions at once: transformations of the global can be achieved through intervention in the local, while changes in the local can be effected through critical engagement with the global.

Obviously, the consequences for our professional practice are that we should promote forms of literacy, practices of rhetoric, and processes of writing that encourage different, more democratic habits and practices of placemaking, dwelling, preserving, and inhabiting. Another consequence is that we should work to construct and preserve spaces where democratic habits and practices of language can be lived. A less obvious (and far more debatable) consequence of taking up a material theory of language is the need for us to promote bodily habits and daily practices that enact what appear to us now as democratizing literacies, rhetorics, and writing. Here we should feel uncomfortable about the disciplinary prospects. Yet, if language is an embodied practice, we should be no less uncomfortable with the prospects of bodily disciplining only once removed in our advocacy of more of some kinds of literacies, rhetorics, and writings and less of others. I think this sensation of discomfort is a corporeal pain to which future work on the materiality of language must pay careful attention, for it cautions us against work that is either materially appropri-
ate but ethically inappropriate or inappropriately materially but appropriate ethically. We should take such discomfort as encouragement to work in ways that are both materially and ethically appropriate.

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Writing on Tour: Rethinking the Travel Metaphor

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My work in rhetoric and composition theory tends to address problems that follow from individualism among people who must live and work together. As John Dewey succinctly puts it, these are problems “of adjusting groups and individuals to one another” (181). Such problems can be solved, he continues, as people learn “a distinctive way of behaving in conjunction and connection with other distinctive ways of acting, not a self-enclosed way of acting, independent of everything else” (Public 188). In “Writing as Travel,” I presented a model of individual identity that would enable people to do just that. I ended that essay with a summary