

CRAFTING PLACE:  
RHETORICAL PRACTICES OF THE EVERYDAY

By

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## ABSTRACT

### CRAFTING PLACE: RHETORICAL PRACTICES OF THE EVERYDAY

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This dissertation explores how everyday rhetorical practices contribute to place- and space-making that also enable the negotiation of identity positions. The theoretical framework I build is based upon a qualitative research study of a crafting group, The Crafty Beavers. The methods used in the study include oral history interviews and participant-observation of group meetings. By listening to the stories from The Crafty Beavers, I hear their stories as theories and use them as the primary framework for the dissertation project. Their theories draw attention to how practice informs place and place informs practice.

Through these stories and experiences, I develop a theoretical and methodological framework for studying space and place as simultaneously rhetorical, cultural, social, and physical that emphasizes the importance of *everyday* practice in the making of meaning and the making of space and place. This framework includes five key arguments 1) Space is fluid and relational and exists within and/or alongside place, 2) Place is more stable than space and is given meaning through artifact, language, and practice, 3) Spaces are made to change, adapt, and manipulate places, 4) Space and place are performed in multiple ways simultaneously, and 5) Space and place are mobilized through everyday cultural practices.

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## DEDICATION

To Edward and Lillian Pederson.

To your home at 4803 NE 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland, Oregon. To cribbage, potato soup, apple betty, blackberry picking, and bingo. To roses, to tomatoes, to crocheting, to knitting. To all the ways you helped me find ways to belong, ways that I take with me wherever I go, wherever I make home.

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My writing has always been an attempt to live in the shadows of presence. To insist upon an existence, a voice. To write myself and my body into comprehensible space. But human existence is haunted by leavings, by disappearance.

—Malea Powell, “Listening to Ghosts”

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Knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us.

—Shawn Wilson

## CHAPTER 1

### *Stories of Practice, Stories of Space and Place: An Introduction*

#### *Where I'm From: Affiliations and Belongings*

“Where are you from?” It’s a simple question. I’ve asked it many, many times. I’ve been asked it many, many times. It’s a “get to know you” question. Most people give a brief answer. They name a town: Kalamazoo. If they’re from another state, they’ll name it, too: Portland, Maine. Sometimes they’ll name a part of a state instead: upstate New York. Where are you *from*? For a long time, I stumbled when asked this question. I had a hard time naming one place. In some ways, this dissertation project is about how this question is relevant to the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.

Where are you *from*?

My Dad is a Marine. A retired Marine.<sup>1</sup> Because my Dad is a Marine, I spent my childhood moving to different apartments and houses, living on or not-too-far-from military bases. Military assignments generally last between two and four years. We were lucky, usually relocating only every four years. My Dad began his military career in the Army. He met my Mom, who lived in Portland, Oregon, while stationed in Alaska because his roommate, Chris—who like my Mom is from Portland—was dating my Mom’s best friend, Penny, at the time. My Dad was born in Charlevoix, Michigan and raised in East Jordan, Michigan. My Mom was born in Sheyenne, North Dakota and moved to Portland, Oregon when she was eight. Michigan, North Dakota, Oregon. Alaska? I’m from and not from these places.

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<sup>1</sup> I’d like to mention here that the term ex-Marine indicates a dishonorable discharge. Marines who retire will *always* be Marines, never ex-Marines. I mention this now since I refer to my Dad’s Marine-ness in the present, even though he’s been retired from the Corps for 17 years.

Where are you *from*?

I was born on McChord Air Force Base just outside Tacoma, Washington. My Dad was stationed at Fort Lewis, an Army base that bordered McChord. We later moved to Olympia, Washington. When my Dad was stationed overseas, my Mom, brother, and I lived with my grandparents in Portland, Oregon. When my Dad transferred into the Marine Corps, we moved to San Clemente, California and later the nearby Military Base Camp Pendleton. When my Dad was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant, we moved to Silverdale, Washington, just outside Naval Submarine Base Bangor. When my Dad retired from the Marine Corps, we relocated to Charlevoix, Michigan.

My childhood was spent on and alongside military bases. I was thoroughly American—singing patriotic songs each morning at school (my favorite was “You’re a Grand Ol’ Flag”<sup>2</sup>), teaching myself “The Star-Spangled Banner” in my free time, thinking about how my Dad was a good guy and how folks like Saddam Hussein were bad guys. My Dad’s friend Adolph would give me a quarter every time I sang the “Marines’ Hymn.” I knew the joke that USMC stood for You Suckers Missed Christmas and knew the reason the joke was “funny” firsthand. It also stood, my Dad told me, for Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children. Washington, Oregon, California, Washington, Michigan. America.

Where are you *from*?

I spent a lot of time with my Mom’s parents when I was a kid. Gramma and Grampa lived in Portland, Oregon but they’d both grown up in very rural towns in North Dakota. They

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<sup>2</sup> It still is. I am singing it *right now*.

“You’re a grand old flag/You’re a high flying flag/And forever in peace may you wave.  
You’re the emblem of/The land I love./The home of the free and the brave.  
Ev’ry heart beats true/’neath the Red, White and Blue,/Where there’s never a boast or brag.  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,/Keep your eye on the grand old flag” (Cohan).

moved to Portland in the 1960s and stayed put, living in the same house for forty years. Their house in the Parkrose neighborhood never seemed to change. When they painted the house, they painted it the same colors—white with blue trim. Not only did the material things in the house remain fairly constant, the practices were consistent, too. We made the same foods over and over and over again: potato soup, potato sausage, lefse, white buns, sage dressing, beer battered shrimp, apple betty, country pie, oatmeal-raisin cookies, pumpkin pie, country-fried steak, steak on the grill, bacon. We played the same games over and over and over again: cribbage, rummy, pinochle, *Uno*, *Eye Guess*, *Barbie Queen of the Prom*, *Aggravation*, *Sorry*, *Trouble*. We collected the same foods from the garden over and over and over again: onions, carrots, better boy tomatoes, early girl tomatoes, corn, zucchini, potatoes. These patterns emerged over time; many had been packed up and driven from North Dakota to Oregon. Others, I’m sure went back even further. Gramma’s parents were second-generation Americans whose parents came from Norway: Struxness and Stensland. My Grampa’s parents were first-generation Americans, born in Sweden and Denmark: Petersen and Pederson.<sup>3</sup> Norway, Sweden, Denmark. North Dakota. Oregon. Home.

Where are you *from*?

My Grampa was a carpet-layer. My other grandfather a construction worker. My grandmothers were both stay-at-home moms, although my Dad’s mom was trained as a cosmetician. Most of my great grandparents grew up on farms. In the generations before that, the great-greats and great-great-greats and so on, there’s a graduate of Yale Divinity School (graduating 22nd in a class of 23), a Civil War soldier who fought in Antietam, an art professor at Hillsdale College, a riverboat dancer. Both of my grandfathers fought in the Korean War. My

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<sup>3</sup> These names have the same pronunciation and both generally denote “son of Peter.” Pederson is one of the most common surnames in Denmark.

Dad, as you know, chose the military as his career, retiring as a Gunnery Sergeant, a non-commissioned officer. After retiring, he took advantage of the GI Bill by taking a few courses at the community college 20 miles away. His post-military career includes a stint as the trainer for a junior A hockey team, The Grizzlies, a year working for a tree-trimming service, several years running a band saw at a local pallet mill, and over a decade of farming with draft horses. My Mom has spent the last 17 years as a teacher's aid working with special education students. She has a BS in Business from Portland State University. She's also worked for the Port of Portland, Ambassador Greeting Cards, and the North Kitsap School District. She's volunteered as a Girl Scout troop leader, with the Parent-Teacher Association, as the president of her bowling league, as the advisor to the National Honor Society at the local high school. Working class. Enlisted. Blue collar. Middle class. College. Bowling alleys. Greeting card aisles. Saw mills. These places, too, are where we're from, where I'm from.

Where are you *from*?

It's possible I'm belaboring the point. I've gone on and on about details that might seem trivial or unimportant to others. They're not trivial. These *places*—places that are at once indicators of geography, class, race, education, and political affiliation—mark me. Where we are, where we're from, and where we belong are deeply implicated in *who* we are, *what* we do, and *how* we do it. *Where* garners my attention, but it's not separable from when, who, what, why, and how. Rhetoric, as the study of meaning-making symbol systems, should pay more attention to *how* place is rhetorical. Place not only informs meaning-making as a backdrop for where meaning is made; place actively contributes to meaning-making practices.

Where *I'm* from is one starting point. It's a question I've thought about a lot. It's a question that's haunted most of my scholarship and teaching. For the dissertation project before

you, I was a participant-observer in a local craft group, The Crafty Beavers. I observed and participated in multiple meetings, I conducted a group interview with seven members of the group, and I conducted oral history interviews with six members of the group. I draw from these observations and interviews in the dissertation to theorize about how the group functions as both a space and a place and how the everyday practices that make, maintain, and manipulate space and place are rhetorical. In this introduction, I share how I came to this project, how my data was collected and analyzed, and how the dissertation is organized. Throughout the dissertation, I use *stories of practice* to theorize about how space and place are relevant to the study of rhetorics and the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.

### *Moving Past Where “I’m” From: A Story about Research Design*

I came into Michigan State University’s Rhetoric and Writing doctoral program with place on my mind, not necessarily as an object of study, but out of habit. Like anyone who has moved about in several communities, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the rules of the place I was in, the societal and institutional structures that make the place, and the practices that are supported by those rules and structures. I was caught up in *how* to be a PhD student, *how* to navigate the new place I was in, and *how* to show that I knew what I was doing. I wanted to know the rules and structures, so that I could integrate into the places, so that I could understand the places, so that I could be recognized as a member of the community, and so that I could *belong* in these places.

Central to my understanding of place is *practice*—following rules, playing *Uno*, eating apple betty, saying please and thank you. Place is made through practice, everyday practice. Place is accumulated through practice; it’s borders are defined not just through physical

boundaries but through codes of conduct, through routine. When I first began my graduate work, I read every word of the 800 pages of reading assigned in my courses each week. I bought a parking permit and learned which buildings to cut through to stay warm on the way to class in the winter months. I drank loose-leaf tea and subscribed to *Harper's Magazine*. I watched documentaries. I performed my own interpretation of graduate student through these practices, trying to inhabit the place of graduate school—which is at once personal, embodied, social, cultural, and physical—in the proper way. I wanted to belong!

In order to be part of the place, I needed to take part of particular kinds of practices. These practices allowed me to perform the identity of graduate student *and* they also contributed to the maintenance of the place of graduate school, the place of Rhetoric and Writing, and the place of MSU (just to name a few). What I'm saying is that where we come from, where we are, and where we belong clearly have implications for how we act, who we become, and why we make certain kinds of choices. Practice and spaces/places don't just affect personal, family, and home spaces/places. Place and practice inform each other, and we carry places through our practices into all kinds of other places, shifting and changing them with our practice as we go.

### *Rhetoric and Everyday Practice: Internal Manipulations of a System*

My scholarly ideas about space and place have been shaped primarily by the work of Michel de Certeau. Here, too, *practice* is central. De Certeau posits that place is fixed and meaningful while space is fluid and shifting. De Certeau focuses on space and place as markers of location. He defines place as “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. . . . A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). In other words, place is specific. Place



holds onto objects, ideas, and memories. Place is remembered. Space, de Certeau explains, “exists when one takes into consideration vectors or direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements . . . In short, *space is a practiced place*.” Place is an order and has a proper; whereas, space is more flexible, malleable, and less reliant on material, physical presence. In de Certeau’s world, place and space are defined and maintained through the practices within them.

Not only an essential concept in understanding the making and remaking of space and place, practice is a key concept in my own understanding of rhetoric. I define Rhetoric broadly as the study of meaning-making activities, including writing and composing in the sense of writing oneself and the making of textiles as well as texts. Rhetoric is about choices, about performance, about persuasion, about power, and about meaning. Rhetoric is action. Rhetoric is *how*. How something is done, how something is made, how something is said, how something is written, how something is displayed, how something means. Notice that I’m using the word “how” a lot? In other words, rhetoric is not so much about “things” as it is about “practices.” Ralph Cintron has a similar view; he sees rhetoric as ordering: “What interests me more is how humans ‘make’ an order. In order to explore this idea, I compare rather glibly the ‘ordering’ of a text and the ‘ordering’ of a society. I find both sorts of order making paradoxical. I assume that there is always a need to make an order, and yet the process entails ordering something out” (x). These ideas about rhetoric lead us right back to de Certeau who points out that “both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system—that of language or that of an established order” (23-4). These practices, actions, orderings, manipulations both strategic—those that come from a place of power—and tactical—those enacted in the spaces

alongside places of power—can be viewed as part of systems, institutional or everyday. The practices that make and remake space and place are rhetorical.

### *The Marauder's Map*

During the end of my first year as a PhD student, I started mapping out my research on this subject by designing a project aimed at revealing how graduate students in my own program navigated the disciplinary, institutional, and programmatic spaces and places they'd recently entered. The larger question I was interested in beginning to answer was, "How do graduate students learn the rules, the borders and orders, of these spaces/places?" I saw this project as a pilot study for what would become my dissertation.

To prevent "biting off more than I could chew," I narrowed my research questions and focused primarily on how working from *home* was different than working from *work* for graduate students in my program. The purpose of this study was to answer questions pertaining to the role of *physical* spaces and places in the professional development of graduate students, focusing on the acclimation of students into the program and their choices about *where* to do particular kinds of work associated with their graduate study. The study was a diary study using Twitter as the main mode of collection.<sup>4</sup> Participants spent two working days (one at home and one at school), no more than three weeks apart, updating me of the work-related tasks they completed by using Twitter and following the protocol provided. Participants tweeted an update

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<sup>4</sup> I should mention here that aggregating the data would have been much more difficult without the help of Michael McLeod and William Hart-Davidson at the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center.

each time they began a new activity or changed location; these updates formed a workstream.<sup>5</sup> In each entry, participants provided where they were and their activities (with pre-approved hashtags), and who they are interacting with. At the end of each day, they each wrote a short (1-2 paragraph) journal about how typical the day was. Prior to the study, participants completed an intake survey and training session to discuss the protocol. Following the participation days, I interviewed several participants, asking questions that helped me evaluate the protocol and the study.

This study, which I've taken to calling the Marauder's Map, served as a descriptive study about where participants did certain kinds of work and made useful contributions to thinking about how networked workstreaming could be useful to participants. For instance, participants in a workstream could see that several other participants found working at a local coffee shop when writing was productive and might try it themselves. With the data that I collected, Michael McLeod and William Hart-Davidson created a map that can show us not only where participants are, as Harry Potter's Marauder's Map<sup>6</sup> can, but also to show us *what* they're doing in that space. Alongside this information, we have placed information participants shared with us about their perceptions of different places/spaces in their lives—how they normally use them, how they feel

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<sup>5</sup> Workstreaming is an opt-in service that takes note when writing activity produces artifacts like documents, messages sent by e-mail or SMS, status updates, posted to a social networking service, updates to files stored in a shared content-management repository, calendar events entered or milestones achieved in a project-management timeline. A workstream is a name for the ambient data produced when people engage in writing activity such as when team members collaborate, or more commonly when groups of people are simply doing similar work but not necessarily in a coordinated way. In the Marauder's Map study, for instance, all of the participants are engaged in a similar activity: doing graduate school.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Potter is a fictional character in a series of children's novels by J.K. Rowling. The Marauder's Map is introduced in the third book in the series *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The map is enchanted. It shows the entirety of Hogwarts' castle—the primary scene of the novel—as well as who is in the castle and where they are in the castle.

connected to them. A resource like the Marauder's Map can enable these sorts of ad-hoc connections and exchanges of information. They can also help with the affective challenges of doing graduate school by allowing folks not only to coordinate information but to coordinate experience. The Marauder's Map did not do much to help me understand *why* and *how* the locations selected were chosen and function. Similarly, Harry Potter's Marauder's Map can tell us that Peter Pettigrew is in the Hogwarts castle, it cannot show us what he is doing, *how and why* he's doing it (or that he is a rat).

The study got me thinking about changing my research design to answer *how* and *why* questions instead of focusing primarily on *what* questions. I realized even more clearly that I wanted to focus on the relationship between space/place and practice. I wanted to know more about how space and place inform one another and how they are shaped and mobilized through practice. I wanted to understand space and place as more than just physical entities. My interest in space and place, then, became less about acclimation and *use* and much more about *making*, *maintenance*, and *manipulation*.

### *It Happens Everywhere: A Story about Selection*

I've established that rhetoric is about meaning-making, rhetoric is focused on practice, and that rhetoric shapes place and place shapes rhetoric. Rhetoric also happens *everywhere*. For my pilot project, The Marauder's Map project, I chose to work with a population of graduate students in my program not only because it was convenient but also because investigation into *how* disciplinary, institutional, and programmatic spaces/places are made, maintained, and manipulated rhetorically would be a significant contribution to the field. The Marauder's Map project disappointed me because it ended up focusing more on *what* questions than on *why* and

*how* questions, but it also proved difficult to write about how place and space are made through *practice* since the practices of graduate students—writing, reading, teaching, academic service—are all practices that are routinely researched within Rhetoric and Composition ways that differ from my approach (e.g. teacher research, writing process, writing pedagogies). In other words, it would be easier to show the relevance of everyday practice to space- and place-making as rhetorical if I focused on practices that are not already studied in great detail by rhetoricians. This meant that I had to choose another site.

Serendipitously, one spring day while I was working quietly at a table in MSU's Writing Center a couple of graduate students, Andrea and Ana, came over to say hello. I knew Andrea and Ana because they were part of a graduate writing group that I facilitated through the Writing Center. We met each week to talk about writing, to support one another, and to spur on productivity. I told them about how I was struggling to find a new research site for my dissertation project. They said, "You should write about The Crafty Beavers!" Andrea and Ana were both founding members of the group. I'd heard about The Crafty Beavers from them during our writing group meetings and had even been invited, but I had never actually attended a meeting. I said, "Really? That sounds kind of amazing. I just might. I'm serious! So, I hope you are, too!" I started attending meetings of The Crafty Beavers and soon began to prepare my dissertation prospectus.

The Crafty Beavers<sup>7</sup> is a crafting group in the Lansing, Michigan area. Most of its members are women. Most of its members are graduate students in the humanities at Michigan State University. Members of the group are between the ages of 25 and 45. Group membership shifts as members graduate, get academic jobs, and move away, but there is a core group of seven women who attend most meetings. The group has four “executive board” members and several regular members, but according to founding and e-board member Ana Holguin, “Our club forms itself at each meeting; we make ourselves up as we go along. It’s different each time depending on the people who come. We find a way of hanging together. We negotiate the gaps and construct new connections.” They are friends and friends-of-friends who meet to craft, a term that—for them—includes coloring in coloring books as well as quilting, sewing, knitting, drawing, and painting. The Crafty Beavers do not have a set meeting time or date. They tend to meet a few times a month; meetings are less frequent in the summer and most frequent in the fall. Meetings also do not have a set location; most meetings take place in homes of members.<sup>8</sup>

The Crafty Beavers is an attractive research site for my work for several reasons. First, The Crafty Beavers isn’t tied to one specific physical space/place. During my previous work on space/place, the physical and material notions of space and place were difficult to overcome for me and my readers. People would say things like, “Oh, so you’re interested in how furniture

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<sup>7</sup> There are several crafting groups in the US that call themselves The Crafty Beavers. Many of them, like the group featured in this dissertation, were inspired by the comedian Amy Sedaris. On a website devoted to Sedaris, it’s noted that, “In Fall 2003, she started an amateur craft club called The Crafty Beavers. She’s the club president and they meet on a weekly basis. Felt is their medium of choice, and it’s largely an excuse to smoke pot” (Richardson). Sedaris’s approach to craft is tongue-in-check. She embraces the kitschy quality of craft. She exhibits much of her crafting wisdom in two books, *I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence* and *Simple Times: Crafts for Poor People*.

<sup>8</sup> The Crafty Beavers also have a Facebook group with forty-seven members. Most of the Facebook group members do not attend the face-to-face meetings of the group (more on this in Chapter 3) but use the space to share ideas for craft projects.

arrangement in a classroom might affect learning?” Well, yes and no. Mostly no. With a site like The Crafty Beavers the geographical affiliation is not as strong, so I can study space and place in a more abstract way, investigate the social, cultural, historical, personal, emotional, gendered, classed, and raced elements of space and place as well as the physical and material, investigate how place and space are mobilized through practice, investigate how place and space membership contribute to identity.

Second, the practices of The Crafty Beavers function to make space and place, the group, and textiles. Each of these makings is important. The focus, for me, is on the process of the making and the motivations behind the making. Since the practices are not centered around creating written texts, I can avoid studying writing practices, which can distract my readers into thinking about all kinds of other work being done in Rhetoric and Composition and focus on the making of space and place instead of the making of writing (while still seeing how these kinds of sites can inform one another).

Third, by focusing on a group that makes things, I can consider the relationships between making craft projects and making space and place. The focus is less on the crafted objects and more on the relationship between the people, the craft project, and the space/place as articulated through the practices within the group. I’m not asking, “How are crafts made?” or “How does this group function?” I am asking: How does this craft group make community, space/place, and things? Where do these practices come from? How are these practices related? Why are group members motivated to participate in the group? How do the practices of the space and place of the group inform the practices of group members in other spaces and places?

*Stories-So-Far: A Story about Research Design and Collection*

In order to learn about *how* the space/place of The Crafty Beavers is made through everyday practice, *how* the space/place of the group contributes to the practices of the group and other spaces and places, and *why* members of The Crafty Beavers are motivated to participate in the group, I chose to draw from methods associated with oral history and ethnography. I conducted one group interview with core members of the group and six oral-history interviews with individual members of The Crafty Beavers. In addition, I acted as a participant-observer at multiple meetings during the course of my data collection.

I chose to use oral history methods of collecting in order to be able to have people narrate their experiences, and I chose ethnographic methods of collecting so that I could observe what happens when the group meets. In order to understand the experiences of The Crafty Beavers within the group and their motivations for joining and staying in the group, it is essential I look to their own stories of the experience. I want to know about people's reasons for doing things, for doing things in certain ways, and I can think of no better way than to talk to them about their experiences and choices. Oral history interviews and observations also make a great deal of sense if we are to accept Doreen Massey's definition of space as a "meeting-up of histories" (4) and "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (130) and her definition of "places [as] collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space." If spaces and places are stories and histories of experiences and practices, gathering those stories and histories is the best way to learn about their creation, maintenance, and manipulation.

My original plan was to conduct one interview with most active members of the group during a meeting, while everyone crafted. During this interview, I planned to ask questions about the founding of the group, its primary function, and its day-to-day operation. I would then recruit



two to three individuals from the group to complete oral history interviews during which time they would tell me about their history with craft, their history with The Crafty Beavers, and their motivations for both crafting and attending The Crafty Beavers meetings. From these interviews, I planned to determine how the group functions in general, and what the individual motivations and understandings of particular group members were. Throughout the period of conducting interviews, I planned to attend and video-record one to three meetings of The Crafty Beavers to see how the practices noted in the interviews matched up with what happened in the meetings. I prepared interview questions with this plan in mind. The actual process of collecting data, however, did not go as planned.

Not long after I started attending meetings of The Crafty Beavers in the spring of 2011, members of the group indicated that they knew I was interested in the group as a research site. Ana and Andrea had spread the word. For the moment, I was just a member like anyone else, and I was trying to get a feel for how the group worked. In the late spring of that year, the group did not meet all that often. The Beavers who were graduate students were busy with the end of the spring semester—taking exams, grading papers for the classes they taught, writing seminar papers. When summer came around, several Beavers had trips planned to visit family in different states. I wanted to officially ask the group for their permission to use it as a research site when a majority of members were around.

By the end of the summer, it was clear to everyone that I was likely to write my dissertation about the group. I defended my prospectus in August and began to put together IRB documents. At a group meeting in early October, I explained the premise of the project in detail and provided information about the research design, using oral history interviews and observation. I asked how they felt about the project and provided my recently approved informed

consent forms. A few weeks later, Ana approached me about meeting to “talk about Beaver stuff.” I thought that it was a great idea, and we set up a time to talk at a Starbucks near campus.

When I arrived at the coffee date on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Ana said, “I invited Violet, ES, and a couple other folks, too.” I realized that this was going to be the group interview. The purpose of this interview was to get information about the general parameters of the group—membership, creation, purpose—to compare against individual experiences expressed in the oral history interviews and the observations of group meetings. I’d planned to do this interview during a meeting, while we were all crafting at someone’s quiet house. But, the opportunity to do the interview was right in front of me, and I wasn’t going to waste it. Violet and Jamie arrived shortly, and Ana received a text from ES saying that she’s running late and to start without her. They’re ready to have a straightforward and serious talk about my project and The Crafty Beavers. After making sure I had consent forms from everyone, I pulled out my laptop and began recording our conversation using GarageBand. I asked a variety of questions about how the group formed, how often the group meets, what kinds of crafts are made in the group, and why the group is compelling to them. I tried to make the interview as much like a conversation as possible and learned a lot about The Crafty Beavers, which helped me consider the kinds of questions to ask in the oral history interviews that took place later and the types of practices to look for in my observations. The interview also served as a way for The Crafty Beavers to learn more details about my project and ask follow-up questions based on our meeting earlier that month. After our one and a half hour conversation, it seemed that everyone present had a better sense of the project and were enthusiastic about it.

Shortly after the group interview, I emailed out requests to every Beaver that had indicated interest in the oral history interviews during our early October meeting, asking them if

they were still interested in doing one-on-one oral history interviews. I'd already shared the IRB documents with them but sent them along for their review. I was excited and overwhelmed when six<sup>9</sup> of them said yes. I spent the month of November meeting with individual Beavers to talk about their experiences with craft and with The Crafty Beavers. I interviewed Violet, Katie, Julia, Ana, Andrea, and ES between November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. Each interview took between one and two hours.

The plan for these oral history interviews was for me to talk to participants while we crafted at their homes. I was to both audio- and video-record our conversations. My reasoning behind this arrangement was that participants would be most comfortable in their homes and that the act of crafting while talking would also put them into a similar frame of mind as crafting with The Crafty Beavers does. The Crafty Beavers, however, had different ideas. Many of them suggested that we meet, instead, at some public place and preferred not to be video-recorded. Eager to make them comfortable, I agreed to these conditions.

I wish, now, that I had been more persuasive about where we had these conversations. I spoke with Violet first. We met at her apartment, but she preferred not to be video-recorded. Our conversation was lengthy and pleasant. We drank tea and admired her cats. My conversation with Katie took place in her home, but she, too, declined the offer of being video-recorded. I met with Julia at a local coffee shop and café a little too close to the lunch hour. She, too, preferred not to be video-recorded. Not only was it busy during the interview, but the proprietors of the store chose that time to hang up some photos and paintings, loudly nailing into the wall for several minutes. As a result, parts of the recording are difficult to understand. Next, I met with

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<sup>9</sup> A note to those of you currently developing dissertation proposals and collecting dissertation data: three interviews would have been enough. Six interviews, seven when you count the group interview, makes for a lot of data.

Ana, who also preferred not to be video-recorded. We met at a different local coffee shop; it was much quieter than my conversation with Julia, but there was some disruptive noise from other patrons. Andrea was the only Crafty Beaver who approved of video-recording the interview. We spoke at her home, and she crocheted a blanket throughout the interview. I met with ES last at a local sandwich shop. The site was loud, and we sat near a door that let in giant drafts of cold air periodically. As someone who is particularly interested in space and place, I am intrigued by the choices The Crafty Beavers made about where these interviews happened.

During the interviews, I asked a variety of questions. The purpose of the interviews were to ask participants to reflect upon their crafting histories both within and outside The Crafty Beavers. I started with the questions about their background with crafting: “What kinds of things do you craft? How long have you been crafting? Who taught you to craft?”; “Tell me about your history with the Crafty Beavers—How did you learn about them? When did you join the group? How often do you craft with them?” I wanted to the participants to tell me stories about their crafting, so I tried to elicit stories with these general questions and asked follow up questions based on the direction of their stories.

All of the oral history interviews were audio-recorded using GarageBand. I later converted the files into MP3s and transcribed them in Microsoft Word. When transcribing, I often omitted verbal ticks like “um” and “hmm.” In a few instances, I did not transcribe the entire interview as we occasionally got off topic or because a participant indicated that she was sharing a piece of information that “doesn’t need to go in your dissertation.” I transcribed the interviews in November and December of 2011. I emailed each participant the transcript of her interview as a Word document and asked her to approve the transcript. They were instructed to remove or strikeout any text they would not like to be used as data and to highlight any text that I

could draw from for analysis but that they would prefer I did not quote from directly. At this time, I also asked them to review the document for any potential errors. Participants were also asked to make a final decision about whether they would prefer to go by their actual names or by pseudonyms. Most participants chose to use their real names.<sup>10</sup> The participants responded throughout February, and I used the updated and approved transcripts for data analysis and interpretation.

After conducting and transcribing the group interview and the individual oral history interviews, I had a much better sense of how the group functions in general, how the group functions for the individuals I interviewed, how the individual members came to craft and to The Crafty Beavers, and their motivations for membership. As I read across all the transcripts multiple times, content areas emerged. These include: 1) Family and identity, especially pertaining to maternal performances, gender performances, definitions of feminism, class positions, race positions, and political and ideological leanings; 2) Sources of frustration, stress, and depression and the intellectual, mental, emotional spaces and places that inform these feelings, especially those pertaining to graduate school; 3) Crafty Beaver history and functioning, with attention to collaborative and collective work, material, tangible things, and as a space/place to talk through personal and professional concerns; and 4) Craft history & definitions, such as information about how craft was learned and from whom as well as what counts as craft and how craft connects to other parts of participants' lives.

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<sup>10</sup> I appreciated this decision. Like Shawn Wilson, I feel that using real names helps me stay accountable to my research participants: "How can I be held accountable to the relationships I have with these people if I don't name them? How can they be held accountable to their own teachers if their words and relationships are deprived of names? What I will do is write using the real names of everyone who has given me explicit permission to do so" (63).

### *Listening to Stories of Practice: Theorizing through Story*

I spent a long time floundering with my abundance of data. When I began to write, I did not write theories about how space and place are rhetorical but the stories the Beavers told me. In essence, I was writing an oral history instead of using the oral history archive I'd created to help me theorize about rhetoric, space, place, and practice. I felt responsible to my research participants in ways that made it difficult to begin using their stories to drive theories. I wanted to share as many stories as possible, and I wanted to talk about The Crafty Beavers in only positive ways. It took me several months before I was able to think of the data in terms of what it could show me—and all of us—about how space and place function rhetorically.

It took me awhile to remember that I was listening to stories of practice in order to theorize about the rhetorical nature of space and place. In my prospectus, I'd listed the following questions as research guides:

- Why do The Crafty Beavers craft? That is, what motivates “unnecessary” making?
- How do The Crafty Beavers change or create spaces through their meetings and makings?
- How does membership in The Crafty Beavers impact place-identity?
- How does crafting, for this population, create a particular sense of environment/home/place and belonging?

I hypothesized potential motivations for The Crafty Beavers' making and gathering. It's possible that The Crafty Beavers come together and craft

- to form community,
- to create and/or maintain a particular kind of identity,
- to carry on a family or cultural tradition,
- to bring a piece of another place (home) to this place to which they have relocated (for graduate school),
- to do/make something with their hands, since many of them are intellectuals who work primarily with words and ideas in their professional lives, or
- to do any combination of these and/or other things. I want to find out.

Eventually, I got back on track and began looking to these questions and hypotheses to stay grounded. When listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts, I paid close attention to stories of practice that could help me answer questions about the making, maintenance, and manipulation of space and place. Instead of finding a separate methodology chapter or section within the dissertation, you'll see the ways that the methodology is developed and woven through the entire project. My frame is built through using *stories of practice* and de Certeau's definitions of space and place to situate space and place rhetorically. Ideas and conceptualizations of space and place within and alongside Rhetoric and Composition are constellated throughout the text as well. I hear the stories of The Crafty Beavers as insights into theories of space and place, as rhetorically important concepts and sites.<sup>11</sup> This project contributes to the project of cultural rhetorics, which recognizes that culture is persistently rhetorical and rhetoric is persistently cultural.

#### *A Look Ahead: Dissertation Forecast*

In what follows, I share the stories from The Crafty Beavers to develop a framework showcasing the ways in which space and place are rhetorically significant. This framework emphasizes the importance of everyday practice in the making of meaning and the making of space and place and includes five key arguments: 1) Space is fluid and relational and exists within and/or alongside place, 2) Place is more stable than space and is given meaning through artifact, language, and practice, 3) Spaces are made to change, adapt, and manipulate places, 4) Space and place are performed in multiple ways simultaneously, and 5) Space and place are

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<sup>11</sup> Within Rhetoric, a similar approach can be found in Andrea Riley Mukavetz's dissertation *Theory Begins with a Story, Too: Listening to the Lived Experiences of American Indian Women*. It can also be found in much of Malea Powell's work.

mobilized through everyday cultural practices. These arguments are not made in a linear way; each are mentioned and developed at various points in the dissertation.

In this chapter, I have provided information about my motivations for this project and the framework I use to orient it. I also describe the methods I use to understand how the everyday practices of The Crafty Beavers rhetorically make space and place. In Chapter 2, “The Crafty Beavers Make Do: Making Space to Perform Differently,” I compare and contrast the space The Crafty Beavers make to other spaces alongside their graduate work, especially writing groups. I argue that The Crafty Beavers make a space through their gathering, crafting, and other group practices that enables them to develop professional identities and manage anxieties and stresses associated with the places of their graduate work; that is, spaces are made to change, adapt, and manipulate places. The space made by The Crafty Beavers is of special importance because it relies on home and everyday practices that other spaces alongside professional work do not. In Chapter 3, “The Crafty Beavers Make and Maintain Place: Stabilizing Meaning and Identity,” I argue that The Crafty Beavers are making place as well as space; that is, the group performs as a space and a place at the same time. I argue that The Crafty Beavers are making place through naming practices, drawing boundaries, and making rules. The group have established a place by becoming more fixed in their naming of the group, approach to membership, and accepted crafting practices. Space and place are performed in multiple ways simultaneously. In Chapter 4, “Patterns of Home: Crafting a Life,” I tell stories about my own practice and present my experiences with interwoven spaces, places, and times in a collage essay. These experiences show relationships among different spaces and places, reinforce the notion that space and place are performed in multiple ways, and show how space and place are mobilized through everyday practice. In Chapter 5, “Making Space and Place in Rhetoric and Writing,” I provide a summary



of the project and reflect on how it can contribute to future scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition.

As you read, please keep in mind that this dissertation is a space/place that theorizes through story and that stories are practices that make spaces and places:

Stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world's debris. . . . Things *extra* and *other* (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order. (de Certeau 107)

The stories I tell show that the multiplicity and complexity of space and place are not easily ordered, linear narratives.

I used to joke, back when Jeff and I were married, and we're both atheists, that someday I would be Lutheran because that's where everyone goes. When you're older, you go to church, and you make the casserole, and you hang out with the ladies, and you sing the songs. I think that maybe I'm that way with the Beavers, like maybe I'm just there for the community. I like to do the things that we do, but I don't believe in The Jesus. I don't know. What's the Jesus of craft?

—Katie

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Crafty Beavers Make Do: Making Space to Perform Differently*

It might seem odd to say that crafting with friends could make you a better graduate student, but that's what I've learned from The Crafty Beavers. Although I've spent the last four years working with and mentoring graduate students in graduate writing groups where we talk a lot about how they arrange themselves in relation to their scholarly work as graduate students preparing for comprehensive exams and writing dissertations, I've only recently realized that I know little about how they arrange themselves otherwise, as *people* who are also graduate students. My work with The Crafty Beavers has helped me see the relationships and connections between the everyday, home practices, *and* their scholarly practices as graduate students.

The Crafty Beavers gather to craft, but we also gather because we're friends. As friends, we talk about our everyday lives; we tell stories about how we couldn't sleep last night, about how our partners surprised us with special dinners, about how we're struggling with our concentration exams. As graduate students, The Crafty Beavers spend a lot of time discussing our experiences with graduate school. In fact, craft is the *second* most popular topic at meetings of The Crafty Beavers; *most* of the talk is about graduate school. The Crafty Beavers provide me and other Rhetoric and Composition scholars insights into the spaces and practices *alongside and outside*<sup>12</sup> formal academic places and training that shapes the learning of academic practices and the acquisition of scholarly identities.

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<sup>12</sup> This usage of "alongside" is similar to that of Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson in *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*. In their book, they adapt Edward Soja's definition of thirdspace and explore how a writing studio model for writing instruction acts as a thirdspace, a space alongside.

In this chapter, I show how The Crafty Beavers use everyday, home practices to make spaces alongside the places of their academic lives that positively influence their academic abilities and identities. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to underscore the importance of understanding space and place as simultaneously rhetorical, cultural, social, and physical, and to show the relevance of everyday practices in the development of professional skills and identities through space- and place-making. To these ends, I discuss the ways in which the space of The Crafty Beavers is similar to and different from informal spaces of writing and professional development *alongside and within* institutional places focusing on writing groups in particular. I provide stories of practice from The Crafty Beavers to show how the group acts as a liminal space that allows members to negotiate home and scholarly identities and perform differently than they do in school and work places.

Ultimately, what I am advocating is that *spaces* like The Crafty Beavers are important to the development of professional identities and skills. Writing groups, writing centers, and workshops provide spaces of informal mentoring about professional skills like writing dissertations and interacting with committee members. These spaces exist *alongside and within* institutional places, while The Crafty Beavers exist *alongside and outside* institutional places. The Crafty Beavers is a space *alongside and outside* because although they meet in physical locations outside of their graduate programs, they are brought together by their shared identity as graduate students and much group practice is devoted to negotiating scholarly identities. As a space *alongside and outside* institutional places, The Crafty Beavers allows members to employ everyday practices of home, like getting together with friends and working on craft projects, to bear more productively on institutional places and practices, like writing and working collaboratively in an academic department.

### *Space as Alongside Place*

I subscribe to definitions of space and place associated with cultural geography, emphasizing both space and place as always simultaneously cultural, social, and physical. Tim Cresswell provides a helpful example, writing, “A church, for instance, is a place. It is neither just a particular material artifact, nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both. Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the ‘merely ideological’; rather they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them” (*In Place* 13). At first, it seems that place can be distinguished from space rather simply. Place is more fixed and stable, more imbued with meaning through experience and history, while space is more flexible and fluid. Both space and place are made, maintained, and manipulated through practice.

However, what appears as or feels like a place to one person might feel like a space to another. For instance, as a teacher I might have memories and experiences in a particular classroom that I have taught in for several semesters. I can connect multiple experiences, people, and objects to the classroom. When someone says, “I have a class in 317 Bessey Hall,” their words bring forth a collection of memories and associations. For me, this particular classroom is a place. However, a student taking her first class in the same room will not immediately attribute any special feelings or memories to this classroom. For her, the classroom is likely associated abstractly with other classrooms in her life, but it doesn’t at first contain any distinctive meaning for her. This particular classroom, for her, is a space because it lacks the accumulation of memories and experiences that make a fluid space into a stable place. One day it is a room she meets in for a workshop, another day it’s where her teaching with technology class meets, another day it is a computer lab she uses independently between classes. De Certeau reminds us, “space is a practiced place” (117); this classroom performs in multiple ways; its purpose is open,

not stable. Yes, space is open. Doreen Massey defines space as a “meeting-up of histories” (4), as “stories-so-far” (130), while places are collections of these stories. Space and place, then, are defined through human practice. The practices in a space/place create relationships with the space/place that make it a space or a place (or both) to a particular individual.

Through rhetoric—meaning-making activity revealed in practice and ways of being in the world—spaces and places are made, maintained, and manipulated. De Certeau puts these practices into two camps: strategies and tactics. Strategies are associated with centers of power. In the example above, that center would be the institution (for both me and the student, perhaps to varying degrees), which includes university employees and places (de Certeau 35). Tactics are associated with weaker parties *alongside* those centers (36). In the example above, the weaker party would be university students. That is, strategies come from *place* and tactics come from *space*. Spaces are alongside and within places; de Certeau explains:

*The space of a tactic is the space of the other.* Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver ‘within the enemy’s field of vision,’ as von Bulow put it, and within enemy territory. (36-7, emphasis mine)

Both types of practice influence the ongoing making of space and the manipulation of place, and both types of practice are rhetorical. Like Michel de Certeau, I work from the understanding that “both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system—that of language or that of an established order” (23-4). That is, strategies and tactics within “an established order,” such as language or *space* or *place*, are rhetorical. These practices are

employed to make, maintain, and manipulate such orders. Now that I have explained the role of practice in space- and place-making, I will discuss graduate school itself as a *space* and go on to show how writing groups and The Crafty Beavers are different kinds of spaces of support that both provide graduate students with opportunities to negotiate their scholarly identities and in relation to institutional norms, conventions, and places. In other words, these spaces are made through and encourage everyday practices (i.e. tactics) that allow graduate students to find a way to belong in institutional places.

### *Structures of Support Alongside the Institution*

When I first joined The Crafty Beavers, I knew that most members of the group were graduate students, but I didn't realize how much that identity position informed the space. In "Introduction: (E)Merging Identities: Authority, Identity, and the Place(s) In-Between," Melissa Nicolas describes graduate school as an in-between space; I would contend that all *space* is similarly in-between and that graduate school is an excellent example of space. Nicolas writes:

In-between spaces are murky, stressful, overwhelming, exasperating, challenging, exciting, hopeful, and full of potential. Inhabiting an in-between place, whether professionally or personally, puts our minds in over-drive. . . . During this in-between time, we often experience moments of great clarity about who we are and what we want, quickly followed by moments of intense self-doubt and questions about our identity. Being in-between causes us to assess our situation and reflect on our strengths and weaknesses in order to accept or reject roles and to negotiate this liminal space. (1)

This description reminds me of something Violet, one of The Crafty Beavers, said during our interview: “None of us [the Beavers] think of ourselves as academics. I still don’t. It’s hard to make that shift. I was sending out job applications, and it was really weird. Like, my stuff is out there, and I’m not comfortable with that. How do you present yourself that way?” This shift is made particularly difficult by the need to inhabit multiple identity positions associated with academia at the same time. Nicolas writes, “In terms of academic culture, there is no greater in-between space than that of being a graduate student, especially being a graduate student in an English program since many graduate students hold teaching, tutoring, and/or administrative appointments” (1). As graduate students, we are students, teachers, consultants, mentors, facilitators, and administrators all at once. Each of these positions is taken on by most members of The Crafty Beavers. Our knowledge is utilized in teaching and administration, yet we are not fully credentialed and our decisions are under higher scrutiny than those of full-fledged faculty. We question our own abilities; we question whether we have what it takes to finish the process.

Going to graduate school is a personal and emotional experience that has a significant impact on student identity and wellbeing. During graduate school, students become disciplined into fields of study that are seen as esoteric to their friends, acquaintances, and colleagues who work in different environments. As psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi’s writes,

For most people, domains are primarily ways to make a living. We choose nursing or plumbing, medicine or business administration because of our ability and the chances of getting a well-paying job. But then there are individuals . . . who choose certain domains because of a powerful calling to do so. For them the match is so perfect that acting within the rules of the domain is rewarding in



itself; they would keep doing what they do even if they were not paid for it, just for the sake of doing the activity. (37)

People who find themselves in graduate programs, especially PhD programs, often see that work as a personal calling. Another Crafty Beaver, Katie frequently says, half-jokingly, that she wants to “change the world” with her work. When talking about her struggles with graduate school, Ana says,

There’s like a line that I sometimes consider getting tattooed on myself from Flogging Molly. It says, “Nothing ever came from a life that was a simple one.” Good art happens because you have a messed up life. And, the comedians that I love, they’re like fending off fear basically every day, and my [dissertation] project is hard because I’m working with hard concepts, and I maybe could do something really easy, but because I’m me I can’t. I wouldn’t do something easy. I have to do something that means something to me, and I have to do something that makes me work through stuff.

For Katie, Ana, and many other graduate students, getting a graduate degree isn’t just about achieving a higher level of education but about challenging themselves and contributing to and changing the world. These individuals hope “to bring order to experience, to make something that will endure after one’s death, to do something that allows humankind to go beyond its present power” (Csikszentmihalyi 38). The movement between their pre-graduate school identity and their degree-holding identity, like any movement “is rarely just about getting from A to B. The line that connects them, despite its apparent immateriality, is both meaningful and lade with power” (Cresswell, *On the Move* 9). The spaces graduate students inhabit alongside the place of the academy influence their confidence and abilities as graduate students.

When I first joined the Beavers, I thought the group was simply a social gathering of women who liked to craft. We'd get together and knit, crochet, draw, talk, laugh, and eat. Almost immediately, though, I noticed that the talk was dominated by discussions about graduate school experiences. The Crafty Beavers shared stories of frustration about issues with dissertation proposals, difficulties in scheduling meetings with committee members, misunderstandings about their work voiced by other students in their programs, and concerns with their performance and efficiency in moving through their programs. These particular kinds of stories didn't remind me of other social groups centered around hobbies (e.g. running clubs, bowling leagues, and crafting groups). Instead, they were reminiscent of my interactions with graduate students at writing centers, in consulting sessions, in workshops, and especially in graduate writing groups. Writing centers, and writing groups in particular, as spaces *alongside and within* institutional spaces offer many of the same benefits of professionalization and identity negotiation and opportunities as The Crafty Beavers. Both types of spaces encourage tactics, everyday practices, that slowly shift the strategies that define the institutional places alongside them.

### *Writing Groups as Spaces Alongside and Within the Institution*

At the Michigan State University Writing Center, I have acted as the coordinator of our graduate writing groups, facilitated several groups, and been a member of a writing group.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> These groups typically have three to six members as well as a facilitator, who guides the meetings. The groups meet every week for two-hours and one-hour of time outside of the group is required for reading the work of group members. In larger groups, members can expect to have conversations about their own writing every other week, while in smaller groups discussions about every member's writing each week is more common. Although there is an attempt to group students together by discipline, availability becomes the most important consideration when scheduling a group. As a result, most groups are multidisciplinary. The graduate writing group coordinator aims to group humanities students together, social science students together, and hard science students together, but this is not always possible.

graduate writing groups I'm familiar with act as an extension of one-to-one consulting at writing centers. These groups are coordinated, staffed, and maintained through writing centers and exhibit many of the same values—flattened hierarchy, attention to understanding and questioning institutional norms, and improvement through practice. These groups meet once a week, often in the writing center or another location on campus.

Students tend to find the groups helpful not just as a source of writing knowledge and practice but as a space of emotional as well as intellectual support. Students report that groups give them community and help them feel that they are not alone. In these groups, students support one another; they learn about writing and mentoring through practice within the group. Of their graduate writing group, Cahill, et al. note “we have also become a community of support for one another and the support goes beyond writing. As our friendships have grown significantly, so has our commitment to one another’s professional and personal success” (155). While conversations about writing practices and specific writing projects are the main focus of the group, group members also spend a lot of time discussing work-life balance, teaching concerns, problems with advising, and other topics that, while not directly about their writing, inform their writing situations and their professional lives.

### *The Crafty Beavers: A Space Alongside but Outside the Institution*

Like writing groups, The Crafty Beavers bring together students from across the disciplines in an informal setting outside their departments. While the task at hand, crafting, seems very different than that of graduate writing groups, writing, the conversations throughout the meetings of both groups are strikingly similar. In each of these instances, these groups provide spaces alongside institutional, department, and disciplinary places for students to work

through concerns, issues, and difficulties related to their lives as graduate students. Students in graduate writing groups often attribute a feeling of expertness to involvement with their group since it venues allow them to practice talking the language of their discipline without the prying ears and eyes of authority figures, like advisors and other committee members. Students begin to feel at ease and can develop a better sense of their disciplinary identity through these conversations. In The Crafty Beavers, a similar opportunity arises. The Crafty Beavers develop rapport and feel that they belong, to the group and in academia, through the conversations they have together. In the graduate writing groups, participants share academic success stories as well as stories of reservation, uncertainty, and frustration. Writing group participants focus on both general concerns related to their work-life balance as well as seek thorough guidance on specific writing projects. In contrast, The Crafty Beavers do not focus on specific academic accomplishments and artifacts. Instead, the Beavers' discussions of their academic lives center around bonding over shared experiences as academics.

As a space that is *alongside and outside* academic places, The Crafty Beavers gives its members somewhere else to go. In fact, according to Andrea the creation of the group sprung from a need to form relationships with other graduate students who faced difficulties in graduate school. She says,

When I was in American Studies and when I was a master's student, I was not doing well as a grad student. In my classes I was doing okay, but I was having a really hard time forming relationships. And, I was really, really unhappy. I almost quit 2 or 3 times. And so we [Ana and I] talked about creating this space where people like us could get together and make things. It was a place for us to be normal.

Ana expands on Andrea's story by explaining how the space allows her to deal with the stresses and pressures of school without explicitly doing the work of school:

I don't want to talk about school, necessarily, when I'm doing the crafting. It makes me sad all the time. Why would I want to talk about it? But, then I would feel fine about it if we could talk about school and complain about it or share things that I didn't know, like if somebody else was having a similar situation, and then we could breathe: "Oh, that's not just me?" And, I would get more tense if it would be more like, "We're all going to sit together and talk about the things that we've finished and done!" I'd be like, "Oh, no, I haven't done anything, and now I'm crafting! Oh my God! Get out of my house!"

Several Beavers tell stories like these. It seems that, in some ways, the group is about getting away from explicitly school-related ideas while embracing the identity-position of graduate student and spending time with other graduate students, being around people who understand each other's responsibilities, positionalities, and realities without having to talk about them explicitly. These practices and these spaces are in relationship with the more formal professional practices and academic places in The Crafty Beavers' lives. Both kinds of spaces/places and both kinds of practices are necessary.

Echoing the ideas mentioned by Ana, Katie goes so far as to say that The Crafty Beavers is "a safe space from school." She goes on to say, "you can bring it [school] in, but that's not why we're here. We seem to be people who have some stuff in common and are going through this, 'We've all made this life choice to do the PhD thing,' and so this is a way of creating community and professional development that also kind of nurtures this other side." In other words, the Beavers acknowledge that their identity as graduate students is an important part of

who they are; it is a part of themselves that they might bring into meetings, but the group is really about getting by and making do.

Instead of focusing conversation on how to improve a particular piece of writing, The Crafty Beavers are negotiating how they will live productive, creative lives as academics in the long-term. Ana and Katie have established that school is a topic of importance for The Crafty Beavers but that the group is not a space to explicitly discuss theoretical concepts, research studies, or writing projects. Instead, the space allows members to be both graduate students and the people they have always been. Violet elaborates,

We're all going through this really difficult, horrible time. I think it also causes conflict in that people progress through it [graduate school] in different times. The kind of person that goes to grad school is generally the kind of person that's pretty competitive and who's pretty much a perfectionist as well. So, we're all looking at each other like, "How far along are you?" "Well, your committee is saying that you can go ahead with this, and mine is saying that I have to redo it, and it's not fair." You know, there's always like that sort of thing floating around, but it's [the Beavers] a chance to get away from that somewhat, and it doesn't always work, but it's at least a space where you can step outside of that and perform in a different way.

She says that the group offers her a chance to feel "more like myself" around people who are in similar positions when it comes to life and work realities and choices.

*“Making Something with My Hands” and “Something to Show for It”*

Ana and Andrea highlighted that practicing craft and art gives them somewhere else to go, and Violet stressed the importance of The Crafty Beavers in allowing her to “perform differently” than she does in graduate school. The materiality of craft is important to Violet who shares stories about “making something with my hands” and “something to show for it.” The written work and research tasks associated with graduate study are primarily cerebral activities; tangible products are not the main take-away of the intellectual work of most academics. Written documents, while they can take physical form, are not as easily translatable to the public (or well-meaning friends and family) as a blanket, scarf, jar of jam, or painting. Violet elaborated on how she experiences this reality during our group interview:

I was really invested in making things with your hands being very important as opposed to most of the work we do. Most of us are in very cerebral fields. And, even people who weren’t necessarily grad students are doing [other kinds of] jobs, like Karen was working at a hospital, but it’s not the same as making something and this power of making, of creating something. You can say at the end of the day, “I did this. I got this accomplished.” That’s really important to me.

Having a tangible object is important not only because it can be shown to others and recognized for what it is, but because it has a beginning and an end, and because you can touch it with your hands, and you can feel that it is complete. Violet connects this desire to having “something to show” for all the time and energy she puts into her work. She wishes teaching, as well as writing, were more like craft:

You just want to see something tangible that you've made as well. You know? I love teaching, but at the end of the day there's nothing you have to show for teaching, and it's one of the most depressing things about the job. There's no really good way to measure—I mean you can have your feel good moments, and I know the students are learning; I know from a whole variety of ways that what I am doing is effective—more effective some days than others—but you don't have anything like, "I made that or I built that or whatever."

Craft leads to tangible products that can be held in your hands. You can carry them around with you; you can send them to friends; you can touch them. Writing, research, teaching, and meetings do not lend themselves to the creation of concrete objects in the same way. Being able to create material things, for some of the Beavers, complements the abstract work they do as academics. The *space* created through crafting allows The Crafty Beavers to balance other practices that are part of the *place* of their work.

*"I Made That, and It Looks Right" and "It's about Something That You Can Control"*

Crafting with The Crafty Beavers also gives members of the group confidence in ways that their academic work does not. As mentioned earlier, while in graduate school students occupy multiple roles with varying amounts of expertise and responsibility but are still in training. Graduate students often question if they are doing their jobs in the right ways, if they know what they're doing. That is, graduate school often makes people question their abilities. Alternatively, for most of The Crafty Beavers craft acts as a confidence builder. Violet explains:

When you're working on something like a dissertation, that's so open-ended and



so anxiety producing, you go to something that's—like that cross-stitch sampler I made—it's got boundaries, it's got like “use this color now, sew this here.” It's very comforting to me to just make something according to a set of instructions and be like, “I made that, and it looks right.” Especially since with my writing that never seems to happen, you know?

Since craft is a practice that most of The Crafty Beavers have been familiar with for a long time, The Crafty Beavers know the rules of the *place* of craft, while they don't always know the rules of the *place* of graduate school. Violet can easily follow a cross-stitch pattern, but she second-guesses herself when it comes to what to put in her dissertation.

In other words, patterns are comforting to Violet because she knows how to follow them. When I asked her to tell me more about why patterns were comforting, she said:

I think that, for me, it's about something that you can control or something that's soothing to your mind. That's the best way I can explain it. It's something that you don't have to put a lot of—you put mental energy into it. . . . It's very being in that moment and just focusing on that thing and not really having to think about a lot of different things at that time. And, especially, I think grad school does this to you—I come home, and I can't sit completely still. I have to be doing something. Crocheting is really good. You don't have to think about it; you don't have to do very much. It's something that just sits on your lap and you can do other things while you're doing it. It's really good for transatlantic flights.

Craft, then, is a practice that makes space that allows Violet to mediate her daily transition between the place of work and the place of home. It's something that she has control over,

something that gives her confidence, and something that she finds relaxing.

In this section, I've written about how The Crafty Beavers use the space of the group to manage anxieties and realities around graduate school without explicitly practicing academic skills or creating academic artifacts as they would in graduate writing groups. In the next section, I show how the group also uses practices and identities associated with *home* within the group to manage academic identities and places.

### *Bringing Home to Work, Bringing Work to Home*

Most members of The Crafty Beavers grew up in crafty and artistic households. We were encouraged to draw and paint and taught to crochet, knit, and sew. Craft was an ordinary part of our lives, an everyday practice of their households. Ana's experiences are similar to other members of the group. She says,

I've been doing artsy projects or art or crafts or whatever overlapping since I was little. So, I've always had like 5-subject notebooks, fat ones, and I would just like draw a picture and turn the page, draw a picture and just fill them up. So, I was always doing that. And, I would give myself, not homework, but I needed to do the work, but I wanted to do it. I would sit in front of the TV and be like, "Oh, I'm going to do my work." You know? It was this little job that I was doing. I had this little pink table, like a craft table with pink chairs and everything. I would sit there and do art.

For Ana and other Beavers, art and craft have always been part of their everyday lives. It's something they've always done. Like school itself, craft is something the Beavers have grown up doing; they've gained crafting skills over the years without much critical reflection about those

skills.

However, graduate students often give up hobbies to focus more on school. When graduate students struggle in their academic roles, the lack of other skills and activities is frustrating. For most graduate students, school has always been an ally, something they've been good at doing, dropping other activities from their lives without thinking about it in favor of school-related activities. When graduate students struggle with their studies, they are suddenly being challenged in ways that are unfamiliar. Often, they've spent most of their lives putting energy into school and do not know how to handle the challenges school now poses. Ana describes the danger of only focusing on school:

You work really hard at school; school is what I'm good at, you know? And then you get to a point where you're not good at it. And then, if you put all your eggs in that basket you feel kind of worthless when you don't have anything else. So, if I would have kept dabbling [at art], I might have felt better. If I had other little places to go, but I didn't. So, it was kind of crazy reckoning.

She dealt with this "crazy reckoning" by returning to art and craft, hobbies she'd abandoned early in her graduate career. She explains,

When I was working on all of that [comprehensive exams], I think that was around when I did start turning back to making art, like I started making those little idols for myself to have reminders of tough women that weren't appreciated or had to do a lot of crappy stuff, but that I thought were badass. And, I wanted them surrounding me, so I made Frida Kahlo first and then Buffy. . . I just started making all of these different ladies to have around me, and they're kind of tongue and cheek. I mean, they're not saints or anything, but I was depicting them that

way. But, they kind of are to me.

She says that returning to art was a way of “reviving myself from being really downtrodden by the whole academic system and feeling like I just couldn’t do anything. Like, I couldn’t do the one thing that I knew how to do, which was school.” This making, she says, “started helping me recognize that if it [school] were easier I wouldn’t be getting much from it.” The practice of craft helped Ana manage her academic identity by connecting it to her home identity. She realized that she didn’t have to “put all her eggs in one basket” and has made *space* through craft alongside the *place* of school.

Like Ana, Andrea’s family history with craft has had an influence on her approach to her professional life, her identity as a graduate student. She told me a story about her grandmother Najiba, who watched Andrea and her siblings during the summer and before and after school while Andrea’s parents were working. Najiba’s craft was about keeping busy. Andrea relates,

She taught me how to knit a row or whatever you would call it. But, she didn’t teach me how to *make* anything. She would teach me how to make a row, and then she would undo it. And then she would do it again. So, she’d show me how to do it again. I would watch her do this sometimes, too, after the dinner was cooked or the house was cleaned. After everything was done—my grandfather had his food, everything was done. Then she’d pick up the knitting. But, I never saw her make anything, you know? There wasn’t a product. It was just the practice of knitting. And that’s what I remember. That’s my crafting moment that I remember is her teaching me how to knit, but it was just to keep busy, and that was one of the things she used to always tell us, “Just keep busy.”

Andrea sees this value of keeping busy as connected not just to the craft practices of her

grandmother but also to the work practices of her family. She says, “What does it mean for my grandmother who worked these crappy jobs her whole life and raised these kids? We all lived really close to her and stuff like that, and she’s just telling us to keep busy. But, they kept busy. That’s the thing. Like I said, my mom and dad worked a lot, my grandparents worked a lot, everybody worked.” This value of keeping busy, then, is not something that can be separated out between home and work. It’s a value Najiba and Andrea take with them wherever they go. The *place* of home, then, can be transferred into the *place* of work through practice.

The knowledge, skills, and ways of being we practice follow us from space to space, from place to place. We bring the practices that make our spaces and places with us everywhere. Linguist Ron Scollon states that “the practice of handing an object to another person may be linked to practices which constitute the action of purchasing in a coffee shop, it may be linked to practices which constitute the action of giving a gift to a friend on arriving at a birthday party, or even handing a bit of change to a panhandler on the street” (*Mediated Discourse* 5). In response to this idea, Kevin Roozen writes, “the particular act of handing we witness in the present is in part the product of a historical and unique network of handings stretching across a range of interactions and for back into the history of the person” (11). Everyday practices like handing an object to someone are relevant in myriad moments in our lives. Our abilities and skills build on one another, and we take them from place to place, from home to work, from the mall to the office, from the car to the doctor’s office.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

The Crafty Beavers choose to craft together explicitly because it is an activity that is not explicitly associated with their academic identities. Not only are groups like The Crafty Beavers,

ostensibly, not academic groups, they also explicitly rely on knowledge and ways of knowing that come from non-academic environments to help them make space in and alongside an academic place. The stories The Crafty Beavers share about the dangers of “putting all your eggs in one basket” (Ana) and the need to “keep busy” (Andrea) and “perform differently” (Violet) give us insight into the relationships among the spaces and places and the rhetorical practices that make, maintain, and manipulate them. They are using something from their lives outside of academia, something they already know, to help them acclimate to academic life and hone their academic and disciplinary identities. They are feeling like academics not just at work but at home because they can manage their anxieties by gathering and talking with their peers and also crafting like they have with their families and friends outside of school. They can invite friends from non-academic settings to craft with them, bridging these worlds in ways that more formal support structures, like graduate writing groups, and meetings with committee members and other academic mentors cannot.

These are stories of practice about space and place and the everyday. Our daily lives as teachers, scholars, and ordinary people are affected by the spaces/places we work in. They are also affected by the spaces/places we come from, live in, and make. The spaces/places that make up our everyday lives are guided and controlled by the practices within them. These practices are limited by rules as well as by physical boundaries. In many circumstances, workers in the academy must often make spaces for themselves, spaces alongside places of power. As de Certeau would say, “People have to make do with what they have” (18). We never completely leave any space or place we’ve inhabited. We bring the experiences of these locations with us through memory and through practice. Mundane, everyday practices like getting together with

friends, knitting, talking, and sharing ideas make a world of difference in how we develop relationships, negotiate identities, and adapt to and change spaces and places.

In this chapter, I have highlighted the ways in which The Crafty Beavers make spaces through gathering and crafting that exist *alongside and outside* the places of their graduate work. In the next chapter, I go into more detail about how The Crafty Beavers make *place* as well as space. Much like an individual can be a scholar, teacher, daughter, sister, and administrator all at the same time, objects like space and place *also* perform in multiple ways *at the same time*.

What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.

—Michel de Certeau



## CHAPTER 3

### *The Crafty Beavers Make and Maintain Place: Stabilizing Meaning and Identity*

The idea of “place” evokes a sense of connection and belonging, of a location that is defined and special, marked by some particular feature, memory, and/or purpose. For The Crafty Beavers, the group is a place of belonging that is defined by talking about personal concerns with friends, making things with their hands (and yarn, glitter, scrapbook paper, felt, googly eyes), carrying forward family and cultural traditions, and subverting normative gender roles through the way they practice craft. It’s easy to think of places as welcoming, but places also have the power to reject. For members of The Crafty Beavers, the place of graduate school has been isolating and difficult to negotiate. The space of The Crafty Beavers has helped members negotiate the *place* of graduate school, but increasingly The Crafty Beavers is taking on *place*-like characteristics, which makes some members feel isolated or “out of place” even within the group.

An impetus for starting The Crafty Beavers was a desire to ameliorate the difficulties Andrea and Ana were having in graduate school.<sup>14</sup> Andrea was having “a hard time forming relationships” in graduate school, and Ana questioned her ability to complete her degree, despite defining herself all her life as someone who was good at school: “Like, I couldn’t do the one thing that I knew how to do, which was school. And, it felt, like I said before, if that’s the one thing you’re good at, and it turns out that you’re not, then you’re nothing. You don’t have any other identity, and that felt pretty terrible.” These difficulties stemmed from not knowing their roles—their “place”—within graduate school. They were still learning the rules. Places, you see,

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<sup>14</sup> For more information, please refer to Chapter 2 (10-12).

are all about rules. Places are managed through orders and borders, through both physical boundaries and limits on behavior.

In the last chapter, I demonstrated how The Crafty Beavers make a *space* alongside but outside the place of graduate school through their gathering, crafting, and talking. The space created by group allows them to modify the place of graduate school, to make it something more palatable, more manageable. Yet, The Crafty Beavers, which has been operating as a *space*, also can and does operate as a *place*. The Crafty Beavers, like all places, has boundaries, norms and rules that limit its practice and membership. Space and place are performed in multiple ways simultaneously. So, while The Crafty Beavers is still a space that provides members with access to practices that make managing the roles and rigors of graduate school easier, it is also a place with limiting structures that, to some degree, replicate the exclusive and unwelcoming atmosphere of graduate school the space was created to undermine.

In this chapter, I want to explore the ways that The Crafty Beavers are making a *place* (as well as a space) through their gathering, talking, and crafting. I argue that The Crafty Beavers performs as a space and a place at the same time. First, I discuss space and place as different perspectives that can be compared to stories and maps. Next, I show how the Beavers are motivated to *belong* to the space/place because of identity positions the group offers them, seeking acceptance and recognition. Then, I will show how, despite The Crafty Beavers' goals of inclusiveness, all *places*, even the place of The Crafty Beavers, create boundaries that bar entrance to particular people and/or practices. The Beavers, in making a place, create borders and orders that replicate, reject, or reclaim other places in their lives.

*Perspectives of Space and Place: Stories and Maps*

Despite place's negative feature of limited membership, it plays an important factor in identity creation and maintenance as well as stabilizing social norms. Place acts as an anchor. For instance, consider the kinds of questions you are asked by a new acquaintance: Where are you from? What do you do? Where do you work? Do you have any siblings? The answers to these questions establishes—for both asker and responder—a sense of who you are based on the kind of places you inhabit and have inhabited. The places that we're from, the places we go, the places we want to be part of shape us, our senses of self, and our relationships with others. Our identities and social order depend on place, on a stable structure and framework to guide our practices.

In distinguishing the differences between place and space, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes, "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (3). We need both. De Certeau writes that "space is a practiced place" (117). He means that through *practice* space is given shape. In her 2012 CCC Chair's Address, Malea Powell embraces this definition of space, saying:

By 'space,' I mean a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversation with the present and where—through those practices of making—a future can be imagined. Spaces, then, are made recursively through specific, material practices rooted in specific land bases, through the cultural practices linked to that place, and through the accompanying theoretical practices that arise from that place—like imagining community 'away' from but related to that space. (388)

Space is possibility. Space is a set of relationships. Space is ongoing.

Place, unlike space, is defined primarily by its stability, an imposed stability. While space is fluid and in motion, place is understood to be fixed with meaning. Of place, de Certeau writes,

A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (117)

In places, our roles and relationships are well defined. We have a proper place within each place we occupy, be it work, home, or elsewhere. A place, then, is a controlled entity, managed and demarcated not only with physical boundaries but with rules that guide and limit action.

De Certeau illustrates the differences between place and space through the examples of maps and stories. For de Certeau, the creation of maps is in some ways a travel story: “stories of journeys and actions are marked out by the ‘citation’ of the places that result from them or authorize them” (120). De Certeau laments that the map has

slowly disengaged itself from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility. The first medieval maps included only the rectilinear marking out of itineraries (performative indications chiefly concerning pilgrimages), along with the stops one was to make (cities which one was to pass through, spend the night in, pray at, etc.) and distances calculated in hours or in days, that is, in terms of the time it would take to cover them on foot. Each of these maps is a memorandum prescribing actions. The tour to be made is predominant in them.<sup>15</sup> (120)

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<sup>15</sup> De Certeau links this shift to the development of scientific discourse from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

That is, while the map was once a log of a journey, it is now reduced to *only* representing geographic space. The map “colonizes space; it eliminates little by little the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce it” (121). Maps, based on stories, now erase the stories that construct them and exist as “a isolated system of geographical places.” De Certeau writes, “Maps, constituted as proper places in which to *exhibit the products* of knowledge, form tables of *legible* results. Stories about space exhibit on the contrary the operations that allow it, within a constraining and non-‘proper’ place, to mingle its elements anyway” (emphasis in the original).

In other words, space and place are names for different ways of seeing relationships associated with physical, social, and cultural sites. Place and maps, then, focus on legible artifacts of the past, on *questions of what*, while spaces and stories emphasize practice, process, fluid time, on *questions of how*. Both space and place are defined through practice, but places put firm boundaries around those practices, valuing the artifacts they produce, seeing only their traces. Like maps, we accept the rules of places as “how things are,” as givens, without necessarily knowing much about the histories, journeys, and stories that created and sustain that place. We fall in line. The Crafty Beavers, like most communities, acts as both a space and a place.

### *Place-Making for Acceptance and Recognition*

Not only are places about rules, controlled by them, defined by them. The places we’re part of, the places we come from, the places we occupy give or bar access to *other* places we might want to go. Cultural geographer J. Nicholas Entrikin explains that “Place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience. As agents in the world we are always ‘in place,’ much as we are always ‘in culture.’ For this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in

the construction of our individual and collective identities” (1). The places we inhabit define who we are. Within The Crafty Beavers, members might ask each other: Are you a graduate student? Do you study English literature, Rhetoric, American Studies, or Philosophy? Do you knit or crochet? Did you grow up crafting, or is it a new hobby for you? The answers to these questions—and others like them—say something about our practices and our identities, but they also say something about our places. We know what is on the map. We can see it, and it is recognized as valuable. We all want to be on the map, so to speak. We all need places to belong. One way that The Crafty Beavers operates as a place is by providing members of the group with *recognition* for identity positions they would like to claim. Stories from Katie and Julia illustrate this idea.

*“Because I Want to See Myself in a Certain Way”*

For at least some of the Beavers, the practice of craft, of making things is tied to receiving recognition from others. Katie says that she wants to be seen as “the kind of person that can create all these things that are beautiful. And, it’s awesome.” If a Crafty Beaver is known by her friends as someone who is crafty, she might also be seen as creative, talented, accomplished, and resourceful. We’re crafting blankets, scarves, mittens, hats, and home décor, and we’re also crafting our own identities. Katie explains. “There’s the difference between doing that [creating beautiful things] because that’s the way you like to be and doing it so that other people will see it and be jealous. Because . . . because I want to see myself in a certain way. Oh. My. God.” During our interview, she realizes that when she makes things, she’s doing it for recognition, for validation. She reflects, “Because no one else cares. No one else gives a *shit*. But, I am trying to convince myself that I am a certain way. Which is valuable. I want you to see me

in certain way, so that you will reaffirm that I am that way, so that I will believe you. That's it. That's why I do the things I do. That's why . . . Oh God."

For Katie, crafting is all about making something for other people who will, as a result, see her a certain way. She shares a story about a friend who makes valentines for all his friends and co-workers,

He would make cards and send cards to everyone and always keep in touch. And, that kind of person who you would expect these super-cute handmade cards from a couple times of years was the kind of person I wanted to be—the kind of person that gives the perfect gift, the kind of person who has the perfect presentation for whatever they're doing. You know?

Katie has "a dream of having a Thanksgiving of where everyone looks perfect and the table looks perfect." The effect would be "just adorable and the kind of thing where you want to take a picture and just remember forever that you've made something great and shared it with people, and *they appreciated it and appreciated you*. Yeah." For Katie, acceptance and validation are central motivations for crafting, which she almost always connects to giving. The Crafty Beavers helps her with this desire for appreciation and acceptance by gladly accepting the cheesecake, pumpkin bread, and other culinary treats she shares with the group thus reaffirming that she is the kind of person she hopes she is.

*“It’s A Lot About Me”*

Another Crafty Beaver, Julia, also wants recognition for her crafting. She says, “It’s a lot about me. It’s a hard thing to admit, but I would like to be recognized for my hard work and talent.” She elaborates this idea with a story:

I really like to make presents. Like, giving the stuff I make away gives me a lot of joy. So, I was talking about my friend who is a massive knitter. She doesn’t give hand knits to anybody that isn’t a knitter or just a person who wouldn’t appreciate it. It’s expensive. She uses super-awesome yarn, and she makes really terrific things that would go for hundreds and hundreds of dollars. I’ve gotten hand-knits from her, but I know she won’t make anything for her sister-in-laws because they’d be like, “Oh, great, thanks.” And, then you’d never see them or their kids wear it.

Julia is frustrated when the time-consuming, expensive gifts she makes for friends and family are not valued in the way that she sees fit. Handcrafted gifts shouldn’t be seen as cheap or tacky. Julie gives an example, “I used an Alpaca yarn from Peru that was hand dyed. You want to let them know that this yarn is super-special and this pattern was selected for them.” Something that Julia gets from The Crafty Beavers is recognition that the things she makes are special. When she makes a pair of mittens, the response from The Crafty Beavers isn’t, “Oh, you made some mittens. Great.” Instead, it’s more like, “Oh *wow*. You *made* these?”

The recognition Julia seeks seems different from the recognition Katie desires. Katie wants to see herself in a particular way and understands this identity as something defined by others for her. In other words, “What’s important to others should be important to me.” Julia also



wants her identity position validated, but she wants others to show that they value what she values. In other words, “What’s important to me should be important to others.” Both Katie and Julia get what they’re looking for from The Crafty Beavers who provide them with recognition and acceptance. As a *space*, The Crafty Beavers gives members the freedom to do any craft they would like, but as a *place*—somewhere with clear boundaries and rules—The Crafty Beavers can offer *recognition* of particular identity positions that it cannot as a space. As a *place*, The Crafty Beavers aligns itself with particular values and practices, recognizing some ways of crafting and overlooking others. Katie and Julia have been put on the map through their practices within the *place* of The Crafty Beavers.

#### *Crafts that Count: Practices and Identities Supported by The Crafty Beavers*

Place is not unlike genre. In fact, genres are places, textual places with boundaries and rules about the content, arrangement, and style. Anis Bawarshi compares place to genre in “The Ecology of Genre.” He argues that genres “are the sites in which communicants rhetorically reproduce the very environments to which they in turn respond—the habits and habitats for acting in language. This is why I argue that genres are rhetorical ecosystems that allow communicants to enact and reproduce various environments, social practices, relations, and identities” (71). In other words, genres are places, and all places are made and remade through practice. More importantly, genres—or certain kinds of places—give us expectations for other places of the same sort—a sense of what belongs or is in its “proper” place. In his essay, Bawarshi uses an example of a doctor’s office to explain how genre expectations are carried from one doctor’s office to another. The same is true for other kinds of places, broadly conceived, whether those places are doctors’ offices, dissertations, neighborhoods, YouTube

videos, writing classes, crafting groups, or—as in de Certeau’s example—maps. Genre or *place* expectations and assumptions, as well as our previous experiences with similar places, frame our understandings of how to *act* within particular places, of what’s *allowed* in these places.

The group cuts across and makes a *space* for a wide range of crafts, yet the pressure of a more typical craft group *place* is still present. The idea of what a crafting group is or should be, the place or genre of crafting groups, has a history that imposes itself onto The Crafty Beavers. Several members of the group agree that The Crafty Beavers embraces a broad definition of craft and note that their own definitions of craft are open, including Paint By Number kits and coloring books. Julia, who has been affiliated with several crafting groups and communities praises the inclusiveness of The Crafty Beavers:

I like that it’s not so one-craft specific, like spinning guild or a knitting club. And, I really like that everybody is interested in what everybody else is doing, that they’re not like, “Oh. She’s crocheting with *acrylic* yarn.” It does not feel like a judgmental atmosphere; it feels very supportive and warm.

Yet, other members raise concerns about how the group both reinforces traditional notions of craft and rejects traditional craft and gendered practices. They feel that they aren’t actually crafters or that they are being pressured to craft (or not craft) in particular ways. These contradictions seem related to confusion around what kind of place a crafting group should be. The idea of a typical “crafting group” is imposing itself onto the place of The Crafty Beavers. Stories from Andrea, Ana, and ES show the ways they feel the group has enforced and rejected particular identity performances and place-identities of The Crafty Beavers as a craft group and female space/place. Many members feel left out because they do not know how to crochet or knit or because these more typical crafting skills are not ones they prefer.

*“How I Actually Practice Making”*

While explaining her definition of craft, Andrea told me that the Beavers didn’t value her definition. She said, “I can think of tons of times in which my own—how can I explain this? I can think of lots of ways where my family taught me how to make things, like rolling dolmas, for example. I think of that as crafting, so I think of it as making. It’s something I tried to bring into the Beavers, but they were resistant to it.” She doesn’t say *how* the Beavers rejected rolling dolmas as craft, but it was made clear to her that it was not an appropriate craft.

To stay active in the group, Andrea learned to crochet. She says, “I just learned to crochet, so that I could participate with the Beavers. I learned a little bit before, but it was something I learned, so I could do it with them. But, how I actually practice making is through cooking things or forming relationships or keeping house. That’s like what, that’s how I understand my identity.” Although group members never said that cooking or rolling dolmas, specifically, was not welcome in the group, Andrea received cues that this was not an acceptable activity within the group.

The resistance Andrea felt might also be related to white, mainstream, westernized notions of domestic activity. If Andrea were to bring cupcakes, muffins, or scones in to The Crafty Beavers that would likely be more acceptable (I’ve seen many people do this during our gatherings). Something about dolmas and other Chaldean or Native foods and traditions embraced by Andrea might be part of the issue here. The unfamiliarity of members with these items might be part of the reason Andrea feels that they are rejected, but there is no explicit evidence of this mentality. In other words, the rejection has less to do with the fact that Andrea is crafting food than the fact that the food she crafts is unfamiliar to other members of The Crafty

Beavers.

*“Still, I Wish I Knew How to Crochet Because Everyone Knows How”*

Andrea is not alone in her sentiment about the prevalence and privilege of knitting and crochet. Ana doesn't feel that she has to do more mainstream crafting now, but at first she “resisted doing crafting in a group because I didn't know what to do.” She soon found that she “could do whatever I was doing and it was still in the group, it was okay.” She felt more out of place in not knowing how to quilt, crochet, or knit when The Crafty Beavers would try to create something collectively, such as a blanket or quilt for charity. Often each member of The Crafty Beavers would make a square for the collective project, but Ana explains “mine were never the same as everybody's, so that would be hard for me sometimes” noting that once she contributed a paper square to a fabric quilt. In general, these projects made her feel “like I had nothing to contribute when everybody was crocheting [squares]. I don't know how.” Ultimately, she says, “Still, I wish I knew how to crochet because everyone knows how.” There is something about traditional crafts, like crocheting, that mark someone clearly as crafty. Ana and Andrea have both felt left out because they couldn't crochet or preferred another craft, even though no one explicitly rejected their chosen crafts. There's a power to conform to the proper roles of the craft group, and even though The Crafty Beavers isn't a typical craft group it still pulls forward the expectations and norms that come along with a more typical craft group.

*“It's Like Boys and Girls”*

The Crafty Beavers are a group of women, most of whom are in graduate school and all of whom identify as feminists. It might seem odd that they choose to craft together, an activity

highly associated with traditional feminine roles that maintain gender norms. The Crafty Beavers definitely see the space/place as gendered. Some call it female, some call it feminine, and others call it feminist. There are clashing views about just how The Crafty Beavers, as a group, contribute to making, maintaining, and/or manipulating notions of traditional craft and the identity markers that come with it.

The feminine undertones of the group can make some members uncomfortable. ES shares that her first experience with The Crafty Beavers was organized along stereotypically gendered activities. She says, “I didn’t understand it. It just seemed like a bunch of people hanging out, and the men doing stereotypically masculine things—watching sports and yelling—and the women doing stereotypically feminine things—like crocheting. And, I was like, ‘This is kind of the worst, most offensive thing I’ve ever been too.’” She relates that since then not all the meetings have seemed so overwhelmingly gendered, but that when men are present—usually partners of the regular members of The Crafty Beavers—“they have gone and done their own thing that wasn’t crafting. Specifically, the women will be crafting in the living room, and the men will be playing table-top games—like really nerdy and therefore masculine games—in another room, and there isn’t even a dialogue between the groups.”

ES goes on to reflect that this gender divide makes her uncomfortable because she identifies as genderqueer. She says that she feels awkward,

Not only because I felt that I didn’t fit in with the group that I was in genderwise but because I would much rather be playing nerdy table-top games, especially when the crafting part isn’t what draws me there. But, then if I go and switch to the group at the table, then I don’t get the safe space and the talking to people about important things because that’s not what they’re doing over there.

The men group with other men, and the women group with other women, and both parties interact through activities that are highly gendered indicating that the *place* of gender has a significant role in the practices of The Crafty Beavers. ES says that she doesn't blame other group members for feeling out of place, "No one has ever said, 'You can't go over there.' No one has ever been like, 'No, you're a woman. You belong here.' No one has ever, in any way, criticized my lack of crafting or my different take on crafting. Everyone has been really great about everything, you know? So, this is all, I know, all my own stuff that I bring." While her own identity certainly has an impact on her discomfort in the space, the practice of gathering to craft and talk appears to be seen as a female activity, one that men feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in and one that genderqueer members like ES are conflicted over. ES notes, "You know what, even when there wasn't a huge gender divide, it was just because there weren't any men there."

Perhaps unintentionally The Crafty Beavers has marked itself and been marked by others not only as a female space that unwittingly excludes men and more masculine practices; everyone knows their place on the map, and she stays there. The place of a craft group—socially, culturally—has impressed itself upon The Crafty Beavers, but traditional crafting and other stereotypically gendered activities associated with The Crafty Beavers have not been intentionally reinforced by the group, and the tensions created by the implicit push to craft a certain way or perform gender through a particular activity have not been dealt with by the group in the open. Instead, members of The Crafty Beavers often ascribe the concerns they have with

pressures to craft in particular ways to their own personal baggage, as with ES, or have left the group, as with Andrea.<sup>16</sup>

### *Drawing Boundaries by Limiting Membership*

While social and cultural histories of craft and gender impose particular understandings and pressures on The Crafty Beavers in terms of what kind of craft “counts” and how feminine the group is, other tensions have formed as a result of expectations based on other everyday practices of the group, less associated with tradition and gender. The Crafty Beavers have found themselves in conflict over practices that are embraced by some and rejected by others. Violet’s and Ana’s stories illustrate these issues about the boundaries—and identities—of the group.

#### *“We Were All Right Next to Each Other, But We Had Nothing to Talk About”*

In a group interview with Violet, Ana, and ES, it became clear that there was a difference of opinion over how membership in The Crafty Beavers works. Violet says, “When I’ve hosted, I’ve invited a lot of different people that people [the usual Beavers] didn’t necessarily know, and that didn’t always go well. People would be like, ‘Let’s just talk, the four of us.’ And, I’d be like, ‘No, I’m inviting my friend who’s married with two kids, and my friend who lives across town is going to come.’” Violet wanted to invite people from other parts of her life, but many other Beavers wanted to keep the gathering small and intimate, since they’d grown closer and could

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<sup>16</sup> I’d like to mention that none of these concerns came up during any of the meetings of The Crafty Beavers that I have attended in the past three years. It is unclear to me if these issues have been discussed by the group during meetings. Some of these tensions (e.g. real craft, gender issues) arose in conversation during the group interview I conducted in October of 2011. At that time, The Crafty Beavers were very supportive of one another.

confide in each other. Ana shares that sometimes it was especially weird because, aside from the fact that they felt uncomfortable talking about important and sensitive topics that they could usually converse about during meetings of The Crafty Beavers, sometimes the newcomer didn't even craft:

I remember people would be there who weren't crafting, and it'd be really weird. Like, "We're just going to sit here." And the rest of us are all doing something, but they're not. It became this huge detractor. Or, like all of these people watching this sporting event. None of us are interacting. We were all right next to each other, but we had nothing to talk about.

Violet explains, though, that she has felt alienated during more typical meetings, saying, "I felt the same way when we watched *Buff*y. I'd be like, 'Everyone's watching this show that I really just don't give a shit about.' And, then I'd feel like I was on this weird side-track." While actually crafting isn't always the main purpose of The Crafty Beavers, it is seen as odd when individuals come to meeting without a craft. It is an explicitly supported *practice* within the group—the word "crafty" is right in the name. However, watching *Buff*y has become an implicitly supported practice within the group, while watching sports has not. The space is closing into a place. A map is being drawn that includes craft and *Buff*y but does not make space for sporting events.

### *"That's How It Gets Really Big"*

Not realizing that talking intimately was one of the main functions of the group, I committed a bit of a *faux pas* by inviting the entire Crafty Beavers Facebook group to participate in my research. The Crafty Beavers are primarily a face-to-face group that meets around once a



month, but they also maintain a digital space on Facebook. The Facebook group boasts forty-six members. Ana explains that the Facebook group was intended as a “space for sharing ideas. Rachel kept finding things she wanted to share, but there wasn’t a group, so I made a group, so that there was place to share ideas and crafting stuff. But, then it also opened it up to being a place where you could call a meeting, and that’s how it gets really big.” The “bigness” of the group becomes a problem, because one of the main activities of the group is to talk about serious and personal issues. The core members of The Crafty Beavers have become a close-knit group, making it easier for them to share with each other. Ana shares, “So, it would be okay to talk about those things sometimes, and that’s why I think we get scared sometimes inviting new people because we get to a point where it’s okay to talk about that, and then you don’t know this new person at all, so you’re just like, ‘I’m just going to crochet<sup>17</sup> in silence.’” The Crafty Beavers want to be inclusive, especially because many of them had often felt excluded within other parts of their lives (e.g. graduate school). Yet, the group wants to be close-knit and worries about including new people. The Facebook group allows The Crafty Beavers to be inclusive and exclusive at the same time. The message seems to be “feel free to join our online space, but we’re not sure if we want you at our meetings.” Places have to have boundaries to have identities, and now that the space/place of The Crafty Beavers is taking shape limiting practice and membership helps maintain that shape.

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<sup>17</sup> I’d like to point out, here, that Ana uses “crochet” as an example of how newcomers to the group would silence the core members of the group into focusing on their crafting activity. As discussed earlier, Ana does not crochet, yet she uses this particular form of craft to make her point clear to me.

*“And, There’s Nothing I Can Say.”*

As established earlier, one of the most important practices of The Crafty Beavers as a group is talking about problems and concerns from the past. Another important talking point for the Beavers is discussing difficulties with depression and anxiety, sometimes attributed to graduate school. Past, present, or both, talking through the “bad stuff” is a significant part of meeting with the Beavers. While this practice is helpful to many members, some members feel pushed out by this kind of talk. Violet mentions,

I never really felt like I was, that I had anything to contribute, and it was sort of like we all share X, Y, or Z background or problem, and we all have experiences with this, and we’re going to talk about them, and it’s going to be this thing. And, there’s nothing I can say. And, so, I would just either sit there and just listen and feel like sort of a creep for listening and be like, “I’m just listening to your problems; don’t mind me. I’m not going to contribute.” Or, like, you can’t be like, “Oh, yeah, I know what you’re talking about when I had to, you know, eat an apple every day, that was terrible . . .” You know?

Violet is happy that her friends are able to share experiences and stories that are important for them to share, but it often makes her feel like an outsider or a voyeur. Although the group, on the surface, appears to be a crafting group, it has also become a support group, a group where close friends talk about serious issues and concerns of a personal nature. This intent might not have been explicit to all members, and now Violet who wants to craft and spend time with her crafty friends sees the place as one that sometimes excludes crafters in favor of talking about personal subject matter within a small, intimate group. The place is solidifying around a *practice* other

than craft.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

The Crafty Beavers acts as both a space and a place. In the last chapter, I wrote about how the group is a space in that it allows The Crafty Beavers to manipulate or change the place of graduate school, where rigid rules and structures make them feel out of place and alone. Within the *space* of the group, they can tell a story that helps them manage their existence in the *place* of graduate school; they can make something with their hands, they can have somewhere else to go. Yet, as time goes on The Crafty Beavers operates more and more as a *place* of its own with boundaries that limit membership and practice much in the same way graduate school (and all other places) does.

As Nedra Reynolds points out, “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*” (2). These practices *create* boundaries. In order for the group to continue existing, the members have to hold onto the problems that help keep them together (such as difficulties within their personal lives and with graduate school). As Althusser makes clear, the “ultimate condition of production is the reproduction of the conditions of production” (127); for The Crafty Beavers to remain a place, it has to maintain the structures that allow it to function.

In order to maintain a place where the right crafts are crafted, where the right conversations are discussed, and where the right histories are remembered, the Beavers need to make an order. In *Angel’s Town*, Ralph Cintron writes, “I assume that there is always a need to

make an order, and yet the process entails ordering something out” (x). The Beavers have not necessarily created an order that excludes on purpose, but they have made rules, reinforced particular practices, and limited access to the group in ways that resulted in exclusion.

The members of The Crafty Beavers, like me, see the ways that the group operates as both a space and a place. The members’ perspectives of the group as a storied space *or* as a mapped place fluctuate because the group is both. ES marks the group as a *space*—as *practiced place*—noting,

I think of Crafty Beavers as a queer group . . . like in a queer theory kind of way, where everybody expects something different out of it, brings something different to it, hosts it in different ways, you know? Every time it gets together, it’s gonna be different because there’s gonna be different people there doing different things in a different space. People have different expectations; people have different motivations. It’s super queer.

To ES, the group is a *space* that practices *place*; each time the group meets the rules are a little different, depending on who is hosting and what the group members need from the group at that time. However, some of these rules have begun to stabilize across meetings, which has made the space/place more consistently place-like.

The *place* of the group helps members stabilize their identities. Violet values this function of the group since, at least for her, graduate school can be “a time when you’re trying to figure out your own identity.” She goes on to talk about how her committee sends the message “that you don’t know enough, and you need to go and learn more and that you need to be able to talk about things, and you need to keep learning and learning about all these things in your field and that you never know enough.” Yet as a teacher in the classroom “you’re supposed to be this

person who knows everything.” Having a space/place like The Crafty Beavers helps her “figure out how you’re trying to fit into all these roles.” To do this, sometimes The Crafty Beavers is a space, telling stories that cut across experiences, while other times The Crafty Beavers is a place, drawing a map that stabilizes and solidifies those experiences into boundaries and artifacts.

In this chapter, I have explored how the group acts as a place. Within the *place* of the group, members can control what identities they perform through practices that are implicitly or explicitly validated within the map they have begun to draw. In the next chapter, I draw together the main ideas from Chapters 2 and 3 by relating some of my own stories of practice around space, place, and practice. I tie together experiences of The Crafty Beavers, experiences of school and experiences of home in a collage essay to show the ways in which practice mobilizes space and place and how each space and place performs in multiple ways simultaneously.

Stories, like good theories, make connections that may not at first glance seem straightforward.  
—Julie Cruikshank

In smaller, more familiar things memory weaves her strongest enchantments, holding us at her mercy with some trifle, some echo, a tone of voice, a scent of tar and seaweed on the quay . . . This surely is the meaning of home—a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it.

—Freya Stark

## CHAPTER 4

### *Patterns of Home: Crafting a Life*

Crafting makes me think of Gramma and of long summer days spent with her and Grampa in their home in Portland, Oregon—and in their garden, and walking to the local grocery store, and barbequing steaks on the patio in the evening, and sitting in the driveway eating ice cream as the hot days cooled. I think, too, of Dad taking us ice skating at the nearby Clackamas Town Center and of Mom and Gramma’s highly competitive games of pinochle and cribbage. My grandparents are gone now, and their familiar and welcoming home has been sold to a stranger. I’ll never again feel the shag orange carpet of the living room beneath my feet, but I have my Grampa’s potato soup recipe and my Gramma’s slipper pattern. Someday I’ll grow tomatoes in my own garden. Through *practice*, I can re-make this place from my past. Crafting with The Crafty Beavers, for me, is every bit as much about connecting back to this life—maintaining identities and remaking places I *once* belonged—as it is about being recognized within newer communities and crafting other identities for myself.

Something that sometimes feels at the back of this project (but ought to be at the foreground) is the belief, the understanding that the everyday, the momentary, the fleeting pieces of our lives are absolutely essential to understanding Rhetoric, to all meaning making systems. I’ve been told and overheard convictions that everyday lived experience is somehow less than carefully coded data, than lab experiences, research interviews, and classroom lectures. Personal experience has been indicated as a “starting point” or “impetus” for *actual* research and study. The dividing line is a false one. These practices—all of them, be they classified as personal or professional, as rigorous or anecdotal—make meaning. Stories of practice are essential to

answering questions like: Why do people engage in particular spaces and places in particular ways? How do they understand their relationships to these spaces and places?

I've been calling attention to the ways that the practices of The Crafty Beavers make, maintain, and manipulate spaces and places, how they draw boundaries, how they convey values both personal and social in nature. In this last data chapter, I share stories of my own practice. These stories are patched together, showing the interplay between multiple spaces and places in my life. Like most stories, they're incomplete and ongoing. Initially, I wanted to share similar stories and experiences from The Crafty Beavers, but I don't know their stories well enough.

By telling my own stories, I can show the ways my relationships to The Crafty Beavers, my family, and various spaces and places are also stories about *how place is mobilized through practice*. I agree with Shawn Wilson, who writes, "We cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it. As I am learning more about these concepts, my own being and world around me changes to reflect these lessons" (14). I see the stories below enacting what John Law has called a pinboard or pastiche:

Here is the argument: juxtaposing "images" and making pastiches raises the possibility that the world is not a singular place. It raises the possibility that objects in the world, for instance an object like an aircraft, is, are, both multiple and singular. It raises the prospect that what appears to be one may also be many, and that coordination produces singularity. It also suggests that it is interesting, important, indeed vital to study that coordination, the ordering logics of the fractionally coherent object. (193-4)



Likes the stories Law tells about an aircraft, my stories about place and space are “about *fractional coherence*. Fractional coherence, I will say, is *about drawing things together without centering them*” (2, emphasis in the original).

As you read, I’d like you to keep these words from de Certeau in mind:

stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world’s debris. . . . Things *extra* and *other* (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order. (107)

These stories show that the multiplicity and complexity of space/place are not easily ordered, linear narratives: “The verbal relics of which the story is composed, being tied to lost stories and opaque acts, are juxtaposed in a collage where their relations are not thought, and for this reason they form a symbolic whole” (de Certeau 107). My hope is that with my stories I show how stories of practice are stories of space and place, how stories of practice are stories of rhetoric, how each space or place is multiple.

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### *Home*

Home is 4803 NE 99th Ave, Portland, Oregon. At least it was. It’s the only house I’ve ever loved. Even though I’m 2,325 miles away, I can see the roses that line the driveway. I can picture the blue paint stripping from the porch steps. I can taste a better boy tomato from the garden. I can hear a dining room chair creak as Grampa shifts himself while working the crossword puzzle in today’s *Oregonian* or shuffles a well-worn deck of cards before beginning a

game of solitaire. I can see the built-in shelves behind him filled with both good and terrible pictures of the entire family, including one of Allen, my brother, removing rocks from his socks during a walk. I can see the teapots, jars filled with coins, creatures made of seashells, brain-teaser puzzles made of wood, and the nut-grinder that Grampa insisted was an antique scattered among the photos. I can smell apple betty baking in the kitchen. I can see Gramma rushing around that kitchen, washing dishes, cleaning the counter, and applying lipstick before leaving for bingo. I can almost believe that I am in Uncle Bruce's old room playing *Eye Guess* and *Barbie Queen of the Prom* with Allen. Allen always won. Allen is Queen of the Prom. I can pretend that I am sitting in the brown and orange plaid loveseat reading a book while drinking Nestea from a milk glass mug, while Gramma knits a pair of slippers in her recliner. I wish I was there.

This is how I make home.

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### *Echoes*

"I was thinking we'd have some tea. Do you want some?" Gramma calls out from the kitchen. I'd stowed myself away in the den all afternoon, reading *Emily of New Moon* for the fifth time. A few minutes before Gramma's inquiry, I'd found my way to the dining room and decided to play a game of solitaire.

"Sure!" I reply.

I join her in the kitchen and watch as she fills two milk glass mugs—one yellow and orange, the other white with a brown checked pattern—with water from the sink and sets them in the microwave. The hum of the microwave acts as our background music. Gramma points out how nicely the fuschias on the porch—visible through the kitchen window—are blooming. The

microwave draws attention to itself with a few beeps, and Gramma pulls down a canister of Nestea powder from the cupboard above the microwave. She places a few heaping spoonfuls of the “tea” into each mug; the spoon clinks against the glass as she stirs. We take our tea into the dining room and sip it as we play a game of cribbage.

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### *Patterns*

During most of the summers of my childhood, I spent several weeks at my grandparents’ house. We kept busy with the garden, rummy, cribbage, blackberry picking, and a variety of other activities. Despite Oregon’s reputation for rain, the summers are often sunny, but one summer—I think I was ten or eleven—rain was abundant. Gramma went through her wardrobe and weeded out a slew of polyester outfits decades old, most of them with bright floral patterns, one a navy and white houndstooth. She cut them up into little squares, uniform in size, deciding that she and I would make a little patchwork quilt together. I’d read about “patchwork” in *Anne of Green Gables* and was curious about it, even though Anne seemed to dislike it heartily. Although I never finished the quilt, I spent my evenings for a few weeks stitching squares together by hand. It was slow but satisfying work. I liked the texture of the fabric on my fingers. I liked the sound of the thread being pulled through the layers. I liked to watch the progression of the seam I was creating—little white dashes in a line, like a road.

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### *In Between*

As a child, I moved a lot. My father was in the Marine Corps and got transferred every four years or so. For a military family, we didn’t move all that much, but each time we pulled up stakes it hurt. We spent most of Dad’s service years in Tacoma, Washington, Portland, Oregon,

San Clemente, California, and Poulsbo, Washington, finally retiring to Charlevoix, Michigan. Dad traveled out of the country and overseas to all kinds of distant lands, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Borneo, Panama. I despised relocating my life each time Dad got orders, but there was nothing I could do about it.

I remember when I learned we'd be moving away from our home on Military Base Camp Pendleton in southern California. It was the summer of 1992. I was ten years old. We'd recently gotten a puppy. A beagle puppy. His name was Tikkanen after the hockey player. My dad stayed home with little Tikker (pronounced like Teaker) while my mom, brother, Aunt Ginny, and I went to nearby Disneyland. Aunt Ginny was visiting from northern Michigan; she had never been to Disneyland, had never even been to California. We hit Fantasyland first and got through the Peter Pan, Dumbo, and Snow White rides. We went back to Peter Pan again, as we all liked to fly.

For lunch, we ended up in Tomorrowland. Mom decided to call Dad before we went back to the rides; she wanted to check on the puppy. I went to the bathroom. When I returned to the group beside the payphones, I noticed my brother was crying. I finished drying my wet hands on my shorts, as my mother told me we were moving. My dad had been transferred to Naval Submarine Base Bangor in the state of my birth, Washington. We would be moving in just a few weeks.

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### *Echoes*

Memories associated with our pasts shape the way we experience particular spaces, places, and situations. Our own histories and memories influence the way we understand ourselves and our relationships to other people, places, and objects. De Certeau writes, "A

memory is only a Prince Charming who stays just long enough to awaken the Sleeping Beauties of our wordless stories. ‘*Here*, there used to be a baker.’ ‘*That’s* where old lady Dupis used to live.’ It is striking here that the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there” (108). Wherever we find ourselves, we are in places that both are and are not what they seem.

As a child, I was always fascinated by stories of “how things used to be.” I remember a story about how part of my grandparents’ kitchen was once a bathroom. “That little built-in shelf was a medicine cabinet,” my Gramma would say. None of us had ever see the room as a bathroom, but I *knew* all the sudden that it had been, and it changed the way I understood the house that I thought I knew so well. My mom’s old bedroom in that same house was full of small closets and cupboards. I learned that it was once the *only* bedroom in the house; that was the reason for its significant difference from the other bedrooms, which were added on decades later. My mom told me that when she was a little girl the walls were light pink and that the carpet was striped in hot pink, light pink, and white; the images brought to mind were at odds with the peaceful white and blue room with flowing curtains.

Talk about the past colors of rooms and the previous furniture arrangement is indicative not just of *things* in space/place but of spatial *practices*. When my mom walks through my grandparents’ house, she remembers a place that is both present and absent. She accesses the house in multiple ways because she’s experienced it across many moments over time. When she says, “The carpet was candy-cane pink,” she’s not all that interested in helping me understand what the place used to look like; instead, she’s experiencing the place as it once was. The “wordless stories” of her former days in that house are coming back to her. She relives these moments in her mind—the way it was to sleep in that room at night and wake up in it the next

morning, the way she snuggled with her cat Skipper, the dresses she used to wear—specific practices and experiences come back to her through memory. The simplest, easiest way to begin to convey her experience is to tell me of the candy-cane pink carpet she “sees” where I see blue carpet; “what can be seen designates what is no longer there.”

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### *Home*

Home is 02216 US 31 South, Charlevoix, Michigan. This is the home my family moved to after my Dad retired from the Marine Corps. The house sits along the highway south of a popular resort town in northern Michigan, not far from the shores of Lake Michigan. This was my home during high school and summers home from college. Boxes from the move seventeen years ago clutter the basement. They haven’t all been opened. They seem to be waiting for us to move again. To relocate like we used to. I haven’t lived in this home for the past decade, but I visit often, noticing how more and more I recognize pieces of 4803 NE 99<sup>th</sup> Ave, Portland, Oregon in it. The smells and sizzling sounds of bacon on a Sunday morning. The beauty of dust particles in air illuminated by sun coming through the windows. Balls of yarn and half-finished slippers on knitting needles laid atop the end table beside Mom’s chair in the living room. This home is different, too. A row of bookshelves houses classics like *Anna Karenina* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* beside historical texts about the Civil War and agriculture like *The Civil War: A Narrative* and *Corn and Its Early Fathers*. Christmas decorations sit beside Easter decorations. A two-foot-tall bunny stands on top of the piano beside a snowman smoking a corn-cob pipe. A Marine Corps seal hangs in the dining room; the globe and anchor have been joined by some artificial daffodils, hung from the same hook. Sometimes it feels like a place that

celebrates only the past. Mom says, “When I heard you were coming this weekend, I bought stuff to make potato soup.”

This is how I make home.

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### *In Between*

The heat is stifling. It’s late August. My parents are with me in Alma, Michigan. I’m about to begin my first year of college. Freshman. Fall 2000. That afternoon we attended a presentation in the gym, where we sat in bleachers and fanned ourselves with the programs we’d been handed as we entered the room. We listen to various college administrators tell us what an awesome place Alma College is, what a wonderful experience college is going to be, how Alma College graduates are successful.

While Provost Avery shared his excitement about the school year, my dad catches my eye and says, “You don’t have to do this. You don’t have to stay here. Do you want to come home with us today? You can come home with us today.”

I looked at him and smiled. I didn’t know what to say. Was he serious? I gave him a look that I that I hoped said, “You’re crazy, Dad. Whatever, that’s nice.”

I didn’t really think about it much then; I’d been told my whole life I was going to go to college. That was the plan.

But, my dad didn’t go to college.

Going to college is *serious*.

Before my parents left that evening, my Dad pulled out his wallet and fished around for a twenty-dollar bill. He pulled it out and handed it to me. He never did this. Ever. I grinned at him, “Thanks, Dad.” I was thinking, “You’re so weird, today.”

All day long I'd introduced him to professors and my new classmates, "This is my Dad, Fred." He started signing his emails, "Your Dad, Fred."

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### *Echoes*

The 2011 spring semester at MSU has ended and with it my third year of the PhD. I've finished all my coursework and my exams. It's time to write a dissertation prospectus. Around this same time, I began crafting with a local craft group called The Crafty Beavers.

One of the members, Violet, knows a family whose two-year old son, Charlie, has brain stem cancer. An event called Art for Charlie is put together each year to raise awareness of children's brain stem cancer. Art is donated and auctioned. Proceeds go to hospice care for children with the disease. Violet wanted to make something for Charlie. The Crafty Beavers decided to help her. She picked out an assortment of fabric—orange, green, blue—from which to make a quilt.

At my first couple meetings with The Crafty Beavers, I help create this quilt. We sat in Violet's warm living room trying to share the breeze created by the fan—it was 80 degrees outside and likely warmer in the living room. Ana drew dinosaur shapes—stegosaurus, brontosaurus, triceratops. I cut out 9x9-inch squares of orange fabric. Violet serves us scones for the occasion and topped them with fresh fruit and whipped cream. She offers us tea, water, juice. She says, "There's chips and salsa, too." Violet's cats try to cuddle with Ana, who is allergic to them. We give ourselves homework; we each take one of Ana's templates and volunteer to cut out four of our dinosaur in a particular fabric and attach wonder-under to it. At the next meeting, also at Violet's, we assembled the entire quilt. Andrea and Ana pin it together, and Violet sews it. Violet doesn't remove the pins as she sews; somehow she never hits a pin with her sewing



machine needle. I meet Julia—for the first time—who arrives with lemon cupcakes to share. We visit as we eat, and pin, and sew. Violet does the quilting after we leave. That same week, I sew a toy dinosaur for Charlie, too. I make it from a pattern called Tommy T-Rex and choose green minky dot fabric for the body, striped flannel for the spikes, and big white felt circles and smaller black felt circles for the eyes. We give him his dino-quilt and dinosaur during the Art for Charlie event, and his mom tells me that I should quit graduate school and make toy dinosaurs. Later in the evening, Charlie fell asleep using the dinosaur as a pillow. It feels good to do something for someone else *and* to do that something collaboratively with a group of smart, thoughtful, and crafty women.

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### *Echoes*

I was alone when I learned I'd been accepted into MSU's PhD program in Rhetoric and Writing in the winter of 2008. I trembled with excitement over who to call and tell the news, knowing they'd be just as excited as I was.

I called my Gramma Lillian.

We talked every Sunday. Sunday phone calls with Gramma were a staple of my life. I'm sure Mom put me on the phone with her as soon as I made sounds reminiscent of language. After I left home for college, Gramma had two Sunday morning phone calls, one with Mom and one with me. Usually the conversations were about how much she'd won at bingo, the deals Grampa got at garage sales, news about the garden, and thoughts about what to make for dinner. Sometimes she'd read my horoscope, Aries, aloud and speculate about what it might mean.

On this not-Sunday phone call, I said, “I got into the PhD program at Michigan State.” I’d likely rattled on and on about it and the other programs I’d applied to in previous conversations. I was, at the time, finishing my MA. She said, “I know it’s what you want.”

That’s all she had to say about it.

Our conversation reminded me of one I’d had with my Mom a few years earlier. When I was considering graduate school, shortly after graduating with my BA in 2004, I talked over my ideas with my mother. I’d recently completed an internship at the US Department of State where I’d be working in the Office of Multilateral Nuclear Affairs within the Bureau of Non-Proliferation. I was trying to figure out if I wanted to go into international studies and arms control or English composition and rhetoric. She said, “You know, there’s a time when you’re going to need to decide between having a family or a career.”

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### *Craft*

I bought a sewing machine in 2009, after completing the first year of my PhD program. For my first project, I decided to sew Jeff a pair of pajama pants. I picked out a flannel dinosaur print called Dino Royal because Jeff had always liked dinosaurs. The print was childish and silly, full of cute cartoon dinosaurs in red, green, orange, and yellow on a royal blue background. The first time I cut out the pattern for the pajama pants, I did it wrong. I cut the fabric in two and flipped one piece around, instead of cutting the piece out “on the fold,” so that the dinos on one leg would not be upside-down. Good job, Mari. *But*, I cut the fabric in these two layers with the right side of both pieces facing up. Not so good, Mari. One layer should have had the right side face down. I cut two left legs.

I rushed to the closest Joann Fabrics to buy more Dino Royal, but they were all out. I went to their website, but the fabric was out of stock. I found it on eBay and bought two yards from a lady in Nevada named Wanda. I was so perplexed that following directions out of a book could not work when it looked like I was doing everything right. *I did what it said.* I wished Mom or Gramma could have been there to help me.

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### *Echoes*

In the front of the classroom, I sit down in an orange plastic chair and take a set of metallic blue knitting needles out of a bright green box. I hold them up so that my second-grade classmates can see them shine in the florescent lights. I tell them, “My Gramma’s teaching me how to knit, but I can’t show you how yet.”

My Mom and Gramma purchased me knitting needles and a crochet hook. They spent several weeks showing me the basics. I liked crocheting, but knitting was hard. My Gramma said that knitting was easier for her. When my Mom was in middle school, she learned how to crochet and came home bragging to Gramma, “I can crochet and you can’t!” Gramma, irritated by Mom’s tone, bought herself a how-to-crochet book and figured it out for herself. Gramma stuck primarily to knitting and made everyone—Grampa, me, Mom, Allen, Dad, cousins, nieces, nephews, friends—slippers with Red Heart yarn. She even knitted slippers for my college roommates. I’ve yet to learn to knit, but I can crochet.

Gramma made slippers for me all my life. I’ve always had at least two pairs in my closet or under my bed. I’ve had pink ones and green ones, orange ones, and purple ones. She’d make me stand on a piece of paper and trace my foot to help her get the sizing right. She gave me the last pair—made from aqua, yellow, and white variegated yarn—about eight years ago when I

was home visiting her and Grampa in Portland, bringing my boyfriend Jeff (now my husband) along to meet them.

My slippers always had to have pom-poms. She didn't put pom-poms on all the slippers, but I insisted on having them. They're an essential part of a pair of Gramma's slippers, and eventually she learned that she didn't need to ask my preference. My aqua, yellow, and white slippers sported pom-poms from the very beginning. Gramma gave Jeff a pair of slippers on that trip, too. A set of blue and white slippers. They didn't have pom-poms, but seeing how important they were to me he thought perhaps he was missing out. He requested that they be added. Gramma laughed and laughed and added the pom-poms.

Whenever I got a new pair, I'd use them to slide around in the kitchen, pretending I was an Olympic figure skater. I'd glance down at my feet and smile over my pretty striped slippers with a happy pom on top of each. When I was in college, I'd carry a pair of orange, white, and purple slippers in my backpack, so that I could change into them while I was at the library for hours and hours reading and putting together binders of notes for model UN and studying for exams. I remember wearing a pair of brown, blue, and white slippers in my first office as a graduate assistant, sometimes forgetting to change out of them when I walked down the hall to make photocopies.

After Gramma died a few summers ago, I stopped wearing my slippers. I don't know what to do with these slippers I have. I have multiple pairs, but most of them are worn through in the ball of the foot. They're all falling apart. The newest pair, the pair from eight years ago, is the only set without holes. I want to wear them because they make me think of Gramma who I loved so much, who was so dear to me, so sweet to me. I don't want to wear them because I don't want

to wear them out. I think it would break my heart to be without a complete pair of Gramma's slippers.

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### *Craft*

Around the time I joined The Crafty Beavers in the spring of 2011, I'd recently reinvested in crochet as a hobby. Like playing the flute and ice skating, it was an important practice in my childhood, one I'd spent hours honing to later abandon. I play the flute now so rarely that I've forgotten the fingering of several notes in the third octave. I skate only two or three times a year now. I hadn't crocheted in years. I started again by making dishcloths. Simple, useful projects. By day I worried over how to retool the pilot project, the Marauder's Map, I'd done a few years ago into something workable for the dissertation. By night I crocheted dishcloths while watching episodes of *Angel*.

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### *Home*

Home is 25700 W. 12 Mile Rd, Apt 205, Southfield, MI. This home is barely home. My name is on a lease. I share this apartment with a friend from college, Kristin. We moved in late in 2004 and out the very next year. We both work at the same mortgage company. I hate it. Working the grind of a standard nine to five shift in a cubicle has change my life. I answer the phone, "Good afternoon, this is Mari," and make calls to customer service lines to discuss our "mutual client." I have learned the terms "loan to value," "debt to income," "nonconforming," "FICO," and "underwriting guidelines." My personality has contracted walking pneumonia. I have nightmares about getting onto the gameshow Jeopardy! and being introduced as a "mortgage loan processor." The home Kristin and I share is poorly furnished with sad hand-me-

down chairs—one of green and brown stripes repaired with duct tape, another an overstuffed blue armchair that I still own. The walls are bare. Bare and white and vast. We have a loud neighbor who, when asked to turn down his music, said, “I’m an adult, and you’re an adult. I do what I want; you do what you want.” All I wanted was for the booming bass to stop, for the banging and thumping to end. We don’t know how to cook for ourselves. We eat scrambled eggs and spaghetti. Kristin’s mom takes us to Sam’s Club to stock up on Hot Pockets. When feeling homesick, I make a double-batch of Grampa’s potato soup. Once Kristin tossed a can of green beans into the leftover soup; I was irate.

This is how I make home.

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### *In Between*

I dreamt about the house again last night. My grandparents’ house. This time it wasn’t really a house at all. In the dream it had been torn down; I went to its site to see what had been put in its place. There were no walls, but there was furniture, there were hallways. This seemed to be some new style; other “homes” on the street were similar. Only in dreams could this wall-less house make sense. Mom was with me, and we decided to walk parts of the old neighborhood. I mentioned that we needed to turn to get to Prescott Street, and she faltered. We were losing our way.

I’ve dreamt about 4803 NE 99<sup>th</sup> Ave, Portland, Oregon most of my life. The dreams were once infrequent, happening just a few times a year. After Grampa died in 2008, I started dreaming of the house and my grandparents at least once a week. In these dreams, the house never looks right. I can see multiple dream versions of the house as I write now; they stay with me, these warped realities. Sometimes the hallway, a straight line, seems infinite like it did in my

childhood. I thought it was the longest hallway in the world, but it's a rather normal hallway, just around fifteen feet long. I'm not sure how long, really, but it doesn't stretch on for ages.

Sometimes the house, which in actuality is a ranch style home with an unfinished mildewed basement, is a split-level home. Sometimes there's a secret room above the bathroom.

Sometimes the rooms are out of order. Sometimes the furniture is all wrong; a pale blue dresser in place of a dark brown one; a four-poster bed instead of a waterbed.

After Gramma died, the dreams shifted again. In these dreams about the house, I can't get inside. Instead I'm on the porch, beside the garage, in the yard. Rarely are people in the dream. I once dreamt that Gramma, sitting beside a washer and dryer set in the garage (not their true location) and nestled in a pile of blankets was telling me that she wanted to die, and I, tearfully, was trying to talk her out of it. Out of dying. Usually, though, I wander in the dreams. I cannot find the right room, I cannot find Gramma or Grampa. I wake up from all these dreams confused. I want to go back to sleep, so I can go back to the house, but as I become more fully awake I realize that the contours of the house were all wrong. I begin to wonder why I didn't get to spend time with my family in the dream. I wonder why I didn't get to see the house as it is, as it was. Where is the lamp in the living room, the one whose shade Gramma hung her dangly earrings on? Where is the bingo dauber collection? Why aren't we playing cribbage together and laughing? Why aren't we making or eating apple betty? Why aren't we weeding the garden? Why are we, instead, crying about death in a fabricated garage?

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*Connection*

"Hi Mom."

"Hello there," my Mom's pleasant voice greets me. "What's up?"

“I wanted to call Gramma, but I can’t. I can call you.”

“I know how you feel.”

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### *Patterns*

I’m on a plane. The woman beside me is chewing gum with her mouth open. A few minutes earlier, she’d pulled a plastic bag out from under the chair in front of her and ate pasta out of it. The passenger in front of me lowers his seat, jamming it into my knees. I’m disgusted and uncomfortable; I’m also a little amused.

I’ve been traveling a lot this semester, the spring of 2013. I’m almost done with the PhD, although it doesn’t always feel that way, and I’m on the job market. I’m lucky enough to be invited on a few campus visits, but I find it hard to be excited when I’m spending so much of my time on planes and in airports and so little of my time at home. Travel is full of small irritations and lots of wasted time. I grade papers as I wait for my plane. I eat an Auntie Anne’s pretzel or a Starbucks yogurt parfait as I sit at each gate. I despise connecting flights, which require never-ending layovers. I feel covered in layers of filth. I’ve eased some of my discomfort and irritation by crocheting in these places. It gives me something to concentrate on, something that I can focus on even with gum chewing happening a few inches away. I fall into a rhythm—single crochet, single crochet, single crochet, chain one, turn.

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### *Home*

Home is 1775 Nemoke Trail, Apt 9, Haslett, Michigan. This is the apartment I share with my husband Jeff and our fat, fluffy cat Oola. We live on the third and top floor because I’m sensitive to noise and want to share as few walls with others as possible. It’s a temporary home,



like all of my homes. We'll leave this summer after I finish my PhD. At that point, I will have lived here for five years, the longest I've ever lived anywhere. When we arrive at home after a day at work, we meow back to Oola as we open the door. "Meow!" Our home is filled with academic books by authors like Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and de Certeau. We drink loose-leaf tea, French press coffee, and craft beer. Our home has traces of other homes, too. Several aprons hang from the pot rack, most floral or polka-dotted. A rolling pin rests in our wine rack. A Kitchen Aid mixer takes the place of honor on our counter. I have a craft table and shelf beside my desk in the office. It's cluttered with pattern pieces for the toy dinosaur I'm making for a friend's baby and leftover paper hearts from when I made Valentines bunting to hang in the living room. Afghans and quilts decorate our chairs and couch. I make apple Betty after particularly difficult weeks.

This is how I make home.

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### *Echoes*

"Would you like some tea?" Jeff asks. We both used to be tea drinkers, but not long after starting graduate school Jeff turned to coffee for his caffeine needs. I, however, drink at least 32 ounces of Chinese breakfast tea each day. "Yes, please!" I say. He puts water into our electric kettle. A few minutes later, I hear it click; the water's boiling. I put a tablespoon of loose leaf tea into a Pyrex beaker Allen gave me and rinse the leaves with some of the boiling water, then drain the water with a mesh strainer before pouring more water over the leaves. I set a timer and leave the kitchen. When the timer dings, I pour my tea into a turquoise Fiestaware mug and stir in honey and milk. I like the sound the spoon makes as it bumps against the mug. I sip, and

sometimes gulp, my tea while browsing the internet, while writing my dissertation, while reading a book, and sometimes while playing cribbage.

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### *Craft*

In the fall of 2011, I'd been back in the crochet game for six months or so. I figured it was about time to upgrade from dishcloths to something a bit more challenging and rewarding. I found a pattern called Tunisian Throw on Lion Brand Yarn's website and decided it would be a fun challenge. I picked out nine different colors of Vanna's<sup>18</sup> Choice Yarn—olive, burgundy, brick, sapphire, eggplant, kelly green, mustard, rust, and honey. The throw would be a 42 by 42-inch square when finished, composed of four squares of each color, a total of 36 squares. The throw is a sampler, so each color is stitched in a different pattern stitch. I'd been practicing traditional crochet for six months, not Tunisian crochet, which is a whole different animal. Needless to say, it wasn't working all that well.

At one Crafty Beavers meeting, Violet looked over at my progress on a square and said, "Is it supposed to look like that?" No. It wasn't. She was nice about it. A crocheter herself, she knew how it could be hard to get started again after a long break. She tried to be encouraging, "I'm sure the next one will turn out." It didn't. But, I kept making them.

I made squares throughout the fall and winter. I made squares while I crafted with The Crafty Beavers; I made squares while traveling on the train to Chicago for a conference; I made squares when I was home visiting my parents for Thanksgiving. Mom was curious about Tunisian crochet, too. She said, "I haven't crocheted in awhile, but it looks like you might be stitching too tightly. Your square is rolling up." I liked that I was making something, even if it

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<sup>18</sup> Yes, as in Vanna White of *Wheel of Fortune* fame. She's an avid crocheter with her own line of yarn and patterns by Lion Brand Yarns.

wasn't pretty, even if it wasn't really working. I was trying it out. I was holding it in my hands; it was something even if it wasn't the *right* thing.

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### *In Between*

Over the course of the summer of 2012, my dissertation meetings with Malea go something like this:

Malea: You're writing an introduction again. You write the introduction last; you know this.

Mari: It didn't feel like an introduction when I was writing it. But, yeah. It is.

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### *Patterns*

I've spent the whole morning writing. Trying to write. It's the summer of 2012. I'm working on the first draft of my dissertation data chapters. I'm worried about literature moments in the chapter, about situating the work I'm doing with that of other Rhetoric and Composition scholars explicitly because most of the work I'm familiar with from the discipline doesn't approach space and place the way that I do. It's easy to take a different angle too far, to be led somewhere else. But, there are other things to read. I just haven't read them; I don't know what they are.

I read what I've drafted again out loud. I sigh. I need a break. I walk from my desk in the office to the living room and give myself permission to crochet three rows in the baby blanket I'm making for my friend Betsy's daughter. It's a striped blanket featuring rows of single crochet, double crochet, and V-stitches in pink, green, blue, and yellow. I mull over ideas from my chapter as I work—double crochet, chain two, double crochet.

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*In Between*

When I came to the recruitment event at MSU before starting the program in 2008, I met with several faculty members to talk about their research and the program. Being deeply impressed the community-based work of a particular faculty member, I made sure to meet with her.

While sitting in her office we ended up on the subject of military brats. I was telling her that I was interested in the group as a research site. This led, of course, to some talk of my experiences as a military brat. Since I am a military brat and I don't have a "hometown" in the way that many of my friends and classmates over the years do, I'm curious if I can identify with other military brats about feelings of placelessness, interests with jobs that have a mission, a desire for peace.

In response, she pointed at her filing cabinet, which had a red Marine Corps bumper stick plastered on it. The slogan, Semper Fi—short for *semper fidelis* which translates to "always faithful"—was emblazoned on it in gold. I'd noticed the sticker earlier but thought nothing of it. Filing cabinets get passed around departments, so I wasn't sure if the sticker was hers. She tells me that her dad was an officer in the Marine Corps and that several other family members are in the military. She's another military brat. I share, when prompted, that my dad retired at the rank of Gunnery Sergeant.

She says, "Well maybe you aren't really a military brat since your dad wasn't an officer."

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## *Connection*

I sit alone in my apartment trying to write what's left of the dissertation. It's Saturday. I decide I should take a break and talk to someone, get outside of my own head, catch up with the world around me. I don't know who to call. It's hard to connect. We're all so different. How do we have anything to say to one another? I check Facebook instead.

My Dad has posted a picture of one of his draft horses with snow collected on his back. It's April 20<sup>th</sup>. Snow isn't generally associated with this time of year, even in northern Michigan where my parents live. This year winter is holding on. One of his conservative friends posts, "Climate change! The ice caps are melting!" a sarcastic rant about how climate change is not real. I'm irritated. I write something to the effect, "Climate change refers to more extreme weather in general, not just warming. Also, my dad doesn't like political talk on his FB page." I know this is true because he's said as much to me multiple times. She retorts, "Shouldn't he be the one to say so?" I back off and don't say anything; she has a point there, but why make this nice picture about climate change in the first place?

Dad sends me a message, "Let it go with her...I was surprised to see that there too...I find it inconceivable that one can be against Monsanto in one breath and disregard climate change in another...even with proof...I have been through it with her before...I just let the wind blow now." I write a brief apology: "I should have kept my mouth shut, but I can't believe folks believe that nonsense. It gets me grumpy, and your lovely photo shouldn't be turned into a platform to promote backwards thinking. Instead, we should all just say things like, 'Ugh! More snow! Still!?!' and find common ground there."

During my next writing break, I check Facebook again and notice that he's taken down the photo. He's written a status update about it:

I recently took down a picture of my horse Nick standing in the snow of a late spring morning. . . . Conversation eventually went to climate change and political ideology. I thought the picture was pretty. I am not bright enough to make a stand one way or another, but I do know that the weather here is unpredictable.

Anybody who is family or friends has a right to say what they like on my page, just try to stay friendly, please.

I'm irritated by this message. He's managed to agree with me and make me some kind of bad guy (unnamed, of course) at the same time. The only comments of a political nature were his friend's and mine, just the two. Nothing unfriendly was said by either party. He's on the one hand saying, "Write whatever you want, friends." And, on the other, his actions imply the opposite, "If I don't like it, I'll take it down." In other words, he doesn't mean what he says. He's also playing both sides about his opinion of climate change. What he has told me and what he has told the larger Facebook community do not match up. (His scientifically-challenged friend has "liked" the status update.) I don't even know which one is his true opinion. Shouldn't I know? He's my dad. I don't know how to talk to him or Mom anymore, really. I feel like we have to try too hard. It's hard to belong to a place—family—that I am inherently tied. How is that?

I sent him this story. I wasn't sure how he'd react. I felt that maybe I'd just upset him and our online conversations would make whatever issue had arisen harder to resolve. We ought to do these things in person, face-to-face, but that's a tall order these days. We have to be together in different kinds of spaces or not together at all most of the time. A few hours after I sent him this story, he reposted the picture of Nick, his horse, in the snow with the caption: "Several things I am proud of Marilee Brooks-Gillies, one of them is that you are my daughter, and

hopefully you can say that you are proud of the old man even though he can be a somewhat of a clod.”

Maybe it’s not so hard after all.

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### *Echoes*

Last year around this time, my Mom said to me, “I understand Allen’s degree better than I understand *yours*.” She said it in this way that seemed to be blaming me for not making it make more sense to her. Allen is a Medicinal Chemist. I’m going to repeat that for emphasis: Medicinal Chemist. My mother *does not* understand medicinal chemistry better than she understands rhetoric and writing, better than she understands “whatever it is you do.” I know this for many reasons. One of them is the fact that she wrote this in the 2011 family Christmas letter:

The loss of family matriarchs was devastating this last summer. My eyes well with tears as I think of my dear mom and aunts not being around any longer to anchor our families. Lessons learned, traditions passed down, and touching memories keep their spirits alive in our daily lives.

Mom was definitely helping me this Thanksgiving as I kneaded the bread dough, one of the best bun batches ever. The dressing was moist and tasty; I knew her hand had to be in it as I added one more shake of sage to make it perfect. I’ve even tackled her tradition of knitting slippers. I remember how hard she tried not to laugh and be supportive about my first pair of mismatched slippers. Even though one was significantly larger than the other, Dad faithfully wore them and said they fit his feet perfectly. So far I have stitched seven pairs this month—anyone need slippers?

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## *Craft*

After crocheting 34 of the required 36 squares, I decide to start putting together the Tunisian Throw. I pull them all out and begin arranging them on the floor. It's the fall of 2012, and I haven't worked on the squares since February. At this point, it's especially clear that these squares are no good. They're not even squares, more rectangular than anything. They're different sizes and will be difficult to make into a square or rectangular blanket with even edges. I put them away.

A few days later, I pull them all out again. I decide to rip out all the stitches. I unravel every square. I decide, instead, to make a larger blanket, a bigger version of the Bright Stripes Baby Afghan. I'd made the pattern twice and really liked it. I make the blanket much, much bigger, the length of a queen size comforter. I choose colors by feel; I modify pattern to include different stitches and to include them in different quantities. The pattern is a guide, but I'm not really using it. I work on the big blanket in the evenings and during Crafty Beavers meetings. It's got some problems—it's longer than I expected and the sides are somewhat uneven. I'm making it up as a go along, but it's a lot better than the squares. It's coming together in ways the Tunisian Throw wasn't. I'm learning.

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## *Home*

Places are collections of activities, of people, of habits, of values, of taste. They're a collection of moments. Like Doreen Massey says, a space is a "meeting-up of histories" (4). I have always been leaving spaces and places behind, but I've been bringing them with me, too. I've carried them around with me in pieces, like slippers Gramma made for me, photos of friends



and family, an afghan Mom made for me, and in practices, like making apple betty and potato soup, like crocheting blankets and crafting Christmas ornaments, like playing board games and watching Jeopardy!.

Although it's obvious that "where" we are cultural, socially, and physically is significant to the ways in which we make meaning, I think there is a temptation to try to demarcate the cultural, social, and physical away from one another. Instead, I think that a lot of rhetorical power comes from the relationship between those elements—between place, identity, and practice.

This is how I make home.

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We have lost sight of the simple fact that the only difference between a history, a theory, a poem, an essay, is the one that we have ourselves imposed.

—Malea Powell, “Listening to Ghosts”

## CHAPTER 5

### *Making Space and Place in Rhetoric and Composition*

I attend the Michigan State University party every year at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. It's an event that welcomes graduates, faculty, and current students of the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program at MSU as well as prospective students and MSU alumni in the area. A few years ago at this party, I think it was in Atlanta that year, I sat at a table snacking on crostini and talking with Trixie Smith, a friend and mentor who is also the Director of The MSU Writing Center. She told me about how she had spent the last fifteen minutes or so discussing the graduate program with an MA student from another institution who was attending the party. She'd been helpful, giving him lots of information about MSU's PhD program, telling him about funding opportunities, different concentrations available, and the culture of the program. When the student found out she directed the Writing Center, he disengaged and said something like, "Well, I'm going to go talk to some professors now." Evidently because she is a Writing Center director, she doesn't count as a "professor."

I'd inadvertently done something similar to Trixie before. I think it might have been during the fall of my second year in MSU's PhD program. I was on assistantship in the Writing Center where I consulted in one-to-one sessions and was involved with a variety of projects and committees. During a meeting with Trixie about an independent study I was doing with her focused on WAC/WID and space and place, I said something about how I liked all the administrative work we did in the Writing Center but that I also wanted to do scholarship and teach. Trixie said, "I do all of those things, too."

These stories worry me. They make me angry. They frustrate me. In academia, we all are always breaking our work into discrete chunks, labeling and drawing boundaries around them. We have History, English, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Sociology. These areas of study are different. They are. But, they're not always as different as we make them out to be. Faculty, each with a PhD, have many different titles, adjunct, fixed-term, lecturer, director, tenure-track. These, too, demarcate, and while there's more difference between Sociology and Chemistry than there is between adjunct and tenure-track the second set of labels impose significant boundaries around the everyday practices and existence of those who hold them. In higher education, we're part of a larger network of information, research, and intellect that overlaps and coordinates. We each have a *place* in an institution, in a department, in a discipline. We make and maintain these places. Sometimes we shift and alter these places through making *space*, too.

Throughout this dissertation, stories of practice from The Crafty Beavers have helped me theorize about the ways in which space and place are rhetorical. In Chapter 1, I shared with you my history with the concepts of space and place and my conviction that space and place are rhetorical. I provided an introduction to The Crafty Beavers and explained why stories of practice from members of the group could provide insights that would help me theorize about the rhetoricity of space and place using de Certeau's definitions as a frame. In Chapter 2, I provided more details about how space is made and provided examples of how The Crafty Beavers operates as a space sometimes *within*, sometimes *outside*, and generally *alongside* place. *Space is fluid and relational and exists within and/or alongside place. Spaces are made to change, adapt, and manipulate places.* I emphasized that space and place are made through practice, and noted that each space or place performs in multiple ways. In Chapter 3, I investigated the ways in which The Crafty Beavers make place as well as space. *Place is more stable than space and is*

*given meaning through artifact, language, and practice.* In particular, I shared stories from the Beavers that show how, despite their goals of inclusiveness, they create boundaries that bar entrance to particular people and/or practices within the place of their group. I noted that in making a place members of this group create borders and orders that replicate, reject, or reclaim other places in their lives. I highlighted how these borders and orders are motivated by a desire to create and/or maintain recognition of specific identity positions. *Space and place are performed in multiple ways simultaneously.* In Chapter 4, I reinforced the ideas developed in Chapters 2 and 3 by providing a collaged set of stories that demonstrate the ways in which spaces and places are multiple, the ways space and place inform one another, the way practice mobilizes space and place, and the role of memory in the practices that make and remake spaces and places. *Space and place are mobilized through everyday practice.*

Here, in Chapter 5, I want to pull this all together, to make a neat and tidy package. But, it's not a neat and tidy package. Our lives and stories are messy. The way that we make space and place, the way we engage in everyday practices is messy—difficult to narrate in linear prose. Throughout this dissertation, you've seen me referencing the ideas of de Certeau and others, sometimes quoting the same passages in different sections. This was not an accident. In what follows, some now familiar passages will surface again, some stories from The Crafty Beavers will be repeated, too. I end by setting some *stories of practice* from my recent experiences on the job market, in particular spaces and places, alongside the stories of space and place The Crafty Beavers have shared with me. I want, now, to share some stories that demonstrate how these understandings of space and place have clear application to higher education and to the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.

### *Visiting Places, Looking for Openings*

The month of March was full of airports, airplanes, taxis, and shuttles. For me, March included one conference, three screening interviews, four campus visits, three job offers, and one birthday. It also included a cast of nose sniffing, throat clearing, gum chewing co-travelers, a lack of sleep, and a lack of progress on this dissertation. It's my market year, a year filled with exciting events and opportunities as well as many of my least favorite things—noisy people, travel delays, potentially bedbug infested hotels. I'm sick of cran-apple juice served with too much ice. I've crocheted two scarves while flying and in airports. I keep thinking about buying postcards (I have nine postcard stamps in my wallet) but never like the selection. During my trips across the country, I've worried about losing my luggage, missing my connecting flights, catching up on grading, and finishing my dissertation. I've also thought a lot about the practices that make and re-make space and place.

Being on the job market has given me a lot of opportunity to imagine myself in “new” departments, institutions, cities, and states. I've taken a job in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a job 1,410 miles from my parents' home in Charlevoix, Michigan, 1,286 miles from my current home in Haslett, and 1,326 miles from my most-beloved childhood home in Portland, Oregon. In short, it's nowhere near anything I know. When I was on my campus visit, though, I noticed that they had the grocery chains Safeway and Albertsons, that they had the fast-food chain Carl's Jr. These chains don't exist in Michigan, but they did in many of the cities I grew up in. The city that will soon be my home is also home to multiple military bases, like many of my childhood homes. Is it odd that I find the existence of a Safeway grocery store comforting?

As spring has finally found its way to Michigan, the spring peeper chorus frogs (*Pseudacris crucifer*) have begun their nightly peeping, the common American toad (*Bufo*

*americanus*) is singing his song, too. Neither of these species lives west of the Mississippi. I'll miss them. In Colorado, I'll learn to avoid rattlesnakes, look for Steller's jays and mountain bluebirds. I'll be comforted to see that robins, red-winged blackbirds, and sandhill cranes make appearances there, too. These are the things I think about as I prepare to leave. As sad as it is to contemplate leaving Michigan, my home now for seventeen years, I'm confident that I chose a position that's connected to a welcoming and well-structured university. My campus visits told me that this, of the jobs I was considering, is the place for me.

I went on four campus visits. Most of them were pleasant, but one was far superior to the others, and one was a rather awful experience. All of them helped me understand not just the specific duties associated with the position I was interviewing for but also gave me a *sense of place*, a sense of the culture of the department and institution. My last visit was the most memorable. For this last visit to a school in New York, I'd booked my own flight and arranged for lodging myself. When I asked the search committee chair questions about which airport to fly into or what area to stay in, she was unhelpful saying things like, "It's up to you" and "There might be a shuttle van from that airport to your hotel and a return van from the college to the airport. *You* can check on this." I spent hours choosing and worrying over my selection of travel plans, figuring out shuttles, cabs, hotels, and airlines. I was nervous about paying for the entire trip myself and continue to worry about when I will be reimbursed. I've sent a list of all my expenses with relevant receipts twice since returning from the visit. This was completely unlike my other visits. The visit to Colorado Springs only days before this last one in New York was completely set up for me once the days of my visit were selected. All I had to do was confirm the spelling of my name and okay the departure time for my flight out of Lansing.

With a job offer in hand from a different institution and the possibility of one from another school, I almost didn't go on the New York visit. I had a bad feeling about it. I ultimately decided to go because they were expecting me and canceling plans with short notice is unprofessional. Besides, I definitely wouldn't get reimbursed for the flight if I didn't go. I took the 2pm Michigan Flyer from East Lansing to Detroit. I flew from Detroit to Philadelphia and almost missed my flight from Philadelphia to my final destination. I took a \$55 cab to my hotel room and arrived around 10:30pm. The hotel is a little seedy, and I'm not sure that I want to get under the covers. The next morning, the folks at the college I'm visiting have *nothing* planned for me. The hotel's idea of breakfast is an apple spice granola bar. The chair of the English department said she'd pick me up at the hotel at 12:30pm. *I do a phone interview with another university* at 10am and check out of the hotel at 11am. The hotel lobby has only one chair; sitting in it for an hour and a half after spending all morning in my hotel room doesn't sound appealing. I'm bored and starving. I decide to walk to campus. Again, this experience is wholly unlike the other ones I have had. In each of my previous visits, I'd been picked up from the airport by members of the search committee. I had been taken out to lunch and dinner. I'd been asked polite questions about my trip. I'd been given information about the university and surrounding area. I felt like I was being *welcomed*. This time, I felt like I was an afterthought.

The walk to campus didn't take long; it was just over a mile, but it's along a rather busy 4-lane road. The sidewalks are being redone, so I am walking along the shoulder of the road, with the slim protection of orange traffic barrels. I'm wearing dress pants, a blouse from NY&Co, a cardigan, and pair of blue sneakers. It's in the high 40s; I carry my peacoat. I'm also pulling my luggage behind me. I arrive on campus and search for the hall where the 1pm meeting will take place. I find the provost's office, introduce myself, and ask the administrative assistants



if I can leave my luggage and coat with them. One of them says, “Your interview isn’t for almost 2 hours.” I say, “I know, but I had to check out of my hotel, and I’m hungry.” They offer no suggestions of where someone might find food, do not offer me coffee or water, or ask how my trip has been. They are stone cold. I leave. They seem to not even expect me, to be annoyed by my presence. I am, once again, surprised by this treatment. At the other institutions, they’d offered to take my coat at the very least.

The campus center building, which appears to house lots of dining options, is closed because it’s the college’s spring break. I call my friend and colleague, Elena, who recently went on several campus visits. I tell her about how awful my trip is, how I’m being ignored, how my time is being wasted, how I am starving. I get her assurance that my experience is atypical. The campus is cute and full of old buildings. The sky is blue, blue, blue. There are geese everywhere. There is geese shit everywhere. I eventually find my way to the other side of campus and see a sandwich shop across the street.

I go inside and order the special, which is a chicken panini with peppers, provolone, and pesto on ciabatta. While I wait for my sandwich, I sit at a table and drink some water. A man a few tables over is eating a sandwich. The sounds he makes involve smacking and slurping. It’s one of the worst public habits anyone could possibly have, and this is the absolute worst instance of such behavior I’ve ever encountered. Awful. I cannot help myself and repeatedly glare at him. He doesn’t appear to notice. When my sandwich is ready, I retrieve it from the counter and relocate to a table where I can no longer see the offensive open-mouthed eater (but I can still hear him). I think about how at the other places I’d visited, I had been taken out to lunch and given the opportunity to talk with people who could be my future colleagues. I’d been given tours of campus instead of wandering aimlessly about them by myself. I’d been introduced to

students. I thought, especially, of my recent pizza lunch with the Writing Center consultants during my Colorado Springs visit and the wonderful questions they asked me, showing their investment in their work.

I arrive back at the interview site around 20 minutes before my interview. I collect my luggage and coat from the taciturn administrative assistants and change my shoes in the bathroom. I sit and wait in what appears to be a waiting area. The chair of the English department arrives and asks, “How was your flight?” I smile and say, “Not bad.” I think, “Seriously?” She then goes on to talk about how she can’t drive me to the airport because she has to pick her granddaughter up at daycare. I say that I understand, but I wonder why she needs to pick her granddaughter up at 2pm; surely they could keep her for another hour. A vaguely familiar man arrives. His shirt’s untucked, his hair is ruffled, and he appears to be out of breath. He shakes my hand, “I’m Mike, the dean.” I say, “Didn’t I just see you at the sandwich shop across the street?” “Oh, you were there, too!” I felt like I was in an episode of *Seinfeld*.

My interview begins. I’m talking with the provost, the dean, and the chair of the English department. Their questions are broad and unfocused. I’d been impressed with the search committee’s questions during the screening interview; these questions, however, seemed to be made up on the spot as each person scans a copy of my CV. They appear intrigued and puzzled by my undergraduate major of Foreign Service. I talk about arms control, Model United Nations, and negotiation. The provost—a biologist—shows a keen interest in my MA thesis, which was about the evolution and intelligent design debate and scientific ethos. We talked about it for several minutes.

At one point while summing up the controversy in the *Dover v. Kitzmiller*<sup>19</sup> case that my research focused on, I say, “And the some parents are like, ‘That’s some shit.’ Uh . . . pardon my French.” Apparently, I didn’t spend enough time getting into professional mode before the interview began. The provost, however, seems to appreciate my candor: “No, that just about sums it up.” Nothing like this had happened during my other visits. I wasn’t even sure how to act here; it all felt so alien. I knew, already, based on the way I’d been ignored during the visit that I didn’t want the job, though, so I went into all of this much calmer than usual, which might have been why I ended up talking so casually; I wasn’t nervous.

They ask about my dissertation and seem to have an incredibly reductive definition of both rhetoric and writing. They ask if I have questions. I ask what they want the person who takes this job to do; I ask what classes are capped at; I ask the teaching load; I ask about directions for development and growth. They tell me that it’s a 4/4 teaching load of primarily Composition 101. The department doesn’t have an English major; it does have a Professional Communications minor, but there is no writing component to it. They have 13 tenure-track professors of literature. These literature professors want to teach in their specialties, not writing, so all of the writing is currently taught by adjuncts. They tell me that they have a “mandate to hire a writing specialist” and go on to ask, “What workshops would you design for the adjuncts?” It’s painfully obvious, to me, that I do not want the job. Writing here is seen as a basic skill, the teaching of which is a punishment. The faculty who teach it are not valued as worthy of the tenure-track, and if I were offered this job it appears that the administration would see me as

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<sup>19</sup> In this 2005 U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania case, Tammy Kitzmiller and ten other parents argued that the Dover Area School District violated the Establishment Clause and the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The school board had decided that intelligent design must be presented in biology classrooms as an alternative to evolution. Teachers were required to name *Of Pandas and People* as a helpful reference. The court ruled in favor of Kitzmiller, et al.

someone who babysat, er . . . managed, the adjuncts. I told them that I would work with the adjuncts to develop workshops and that I was sure all of them were at least MA-educated and many of them probably held PhDs, that many of them had been teaching just as long if not longer than me, and that all of them knew more about the student population at this particular college than I did. “I’m not going to come in here and tell them how to do their jobs,” I said. Instead, I said I would see what kinds of expertise they could offer to their peers, and that if many of them noted the same kinds of gaps that I could address that in some way at that point.

As I sit at the table with these folks, I worry about the fact that I just turned down a tenure-track job with 4/4 teaching load in Michigan. I didn’t want to teach first-year composition, advanced composition, and basic writing on repeat. I didn’t want to have almost 100 students each semester in these entry-level courses. I wanted to have time to do research; I wanted to have a role in the structure of the program, of the department. I worried now that I wouldn’t get an offer from Colorado and that I might have to take a job with New York. As I sat at that time, I became overwhelmed with fear that I was looking at my future. A future where I would have to make convincing arguments about writing on a daily basis, since those around me didn’t seem to value it. There appeared to be very little community in the department around the role of writing. They seemed surprised when I asked if they would be interested in a writing minor or, at the very least, adding a writing component to their Professional Communication minor. Of my visits, Colorado offered the only departmental structure that made sense to me. Their English department has a major with four tracks—rhetoric, literature, teaching in K12 schools, and professional writing. While I was on my visit, they were enthusiastic about my idea of designing and teaching a histories of rhetoric course. There were openings, openings for *spaces*, to make the *place* somewhere I could inhabit. This was less true of the other campuses I

visited, especially New York. The day after I returned from New York, Colorado called with a job offer. I was ecstatic, but I didn't accept immediately. Early the next week, New York called with a job offer. No, no, no. A thousand times no.<sup>20</sup> And, they'd better get me my \$770.33 to ASAP. I signed the contract for Colorado soon after that.

### *Expectation, Recognition, and Opportunity*

During my campus visits, I was struck by how much the practices that were part of the visit gave me insights into the community, into the institution, into the space/place that I was potentially going to spend several years of my life. This past fall I took part in my graduate program's job placement group. We met once every week or so to talk through our job materials, what to expect during screening interviews and campus interviews, how to approach job talks and teaching demonstrations, and so on. On the week we discussed campus visits, the group facilitators Malea Powell, Bill Hart-Davidson, and Stuart Blythe all indicated that being on a campus visit is something to enjoy, that once we made it that far into the process the search committee liked us. The visit was about seeing if you were a good fit, and the interview went both ways. I believed them, of course, but I wasn't prepared for how incredibly different campus visits could be from one another. I thought that during campus visits I might learn more about particular job duties that I would be excited or frustrated by and perhaps programmatic structures that I thought would or wouldn't work for me. For instance, on one visit I learned that English and Rhetoric and Professional Writing were separate departments and that English held onto introductory compositions courses while Rhetoric and Professional Writing housed all the upper-

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<sup>20</sup> Lest you think me rude, I'll let you in on a few more details. I did not say, "No" immediately or harshly. I feigned interest and asked questions about salary, travel funding, technology, and reimbursement for moving expenses. I told him, though, that I was considering another offer. I called back the next day and told him that I'd accepted a position at another institution.

level rhetoric courses. The job was in English, and I knew I wouldn't be happy teaching a 4/4 load of English 101 for any amount of time. These are the kinds of “fit” issues I thought I would get more insights into during campus visits, but the small things, the little practices count for a lot, too.

In Colorado, my expectations for the campus visit were met and, at times, exceeded. They engaged in all the practices that I thought of as normal and expected. I was given tours, met many members of the community, and was asked lots of questions. They were courteous and saw to my transportation needs. They told me about not just the university communities I would be part of but also answered my questions about the city and region that the university is part of. I wasn't impressed by any of this. I expected it. I was pleased with the visit and enjoyed my time there, but the only way in which my expectations were exceeded was when I was presented with a gift bag full of snacks, a water bottle, and visitor guides to the region and city. That seemed like an incredibly thoughtful move.

My visit had been pleasant, and I could see myself becoming part of the community. For example, when I had lunch with the Writing Center consultants they asked smart questions about how I could be an advocate for students and how I valued the professionalization of consultants that showed me that they understood Writing Centers in the same way that I do. All of the practices within the visit showed me that this was a *place* that I could be part of and that also they were open to the kinds of *spaces* I needed to make for myself within it. For example, the job is a 12-month administrative appointment instead of a 9-month academic appointment. I'd be running the Writing Center, and the university doesn't want tenure requirements from an academic department getting in the way of how the Writing Center is run. I understood the emphasis on administration but made it clear to them that it was important to me that I be seen as

a teacher and scholar as well as an administrator and would need time and space for research. They were able to ameliorate my fears about taking an administrative post because they showed me that it would be flexible, that I could take on this role and still be a teacher and scholar, too. After my visit, I understood the campus, Writing Center, English department, and university to be *places* that I could be part of, and I saw *spaces* that would allow me to make the *places* even more welcoming to me.

In New York, the opposite was true. These folks didn't seem to understand what a campus visit was, let alone the concerns I had about the way rhetoric and writing are understood there. I found myself thinking of Julia's words, "It's a lot about me. It's a hard thing to admit, but I would like to be recognized for my hard work and talent." I felt like I was being slighted. I played by all of their rules—I sent the appropriate documents, I did the phone interview, I scheduled the travel—and now they are pretty much ignoring me. I wandered campus, so I suppose I gave myself a tour of campus, but I don't know what building I would teach in, I didn't meet with any faculty other than those who interviewed with me that day (no one on the search committee was available, either!), I didn't meet with any students, and I didn't get any information about the surrounding area. Not only that, they didn't even extend the basic courtesy of helping me with transportation and dining. The expectation seemed to be that I would do all of this on my own time and my own dime. My expectations were very different, and I'd been led to those expectations based on my experiences on other campuses as well as through the experiences my colleagues had shared with me of their own campus visits. These folks just didn't seem to understand important *practices* that make up a campus visit in the *place* of higher education.

By the time my actual interview came around, I wasn't sure what to expect, and I didn't really care because they'd already lost me. I didn't get the kind of recognition that I'd expected, recognition that I belonged to the *place* of higher education. Perhaps without realizing it, their lack of engagement with the *practices* I understood to be part of campus visits and basic professionalism signaled that they were rejecting me. In a way, it was similar to Ana's feelings about newcomers to The Crafty Beavers meetings who didn't craft:

I remember people would be there who weren't crafting, and it'd be really weird.

Like, "We're just going to sit here." And the rest of us are all doing something, but they're not. It became this huge detractor. Or, like all of these people watching this sporting event. None of us are interacting. We were all right next to each other, but we had nothing to talk about.

This carried into the interview where my interviewers asked several questions about my MA thesis, which seemed to have little to do with the kind of work they wanted me to do in their college and represented only a small fraction of the kinds of research and training that made me a good candidate for their position. I, too, lost my sense of being in a professional *place* and swore during the interview. Here the borders and orders, the rules and expectations that make place are not *practiced* in the ways that I expect based on my understandings and experiences with similar places. Not only do I not know how to act in this place, but I find that I do not want to be in it. *Everyday practice matters.*



## *Groundwork*

Earlier I wrote that where we come from, where we are, and where we belong clearly have implications for how we act, who we become, and why we make certain kinds of choices. I also said that place and practice inform one another and that we carry places through our practice into all kinds of other places, shifting and changing them with our practice as we go. In my first semester as a PhD student, I took a course called *Research Colloquium*. It's a proseminar in Rhetoric and Writing, meant to introduce students not just to the field but to MSU's orientation to the field. Jeff Grabill taught the course, and I remember him saying, "We're "preparing for a field that doesn't precisely exist yet." He also said to make sure I can tell a story about who I am as a scholar. I've spent the last five years thinking about the ways that I can contribute to the development of the discipline and the kind of story (or stories) I can tell about myself as a scholar. This dissertation is a part of that larger project.

Twenty-three years ago, John Bender David Wellbery wrote, "Rhetoric today is neither a unified doctrine of a coherent set of discursive practices. Rather, it is a transdisciplinary field of practice and intellectual concern, a field that draws on conceptual resources of a radically heterogeneous nature and does not assume the stable shape of a system or method of education" (25). They go on to say that "Rhetoric is no longer the title of a doctrine and a practice, nor a form of cultural memory; it becomes instead something like the condition of our existence." *Condition of our existence*. During that first semester of PhD work, Malea said that as a scholar she is interested in rhetoric for the way it allows her to think about the history of consciousness and systems of meaning making ("Class Notes"). *History of consciousness. Systems of meaning making*. It is with these ideas and sensibilities that I entered the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.

In reference to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Malea Powell stated, “No one works in those categories that they [the 4Cs] ask us to submit to. People work at intersections” (qtd. in White). *We work at intersections*. Shawn Wilson explains, “Reality is not an object but a process of relationships” (73) and that “knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us” (87). *Reality is a process of relationships*. This sense of relationality combined with a focus on practice over artifact, action over thingness, is important to the concept of groundwork described by D.

Anthony Tyeme Clark and Malea Powell:

Groundwork might be understood as an active engagement in the making and remaking of place, peoples, and selves. Because there is no meaning outside of the production of meaning through language, discourse, and image, and given that scholarship is one means of producing meaning, we conclude that *academic* groundwork plays a critical role in place making, and so, too, do place and space play active roles in generating situational interdisciplinaries. (4, emphasis in original)

I hope my work highlights that these intersections and relationships are more than demarcations. The *stories of practice* shared by The Crafty Beavers and by me help show how space and place are rhetorically significant.

The stories found here underscore how our practices—be they defined as home, personal, professional, work, or other—are connected, are related, and they all contribute to the making, maintaining, and/or manipulations of space and place. Spaces and places cannot be reduced to just the physical or just the abstract. They are always both. As we learned from Violet in Chapter 2, being able to create material things complements the abstract work The Crafty Beavers do as

academics. In fact, the *space* created through crafting allows The Crafty Beavers to balance other practices that are part of the *place* of their work. Craft, then, is a practice that makes *space* that allows some of The Crafty Beavers to mediate their daily transitions between the *place* of work and the *place of home*. We learned from Ana that having a *space* like The Crafty Beavers gives her “somewhere else to go” besides school since “if you put all your eggs in that [one] basket you feel kind of worthless when you don’t have anything else.” From Andrea, we see how the practice of “keeping busy” is not something that can be separated out between home and work but a practice that indicates a value that Andrea takes with her wherever she goes. The *place* of home, then, can be transferred into the *place* of work through practice. In Chapters 3, we begin to see how *space* and *place* perform in multiple ways at the same time, how space and place are names for different ways of seeing relationships associated with physical, social, and cultural sites. Place focuses on the legible artifacts of the past, on *questions of what*, while spaces emphasize practice, process, fluid time, on *questions of how*. From Julia and Katie, we see how the boundaries, norms, and rules provide the means for recognition because supportive *practices* are equated with membership in the place and relevant identity positions. From Ana, ES, and Violet, we see how those same boundaries, norms, and rules limit practice and membership but also provide a stable structure that allows community-members to feel connected. In short, we see how our identities and social order depend on place, on stable structure and framework to guide our practice. In Chapters 2 and 3, and especially in Chapter 4, we see how our own histories and memories influence the way we understand ourselves and our relationships to other people, places, objects.

### *Next Steps*

I am involved in a number of scholarly projects alongside the work of my dissertation. I am currently collaborating on a book-length edited collection, *Echoes of Home: Bringing Home to Work*, which explores the ways that home practices influence the professional lives of Rhetoric and Composition scholars. My co-editors and I envision the stories included as part of conversations about mentoring within academic communities that could contribute to the retention of graduate students and new faculty. In my chapter of the collection, “Patterns of Home: Crafting a Life,” I reframe and extend Chapter 4 of my dissertation by telling a stories about the intersections and interplay between home and work places, reinforcing the idea that space and place are mobilized through everyday cultural practices. As my dissertation and the *Echoes of Home* collection exhibit, my scholarship focuses on the interplay between home and professional spaces.

While those projects emphasize home spaces, much of my other work highlights professional spaces. I am currently co-authoring an article, “Graduate Writing Groups as Thirdspaces: Spaces of Professionalization Outside-but-Alongside Academic Programs,” which investigates the everyday practices of multidisciplinary writing groups and how they contribute to participant confidence when writing in their disciplines. In addition, I am collaboratively editing a special issue of *Across the Disciplines* on Graduate Reading and Writing Across the Disciplines (Spring 2014) as well as an edited collection on the same topic. We have requesting articles and chapters that discuss existing writing learning practices that graduate students engage in and those that propose new approaches to graduate writing instruction and support. We ask questions like, “How are students socialized into disciplinary writing? How do graduate students take on the task of writing in discipline specific ways? How do research methods and

methodological paradigms affect writing? How do graduate students' coursework writing experiences transfer into their exam and dissertation writing experiences? How do the complex contexts of "dissertation writing" influence how graduate students write?" In future work, I will continue investigating questions like these, questions that take into account how communities of practice work and where their practices come from. I might, as Bill Hart-Davidson has suggested, write a book using the insights I've gained from my work with The Crafty Beavers called *How to Make Your Writing Group Work*, which speaks back to the work of Anne Ruggles Gere and others on writing groups and makes distinctions between *practice* and *process*.

In addition to these projects, I see the work begun in this dissertation (or, perhaps it began in the Marauder's Map project) as valuable to program-building and institutional change, especially in my work as a Writing Center director and the areas of curriculum development for undergraduate Writing majors and Rhetoric & Composition graduate programs. In "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change" James Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey Grabill, and Libby Miles write "since institutions are rhetorical entities, rhetoric can be deployed to change them" (610). They see the utility of spatial analysis in this process and note that, "There is not one, holy map that captures the relationships inherent to the understanding of an institution, all of these relationships exist simultaneously in the lived—actual, material—space of the institution. Further, it is in the differences that we find in this lived space that the keenest opportunities for institutional change reside" (623). I believe that my work can contribute to this conversation and make space for *being human* in institutions, to consider the importance of lived experience in the making and remaking of places—such as institutions—and the multiple performances of each space and place that individuals carry with them from place to place in the form of practice.

As academics we are always making space and place—graduate programs, curriculum, classroom spaces, journal articles, conferences. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi writes that domains like academia want “to bring order to experience, to make something that will endure after one’s death, to do something that allows humankind to go beyond its present power” (38). In other words, we want to make *places*. For something to be sustained, it needs to have boundaries and rules, borders and orders. But, we need *space*, too. As Doreen Massey writes, “A space, then, which is neither a container for always-already constituted identities nor a completed closure of holism. This is a space of loose ends and missing links. For the future to be open, space must be open too” (12). Place allows for structure and sustainability, for support, while space allows for growth and change.

Spaces and places are *assemblages* made and remade through practice; this is true of institutions as well as craft groups, disciplines, and classrooms. Essential to the understanding of the making, maintenance, and manipulation of space and place is recognizing that space and place are made through human practice. That’s why my use of oral histories and participant-observer methods is so necessary: we can’t understand the experiences within places and spaces or the motivations that drive particular practices within them without talking to the people who not only *inhabit* these spaces and places but *make, maintain, and manipulate* them. Stories are theories about how the world works, and we—as scholars—should be able to see and use them in that way.

I’d like, now, to return to the stories I told at the beginning of this chapter. The stories about Trixie, the Director of The MSU Writing Center. I, too, am joining the ranks of Writing Center Director, and I’ve been thinking a lot about the affordances of the space/place of the MSU Writing Center to my work as a scholar, teacher, mentor, facilitator, collaborator,

administrator, person. I've been thinking about how to make (and/or maintain) a similar atmosphere in the Writing Center I'll be directing in just a few months.

Like groups such as The Crafty Beavers and the aforementioned graduate writing groups,<sup>21</sup> writing centers often act as *spaces*. Writing centers act as *spaces* because, even though they are institutional places, they support institutional and disciplinary work without being seen necessarily maintaining that place as is. In other words, a student can come to a writing center with an essay and talk through it with a peer in a way that isn't regulated by an authority such as a teacher and in a way that supports student agency and the questioning of institutional and disciplinary norms. In fact, while writing centers are part of the place of higher education and are certainly associated with work, they are often seen as homey: "A writing center is a curious mix of office and classroom, but metaphors of home are also often used to describe writing centers with the proverbial coffee pot offering a welcoming cup" (Hadfield, et al. 170).

It's the end of the semester at MSU, and consultants at the MSU Writing Center have been posting about what they like best about working at the Writing Center; those who are graduating have been writing about what they will remember. One consultant, Dean Holden shares,

A job is only as good as the people you work with. That's why this has been the best job ever. . . . I have enjoyed every second I've had to work and chat with each and every one of you. The Writing Center is, without you all, just a big room. You guys are the ones who bring personality, culture, and life to the space, and as vibrant as things are in 300 Bessey (and elsewhere across campus), you should all give yourselves a pat on the back for what you've created.

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 2.

Another consultant, Kurt Trowbridge writes,

I love that everyone brings their own experiences, passions, and ideas to the center—consultants and clients alike—making each time I come to work interesting and exciting. I love that my first job ever has allowed me to help people become better writers, work in a team in a technical environment, and present as part of a panel at a conference—all in my first year of being employed.

The Writing Center is not just a place of work but a place of community with spaces for growth and development. Consultants like Dean and Kurt are invested in their work at the Center and because they are invested they can find and make opportunities like the ones Kurt noted. I want to make a similar space/place in my new role in Colorado.

To me, writing centers encompass the best traits of academic spaces and places. In this new role, I will continue to research space and place, focusing more particularly on writing centers. I will also look to extend the work I began with The Crafty Beavers, perhaps looking to learn more about the role of gender in the space/place. In all of my work, I want to remember to pay attention to, to recognize the connections, the overlap, the interplay, the relationships between space, place, identity, and practice. We're making the *places* and *spaces* of the discipline, and, to this end, our everyday practices are rhetorically significant.

In the stories I began this chapter with, I lament the liminal space that Trixie occupies as someone with a 12-month appointment and without the title Assistant or Associate Professor. For awhile, I was worried about not being a part of the tenure track club, or, rather, being a member of a different, less prestigious club. It might be more productive, though, to think of this role differently, to think of it as one that is more open to making spaces than maintaining places.



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