REMATERIALIZING THE CONTACT ZONE: DISCOVERY

AND EXPLORATION IN THE FIRST YEAR WRITING

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Rematerializing the Contact Zone

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ABSTRACT

Kornkven, Erik Kermeth, M.A., Department of English, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, March 2011. Rematerializing the Contact Zone: Discovery and Exploration in the First Year Writing Classroom. Major Professor: Dr. Kevin Brooks.

This study investigates Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" theory and argues that the contact zone has undergone a dematerializing process from a place with clear geographical and material connections to an imagined geography. Using the material rhetoric scholarship of Nedra Reynolds and Richard Marback, the paper shows the weakening effect a dematerialized metaphor has on classroom pedagogy and presents a writing assignment that seeks to rematerialize the contact zone for the first year writing classroom. The paper explores other uses of contact zone pedagogy to show that there is a pattern of dematerialization prevalent in contact zone pedagogy throughout its existence. Using Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad of lived, conceived, and perceived aspects of space, an assignment is presented that attempts to rematerialize the contact zone in the classroom, effectively changing it from a place of exploration to a place of discovery. Sixty-six student papers were gathered along with reflections throughout their writing process. Students were asked to identify a community they were a part of and describe it using Lefebvre's spatial triad before identifying contact zones in their own lives. The assignment provides students with a way to approach important cultural and societal issues from a place of authority resulting in a fully embodied exploration of their own contact zones.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

It was Flag Day, and I was seventeen. My English teacher at the time assigned a writing assignment to the class that asked each student to write a narrative essay describing what makes American such an amazing place to live. My teenage sense of victimization kicked in, "What if I don't think America is all that great of a place to live?" I thought. I fumed for a while in my seat at the back of the classroom, grumbling and glaring, amazed at the injustice of it all. Then I wrote the paper.

Years later as a composition instructor at a four year university teaching first-year writing courses and developing my own writing assignments I find myself going back to that moment in senior English trying to understand my intense resistance to that particular assignment. Trying to distinguish my actual reasoning at the time from general teenage rebelliousness isn't easy, but ultimately I think I was upset not because I didn't think that America was a good place to live, but that the teacher *assumed* that I thought that way. Looking back, I would have rather had an assignment that asked me to discover my own patriotism rather than one that assumed an aspect of my identity that I hadn't acknowledged yet. The distinction between discovery and exploration has played an important part in my development as a writing instructor. I believe that the writing classroom can be a safe-zone for students to challenge their political and social identities, but before they can be meaningfully challenged, they must first be discovered. One pedagogical model that acknowledges many of my goals for the classroom is Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone".

In 1991 Mary Louise Pratt outlined her vision for a new direction in English studies; one that addresses multiculturalism by focusing on postcolonial clash of cultures

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and the subsequent communication these collisions produce. She called this space the "contact zone" and defined it as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (33). Pratt originally coined the phrase "contact zone" for use in her book *Imperial Eyes* which attempts to make available the intellectual pursuits of imperialism by examining the travel writing created by dominant cultures to define and describe colonized areas. She then used the term to describe her vision for the future of English studies. Her claims about the pedagogical applications of teaching within these contact zones placed her at the center of a growing trend of scholarly work dedicated to reimagining writing pedagogy in the increasingly diverse classrooms across the educational spectrum. Coming shortly after Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundaries*, Pratt's contact zone theory took its place among English studies scholarship devoted to understanding the power structures inherent in the writing classroom by acknowledging that students (and instructors) exist and function within individualized networks of cultures, the negotiation of which is integral in the creation of meaningful composition.

Pratt's contact zone theory has taken its place amongst a number of other spatial metaphors used to describe English studies, both its conceptualization as a discipline, as well as the pedagogical practices used in the classroom. Borderlands, frontiers, cities, fields, and communities are all spatial metaphors used to describe English studies and each has played an important role in moving both the theoretical and pedagogical investigations of our discipline forward.

There is a fundamental difference however, between Pratt's contact zone and other spatial metaphors used to describe the discipline such as frontiers and cityscapes. Where these spatial metaphors originate as imagined geographies, Pratt defines the contact zone as an actual social space. It is important to note that while her concept of contact zone remains largely unchanged between its use in *Imperial Eyes* and her MLA speech, there is a transformation of the phrase from one source to the other. In *Imperial Eyes* Pratt is using "contact zone" to describe a physical space "in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (8). This is clearly not an imaginary metaphor, one can easily picture the Western traveler visiting the colonized country, the places where they slept, the things they saw, the people they spoke with. To Pratt, the contact zone "invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories *now* (emphasis added) intersect" (8). Just as Gloria Anzaldua's powerful conceptualization of the Borderland is arterially connected to the dusty land that makes up the Texas and Mexican border, Pratt's contact zone draws its strength from its connection to real places, real times, and real interactions between individuals. In either case, the metaphors lose their power to inspire and educate when this material connection is severed. Set adrift, they become interesting places to explore, but nebulous, ethereal, and transitory. Easily accessed, but just as easily set aside.

In this paper I argue that the contact zone has undergone just such a severing. It has become dematerialized during its adaptation to the classroom by scholars seeking to find a way to approach difficult cultural and political topics in the classroom. As a dematerialized space it can be molded to fit the parameters of a specific course, or at times, a specific

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political agenda. It can be tailored to produce certain types of student writing and discussion that is challenging and new. But as a dematerialized space, students are able to come and go as they please, leaving the contact zone to wait for them until next class. As a result, the contact zone has lost its potency and is, I argue, being underutilized as a pedagogical space. What is needed is a rematerializing of contact zone pedagogy that asks students to first discover the intersections in their own lives and then explore the contact zones they find there. The space turned metaphor must find its way back to a connection with the material world, bringing it back from its current status as an imagined geography, to one of material space.

Connecting English pedagogy and scholarship to material geographies has become the focus of a number of English scholars interested in material rhetoric. Scholars such as Nedra Reynolds have begun to explore this phenomenon trying to build a bridge between the imagined geographies, and a material rhetoric that connects to actual spaces in our geography. This paper will use Reynolds as a guide to help conduct a spatial analysis of Pratt's contact zone to rethink contact zone pedagogy so it more closely adheres to its status as a social space instead of an imagined geography.

In her book *Geographies of Writing* Reynolds calls for a closer inspection of spaces and geography in composition studies to better understand how these spaces and material rhetoric influence the composition classroom. Reynolds explains the allure of the spatial metaphor for the composition scholar. She explains how a fledgling discipline trying to defend its status reaches out for legitimacy by invoking notions of wide-open spaces and unexplored territories. Composition chose to focus outwards instead of inwards when it "turned to imagined geographies to build its empire, rather than studying the relationship

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between the worn, urban classroom and the writing produced there" (27). But these metaphors are not without ties to the material world. Reynolds argues that spatial metaphors are not completely abstract, but rather "they are formed through the material world and the ways in which people experience space and place" (14). What, then, is the connection between Pratt's contact zone and the material world? To what extent can the contact zone be considered a material or 'real' space, and how is this space produced and to what purpose? A close spatial analysis of Pratt's contact zone can help answer these difficult questions and shed light on the implications of trying to define the contact zone as a model or theoretical framework rather than describing it as a social space, one in which students and teachers alike must inhabit.

Chapter two will outline Pratt's concept of the contact zone focusing on what we know about the contact zone as a space. I will then use the work of Nedra Reynolds to outline the dangers of treating the contact zone as an imagined geography rather than a material space. Finally, I will use Henri Lefebvre's definition of social space and his triad of spatial elements as a way to gauge how close applications of contact zone pedagogy are to the material realm.

In chapter three I will argue that the contact zone has been dematerialized starting with Pratt's limited discussion of the contact zone itself in favor of a more detailed view of the products produced by such a space. This dematerialization continues as scholars insist on turning the classroom into a contact zone whose focus is directed by the texts and subject matters chosen by the instructor. This chapter will review literature of scholars who have implemented the contact zone in their classrooms. I will argue, that by dictating the specific contact zone that the class will explore, the contact zone privileges the

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conceived aspect of social space but fails to acknowledge the perceived and lived aspects of Lefebvre's triad, severing any claims contact zone pedagogy has to material status.

Finally, chapter four will provide my suggestion for rematerializing the contact zone in the composition classroom through the use of the community profile assignment. The assignment I will outline shifts the focus away from the products being produced in the contact zone, to the process by which students identify and engage with contact zones they inhabit. I will argue that by asking students to investigate their own existing communities they will engage with the contact zones in their own lives producing authentic and meaningful composition that will help them negotiate the changing aspects in their lives as new college students, as well as prepare them for future cultural clashes they will experience throughout their academic and personal lives.

CHAPTER 2. THE CONTACT ZONE AS AN IMAGINED

GEOGRAPHY

To begin a spatial analysis of the contact zone, one must first explore what the contact zone as an actual place looks like. Such an exploration is more difficult than it sounds since Pratt has largely described the *products* of the contact zone, but has spent comparatively little time describing the contact zone itself. As a result, scholars are left to speculate about what it actually means to inhabit a contact zone and what exactly goes on there. In essence, scholars are left trying to imagine the inside of a factory by examining the goods that it produces. Without a clear understanding of the contact zone as a social space, scholars often explain the contact zone as they would any other theoretical abstraction with results based on the product and little attention given to the actual space in which that product is created.

The Contact Zone: A Spatial Analysis

Pratt gives very few glimpses into the contact zone itself but there are a few assumptions that can be made about it based on her explanations. For instance, it is clear that Pratt identified the contact zone as a reaction against the utopian ideas of community that suggest homogeneity of language, culture and experiences. In her address to the MLA conference she talked about the way language and communication get described as "discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members" (36). This explanation, according to Pratt, perpetuates the idea that communication is "governed by a single set of rules or norms shared by all participants" (35). Instead, Pratt argues that communication

happens in a more fluid state as participants are influenced by a number of factors in any given situation including differing power structures, class, and cultural backgrounds. The social space where this type of communication happens is what Pratt describes as the contact zone.

It can also be said that the contact zone is a space where artifacts are produced. This is the aspect of the contact zone that Pratt describes in the most detail. She gives the example of a 17th century letter written by an Andean named Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. This twelve hundred page letter, written in a mix of Spanish and Quechua represented to Pratt a prime example of an autoethnographic text, a genre she defines as "text[s] in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (34). This letter, according to Pratt outlines a number of qualities found in products of contact zones such as "miscomprehension, incomprehension...and absolute heterogeneity of meaning" (37). While Pratt provides no examples of texts produced from her own experience teaching in the contact zone, she does give a list of arts of the contact zone. In this list, she includes "storytelling...experiments in transculturation and collaborative work...critique, parody, and comparison" (40).

What is also clear about the contact zone, is that it can be a dangerous, and frightening place, one that challenges the notion of univocality in a classroom. According to Pratt the traditional task of the instructor to ""[unify] the world in the class's eyes by means of a monologue that rings equally coherent, revealing, and true for all" becomes impossible in a contact zone (38). Within the contact zone dissent is valued over unity, and students are asked to situate themselves at the most violent of cultural and historical

intersections. In describing her own course, Pratt outlines the effects of such a learning environment:

> Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom—the joys of the contact zone. The sufferings and revelations were at different moments to be sure, experienced by every student. No one was excluded, and no one was safe. (39)

To address the stresses working within a contact zone can present, Pratt expresses the need for a second kind of space she calls "safe houses". She defines safe houses as "social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust..." (38). This second space often gets overlooked by instructors trying to teach within the contact zone and is the focal point of the assignment described in this study.

Finally, Pratt gives clues into how a classroom actually becomes a contact zone. Pratt describes the sequence of events that led to the production of the contact zone as resulting from an internal dialogue at the university she taught at that challenged the traditional notions of Western-culture requirement. Within this dialogue the concepts of "national patrimony, cultural citizenship, and imagined community" came under fire and as a result a new course was created that "centered on the Americas and the multiple cultural histories...that have intersected here" (38). The contact zone as a social space was produced out of the creation of this new course and shaped by the particular texts and historical intersections Pratt and her fellow instructors decided to emphasize. While Pratt

does not talk about the formation of the contact zone in great length, from a spatial point of view this is one of the most important insights into the nature of the contact zone. It represents the closest thing to a blueprint for other instructors to reproduce contact zones in their own classrooms that fit their own pedagogical goals.

To recap, the contact zone is meant to be a space connected to the material world, as it is a reaction against the notion of imagined communities. We also know that the contact zone is a place where artifacts often plagued by miscomprehension and heterogeneity of meaning are produced. Also, the contact zone can be an unsettling place for both students and teachers alike, and must come paired with another space Pratt calls "safe houses" in which students can shelter from the stresses of inhabiting the contact zone. Finally, the instructors and other administrators of the institution, and not the students themselves, facilitate the process through which the specific contact zone is chosen, according to Pratt. The process is carried out by carefully choosing texts and subject matters for discussion.

This summary outlines how little is known about the contact zone as an actual space. The lack of a clear understanding of some of the most integral parts of contact zone pedagogy, such as the process by which the contact zone is established, the creation of 'safe houses' and student input in the overall process, results in a type of spatial confusion as scholars, more accustomed to handling abstract concepts and theoretical frameworks, suddenly take on the role of spatial architects. As scholars go about changing their classrooms into contact zones they run the risk of treating the contact zone like a theory instead of a place, in essence dematerializing it and pushing it towards the imagined geography Nedra Reynolds warns against. Ultimately, scholars must choose, either the

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contact zone is an actual social space subject to the qualities of spatial production and use, or it is an abstraction, useful for pushing theoretical ideas forward but lacking a meaningful connection with the material world. One or the other, it cannot be both. How one answers this question has important implications in the contact zone classroom. The next section will look at some of those implications and will argue that the contact zone is more valuable as a social space than an imagined geography.

The Dangers of a Disembodied Ideal

The past fifteen years has seen a push towards establishing a material rhetoric in both theory and practice within English Studies. As schools and classrooms have become more diverse and multiculturalism more central to the English classroom, many scholars are worried about the process of dematerializing difficult concepts from their material grounding. Pratt's contact zone theory seems to, on the surface, fit nicely with material rhetoric. According to Pratt the contact zone was created as a move against idealized notions of community, or the ideas of communities after they have been disembodied from the actual people who make them up. However, when a classroom is turned into a contact zone through the carefully selected texts and topics chosen by instructors and institutions, the danger exists that the students, and their own unique positions within such a contact zone will be untethered from their own backgrounds and experiences. To fully realize the implications of a materialized contact zone, a closer look is needed at the field of material rhetoric and the dangers of disembodied ideals.

Richard Marback has described what a material rhetoric would look like. To Marback, a push towards material rhetoric would avoid reducing the people of a place to the representations of their existence. He uses the city of Detroit as an example in his

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article "Detroit and the Closed Fist": "A material theory of rhetoric would not reduce the text of the city (its representations as in agony or despair or hope or rage) to the bodies of its residents...or to the landscape of the city itself" (86). According to Marback, such a reduction would "[dematerialize] the force of rhetoric by making representations solely dependent on corporeal beings and physical conditions" (86). Nor would material rhetoric reduce the physical embodiments of a place to texts. Such a reduction he claims "dematerializes the force of rhetoric by eliminating material conditions altogether" (86). Instead, material rhetoric strives to maintain an equilibrium between the spaces, texts, and people of a place "out of recognition that the significance of spaces grounds in uses of texts at the same time that the meanings of texts ground in uses of spaces" (86).

Marback's description of a material rhetoric highlights the contributions such a theory offers to a contact zone pedagogy. By considering contact zone theory through the lens of material rhetoric, it becomes clear that a classroom contact zone designed by an instructor runs the risk of reducing the contact zone itself to an ideal, or at the least a distancing of the contact zone from the lived experiences of the students meant to benefit from it. Ultimately, the task of an instructor attempting to make of their classroom a contact zone centered around a specific topic or issue must lose its material grounding unless it takes into account each students individual experiences and conceptions.

Reynolds approaches the question of material rhetoric from a slightly different angle, focusing on the role spatial metaphors and imagined geographies have played in English studies, while outlining some of the risks involved when using them in the classroom. At the heart of the issue, Reynolds outlines one of the major drawbacks to spatial metaphors and imagined geographies:

What spatial metaphors and conceptions of space tend to ignore are the

ways in which people move through the world, or the spatial practices that

shape lifeworlds. It is not only *places* and their built-in constraints that

determine certain practices, which then become habitual or taken for

granted, but also the adjustments and compromises, the shifts and turns in

the process of accommodating to a place. (14)

Reynolds' emphasis on spatial practice and the way people move in the material world

seems to mirror Pratt's insistence that the contact zone be removed from disembodied

ideals such as the idealized notion of community. While Pratt's initial description of the

contact zone seems to agree with Reynolds assessment, the application of contact zone

pedagogy often moves away from a clear focus on student's movement throughout their

own social spaces relying instead on an imagined homogeneity in the classroom that, often

due to limitations created from deadlines and schedules, assumes students move through

their social spaces in similar ways.

Besides ignoring the way people move through social spaces, Reynolds claims that

imagined geographies often "[assume] transparent space—where there are clear insiders or

outsiders" (32). Teachers struggling to make the contact zone work in their classrooms run

the risk of this assumption as they focus their attention on the parameters of the zone,

namely, what texts or subject matter may delineate the boundaries of the space, without

taking into account the geographical location of their surroundings or the lived experiences

of the students.

Reynolds doesn't just focus her attention on imagined geographies as a generic

term. She narrows in on the contact zone itself when she draws on Richard Marback's work

that criticizes the contact zone for being a disembodied ideal when as a concept it fails to be "thickly informed by geographic manifestations of borders and communities, assimilation and difference in urban space" (Marback qtd. Reynolds 41). Reynolds agrees with Marback taking the criticism a step further when she argues, "material theories of rhetoric must either reject disembodied ideals—those created through spatial metaphors—or learn how to fold them into corporeal, spatial, and textual efforts to locate rhetorical agency in public life" (42). But learning how to connect spatial metaphors to the material world can be a difficult task. To accomplish this, Reynolds suggests that instructors "focus on spatial practices of the everyday—those habitual movements through space that are often taken for granted or ignored—and try to understand how they inscribe differences" (45).

The field of material rhetoric as represented by Reynolds and Marback challenges instructors interested in using the contact zone to privilege student experience by acknowledging that each student enters the classroom with distinct social and spatial practices. The teacher interested in a contact zone pedagogy may identify a contact zone through carefully chosen texts that represent different voices within that contact zone, while teachers following Marback and Reynold's vision of material rhetoric may still employ the use of texts to set the parameters of the contact zone, but will equally privilege student's movement through their own social spaces. The materialistic approach can be messy. It involves transferring authority away from the teacher, away from the chosen texts, and giving it to the students. Such a transfer of power can result in a chaotic classroom where each student's lived experiences serve as an equally valid response to the material discussed in class. To help make some sense of this chaos and provide a

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theoretical platform upon which a materialized contact zone pedagogy can stand, teachers can refer to the work of Henri Lefebvre and his discussion of what constitutes social spaces. Henri Lefebvre provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of social space in his book *The Production of Space* that we can use to better understand how to ensure the contact zone remains connected to the material world.

Perceived, Conceived, and Lived Space

Pratt describes the contact zone as a 'social space', a somewhat difficult concept when compared with the traditional meaning of the concept of space. However, recent work by cultural geographers has put forth a strong argument towards the idea that social space exists alongside the physical embodiment. In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre gives this detailed description of social space:

> Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity--their (relative) order and (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. (73)

This description outlines some of the benefits and dangers of conducting pedagogy in such a space. If a contact zone is indeed a social space, then it is one that subsumes

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things produced. In the case of English studies, this makes sense as much of the pedagogy deals with interacting with existing texts and the challenge of the English classroom is often rooted in the task of exploring the relationship between texts, historical periods, and cultural tendencies. The other important aspect of Lefebvre's description of social spaces is his emphasis on the valuing and prohibiting of certain actions. Pratt seems aware of this aspect of the contact zone and describes her classroom experiences of teaching in the social space as one that tries to limit the prohibitive aspects of the social space.

Lefebvre is very clear that there is nothing abstract about his notion of social space, but both he and Reynolds understand how easily a materialized view of social space can be turned into an imaginary or disembodied ideal. Lefebvre provides us with his triad, a concept of space that attempts to show how space is created and used. According to Lefebvre space can be split up into three aspects: perceived space, conceived space, and lived space each of which is necessary for a space to maintain it's connection to the material world.

According to Lefebvre, perceived space is "the practical basis of the perception of the outside world" (40). It is the connection between what we consider a space and the material world. Conceived space is "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (33). Conceived space is concerned with the way we interpret space based on knowledge and thought. Lived Space is "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (39). In other words, lived space deals with our interaction with the spaces we inhabit. This is the spatial

movement that Reynolds claims is often ignored by imagined geographies. Lefebvre gives

an excellent explanation of his spatial triad when he compares it to the human body:

> Considered overall, [perceived space] presupposes the use of the body: the
> use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as
> of activity unrelated to work...as for *representations of the body* [conceived
> space], they derive from accumulated scientific knowledge, disseminated
> with an admixture of ideology: from the knowledge of anatomy, of
> physiology, of sickness and its cure, and of the body's relations with nature
> and with its surroundings of 'milieu'. Bodily *lived* experience, for its part,
> maybe both highly complex and quite peculiar, because 'culture' intervenes
> here, with its illusory immediacy. (40)

Lefebvre goes on to discuss the differences between the conceived notions of specific parts

of our bodies such as the heart or sexual organs and the perceived and lived notions of the

same.

The classroom serves as an alternate metaphor for Lefebvre's triad. The

chalkboards, desks, windows (or lack of) all represent the perceived aspect of the

classroom space. Layered on top of the perceived is the conceived, this is the cultural and

social interpretations of what a classroom *means* that students and teachers carry with them

when they enter the space. Finally, the daily activities that take place within the classroom,

the social interactions between the students, the mannerisms of the instructor, all of these

aspects create the actual lived representation of that space. To ignore any one of the triad is

to be left with an incomplete understanding of the space in question. Lefebvre takes it a

step further when he claims that "the perceived-conceived-lived triad...loses all force if it is

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treated as an abstract 'model'. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the 'immediate'), then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than that of one ideological mediation among others" (40).

Marback, Reynolds, and Lefebvre each provide a piece of the puzzle that can help illuminate what a materialized contact zone will actually look like. Both Marback and Reynolds emphasize the importance of keeping a material rhetoric such as the contact zone tied to lived experiences of its inhabitants. Lefebvre then gives a concrete definition of a social space that both limits the possible scope of the contact zone as a pedagogical tool by insisting its adherence to his triad, while also legitimatizing it with his claim that social spaces, such as the contact zone, are at the heart of meaningful social action.

After looking at the contact zone through the lens of material rhetoric and spatial theory, it becomes apparent that a materialized contact zone must originate from the students themselves to maintain the necessary ties to the material world through their own lived experiences. By defining a specific contact zone through selected texts or directed classroom discussions, the contact zone becomes an imagined geography in which the students are asked to work within a social space that is formed through perceptions and experiences other than their own. Lefebvre's triad is damaged when the perceived and conceived aspect of a space is prescribed rather than found. This type of use of the contact zone can challenge students to look at the world through the eyes of other cultures and perspectives, but falls short of a materialized contact zone when considered through the lens of material and spatial rhetoric.

Lefebvre's triad gives us a way to determine if Pratt and other scholars who have set out to turn their classroom space into a contact zone have stayed true to the

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requirements a social space needs to avoid abstraction. The next chapter will take a closer

look at a number of implementations of the contact zone arguing that in most cases the

contact zone has undergone a dematerialization and more closely resembles Reynolds

'disembodied ideal' than Pratt's social space.

CHAPTER 3. APPLICATIONS OF THE CONTACT ZONE

In 2002 Janice M. Wolff edited a collection of articles focused on exploring the pedagogical applications of the contact zone. In her book *Professing in the Contact Zone* Wolff has brought together voices of scholars from all corners of the English discipline as they wrestle with the concept of the contact zone and its place within the academy. The articles in Wolff's book do not only deal with the composition classroom. Patricia Bizzell's article "Multiculturalism, Contact Zones, and the Organization of English Studies" suggests using contact zone theory as the basis for a complete reorganization of the English Literature curriculum. Carol Severino discusses the contact zone as a way to describe the modern day writing center in her article "Writing Centers as Linguistic Contact Zones and Borderlands", while Carole Yee writes about using the contact zone as a model for administering writing programs in the university. The far reaching implications of contact zone theory in the English discipline are a testament for the promise scholars see in Pratt's description of the contact zone but as the literature will reveal, the contact zone is most often referred to as a metaphor or an imagined geography that helps scholars conceptualize new ways to deal with multiculturalism and inherent power struggles in the classroom. Noticeabley absent in this collection and other scholarly work on the subject of contact zones is a connection to material rhetoric or the idea that the contact zone itself is anything more than one metaphor among many in the English discipline. Perhaps nowhere does this sentiment come across clearer than in Wolff's own article "Teaching in the Contact Zone: The Myth of Safe Houses" and her final resignation after her own frustrating experience with contact zone pedagogy when she says " Read about the 'contact zone,' use it as a metaphor for the classroom, let it inform pedagogy, but always with a

Derridean caveat: Use the term under erasure" (Wolff 253). This chapter will try to show

how the contact zone has become dematerialized; downgraded from an actual social space

to a spatial metaphor.

The previous chapter explored the dangers of treating the contact zone as an imagined

geography and gave compositionists ways to assess contact zone pedagogies to see if they

are indeed examples of social spaces connected to the material world. Many scholars have

tried to wrestle the concept of the contact zone into a manageable model for the classroom,

but As Mark Hall and Mary Rosner say in their article "Pratt and Pratfalls Revisioning

Contact Zones" "stipulating a single definition for contact zones may be useful in reducing

some of the ambiguity by making the term reflect an organized and single meaning, [but]

black boxing it in that way may invite us to use the term uncritically, to idealize it and

ignore its limitations" (97). Rather than focusing on how people define the contact zone,

my study will try to study the contact zones themselves. How are the contact zones

produced and who is producing them? Does the pedagogical model include attention to

each of Lefebvre's elements of space? Looking at specific assignments where possible

such an investigation will show how the contact zone has been applied in English

classrooms.

One scholar who has made use of the contact zone is Jeffrey Maxson. In his article

"Government of da Peeps, for da Peeps, and by da Peeps": Revisiting the Contact Zone"

Maxson describes his approach to the contact zone as "more narrow in that rather than

issues of racism, classism, sexism, or homophobia in the culture at large, it takes as its

subject matter the situation of the writing classroom and its enforced formality of

language" (27). Maxson identifies an assignment in which students are asked to rewrite

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important historical documents using different forms of discourse. He gives student examples of a valley-girl translation of Martin Luther King's famous speech, and an African American vernacular translation of Romeo and Juliet. Just as isolating literature from the Americas produced Pratt's contact zone, Maxson has produced a contact zone by focusing on the linguistic attributes of academic versus vernacular language. Maxson calls this a 'domesticated' contact zone, one that "sidestep[s] the more treacherous ground of competing discourses among students, or between students and teacher" (39).

While Maxson's approach to the contact zone has produced interesting and unique student writing that model many of the qualities Pratt attributes to arts of the contact zone (i.e. parody, critique) his attempt to domesticate the contact zone forces him to ignore important spatial qualities of the contact zone as described by Pratt such as the existence of 'safe houses'. His assignment also flirts with the very idea of imagined communities Pratt works against by encouraging the notion of living speech communities that are "held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all members" (Pratt 36). In regards to Lefebvre, his contact zone deals heavily with the notion of conceived space through its attention to the academic and vernacular discourse communities, but doesn't seem to draw on the perceived aspect of space. By exaggerating the discourse conventions of student speech in the forms of sensationalized versions of stereotypical discourse models such as the 'valley girl' voice, students are able to distance themselves from the actual contact zone as their own language comes into contact with that of the academy.

Phyllis van Slyck is another scholar who has experimented with the contact zone in her classroom. Slyck envisions a course or group of courses that are organized based on a

central theme such as the role of women or cultures and communication. This would create a "new kind of contact zone, one in which students can examine texts which foreground and critique different cultural groups attitudes towards a common issue" (155). Slyck is engaging in the dematerializing of the contact zone as she attempts to move it away from a spatial existence and towards a theoretical one, calling it a "curricular model of a more pluralistic and interactive approach to literatures and cultures represented in emerging student populations" (152). Redefining the contact zone as a curricular model adds flexibility to its use in the classroom and allows for the types of thematically centered courses Slyck is advocating for, but severs the connection of the contact zone to the material world.

Here Slyck is again relying on the conceived notions of space. While this approach could be useful as a way to help outline a number of courses or develop a systematic approach to literature, this reproduction of the contact zone becomes problematic as it ignores the individuality of the students moving through the classes.

Another scholar who has struggled with the contact zone as a spatial entity is Richard Miller. Like Pratt, Miller is focusing more on the products produced from the contact zone and less on the contact zone itself. In his article "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone" Richard Miller describes a situation that exemplifies the real-world challenges teaching in the contact zone can produce. He recounts the story of an essay titled "Queers, Bums, and Magic" that was first brought to the attention of the larger English Studies community at an MLA workshop in 1991 and which became the focus of a full panel at the CCCC in 1992. In it, a student, responding to an assignment to write about group behavior by describing an occasion where a group of young men found and beat a homeless man on

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the streets of San Francisco. Using language that would today be considered hate speech, the student writes about the experience leaving the essay's validity ultimately vague.

Miller's article raises important questions for instructors considering teaching in the contact zone, namely, how to respond to the types of products the contact zone produces. Like Pratt, Miller is focusing primarily on the arts of the contact zone rather than the contact zone as a space. He argues that the "the classroom does not...automatically function as a contact zone in the positive ways Pratt discovered in the Stanford course" (399). It is interesting that when discussing the stresses of the contact zone as they manifest in the "Queers, Bums, and Magic" essay Miller does not mention Pratt's insistence on the importance of "safe houses". Without these second spaces it becomes necessary for instructors to try to redefine the contact zone to create a more manageable classroom experience. Miller is struggling with the same thing many struggle with when thinking about the contact zone: is it a real or imaginary place? Miller comes down on the side of the imaginary when he says "Reimagining the classroom as a contact zone is a potentially powerful pedagogical intervention only so long as it involves resisting the temptation either to silence or to celebrate" student voices (407).

There are a few more recent articles that suggest the contact zone without mentioning it specifically. One such example is William Thelin's article "Student Investment in Political Topics". Thelin outlines a composition course that seeks to "maintain political rigor" in his classroom while helping students "become change agents" (Thelin 144). Thelin believes that his students will have a better chance of financial success after college by "developing an awareness of the cultural contradictions of capitalism and engaging in...concomitant political action" (Thelin 143). In his class, Thelin

has his students explore the relationship the United States has with other foreign states. He describes an assignment that asks his students to investigate foreign dictators and "explore the historical context of imperialist politics and globalization" (144). In this example Thelin is clearly dictating the borders of the contact zone he is working within however, unlike Pratt and Slyck, Thelin has created a contact zone that is bordered by his own political ideals. Such an approach serves as a dematerialization of the contact zone because it does not take into account student's position in relation to the subject matter being discussed. At conflict here are not two cultures grappling for power, but rather the abstraction of the same stemming from the instructors interpretation of the cultures inherent qualities.

Thelin's approach is representative of the danger of creating a contact zone from one perspective. While he is stretching student understanding of their country and asking for detailed and challenging writing from them, he has constructed a contact zone out of his own conceived notion of space with little regard to the way the students conceive of it. His attention towards the politics does give his contact zone a connection to lived representations of space but without regard for the way student's conceive the space they inhabit, his model remains dematerialized as a contact zone.

Another example of a pedagogical approach that seems to be closely linked to contact zone theory but doesn't acknowledge the term can be found in Shannon Carter's article "Living Inside the Bible (Belt)" which appeared in *College English* in 2007. In it Carter depicts her struggles as a college composition instructor teaching evangelical Christians. These students she claims live in a "community of practice" whose cultural references, and communal beliefs create the framework upon which a Christian literacy

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develops (578). This literacy allows the students to base their arguments upon texts and

concepts that may be validated within the dimensions of a Christian literacy, but

simultaneously are at odds with the beliefs and practices that make up the academic

literacy. Though Carter does not mention contact zones in her article it is clear that she

views her classroom as a place where two cultures are grappling with each other and it is

out of this conflict that she calls for an emphasis on rhetorical dexterity allowing students

to move from one practice of beliefs and ideas to another. Carter's contact zone differs

from some of the others I've discussed in one simple but important way. Where Pratt,

Maxson and Slyck describe a classroom as a controlled environment where the contact

zone is created from specifically chosen texts and subject matter, Carter is identifying a

contact zone that exists outside of her specific class. To continue to apply Pratt's

vocabulary of the contact zone to Carter's article, Carter has attempted to turn her

classroom not into a contact zone, but into a safe house in which students can learn to

explore and negotiate the pitfalls of a specific contact zone in their lived experience.

To do this, Carter assigned writing exercises that focused on their religious

upbringing and background rather than attempting to ignore that aspect of the student's life.

For example, one of Carter's students wrote a paper entitled "What Makes Christianity

Significant?" (590). This assignment challenged her students to attempt to explain to those

'illiterate in the Christian faith, the significance and purposes behind some of those

practices the student had been participating in throughout her life. Carter's description of

her classroom presents us with our closest glimpse of a materialized contact zone, one with

real ties to a specific geographic and social environment. In creating a safe house out of

her classroom and asking students to explore their own contact zones as they exist outside

of the classroom, Carter is giving credence to the conceived aspect of space (academic and religious discourses and literacies), and the lived experiences of her students as they inhabit such a place. There is one aspect of Carter's description that remains unclear, namely, how does the classroom function for the student who was not raised in an Evangelical home? While paying attention to the local geographic and cultural realities of space is important, it is also important to avoid over-generalizations. Reynolds explains that "Cultural geographers..have long resisted a one-to-one correspondence between the land and the culture... . Just because someone spends her whole life in one place, a neighborhood or house, doesn't mean that she has a resultant stable identity, or adopts the same habits as all of her neighbors, or uses all the same pathways" (57).

There are a few patterns that emerge when looking at the ways scholars have made use of the contact zone. First of all, few of the examples above mention the second space Pratt claims is necessary for a contact zone to be used, the safe house. As a result, scholars like Miller and Maxson try to change or reimagine the contact zone to account for its absence. Secondly, with the exception of Carter, every example above has the contact zone being produced by the instructors alone. Whether it's a specifically chosen set of texts, or a conceptualized view of international politics, a single person in the classroom, the teacher, is producing the contact zone. I believe Carter is closer even than Pratt to a materialized version of the contact zone when she tries to ask students to explore the contact zones in their own lives, and treat the classroom as the safe house where they can come together and share their experiences. It should be noted that the examples mentioned here represent thoughtful and inspiring classroom models. It is only when viewed from a spatial perspective that they fall short of the promise of the contact zone. In the following chapter,

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I will present my suggestion for making use of the contact zone as a social space, one that pays attention to the elements of space as described by Lefebvre while avoiding the imagined geographies that Reynolds argues against.

CHAPTER 4. TOWARD A MATERIALIZED CONTACT ZONE

The Community Profile

After looking at the various ways that contact zone pedagogy has been utilized it becomes clear that in each instance, the contact zone is specified before the class even begins by the instructor of the course. Whether it is Thelin's political emphasis, Maxson's attention to the tension between academic and vernacular discourse, Slyck's vision of a group of classes focusing on specific contact zones, or Carter's attention to the Evangelical and Academic discourse communities, the students are absent from the decision making process. I believe that for the contact zone to be used in a materialized way, there are two things that need to happen. First students must identify a social space that is descriptive but not analytical. Here they are exploring the social spaces they inhabit and in so doing, identifying their own personal contact zones. Next the students are asked to write an analytical commentary that explores their contact zone from multiple perspectives. Such an approach would allow for the complex lived experiences each student brings to the classroom. In this chapter I will emphasize the first step of this process, where students are asked to describe a social space they inhabit and identify contact zones created as their communities clash with others.

For the past two years I have been using a community profile assignment that attempts to have students identify, describe, and analyze a specific social space that they inhabit. The assignment asks students to write a profile of a community they are a part of. Each student is required to interview an insider and outsider of the community, describe a

place or setting associated with the community, and identify a conflict area within the community.

The assignment emphasizes specific writing skills such as primary and secondary research, source integration, description, and maintaining cohesion through complex organization. It also emphasizes discovery before exploration. Instead of introducing a contact zone and asking students to explore it, they must first identify and describe places in their lives where contact zones exist. Once a contact zone is identified students are asked to explore that intersection. I believe this assignment deals with many of the more difficult aspects of working with the contact zone. It asks students to explore the perceived, conceived, and lived aspects of social spaces they inhabit and turns the classroom into a safe house where students feel comfortable coming together and sharing the results of their exploration as a group.

This assignment differs from Pratt's concept of the classroom as a contact zone along with the interpretations others have made of Pratt's theory by placing the focus of the classroom on the discovery and exploration of the individual contact zones students already inhabit. Shannon Carter's contact zone pedagogy moves in a similar direction of allowing students to explore their own contact zones, but I believe by narrowing the focus to the tensions between the Christian and Academic world views such a pedagogy runs the risk of ignoring the complexities and lived experiences students bring with them into the classroom.

I have collected data from students who have completed the community profile both in my classes, and in classes of other instructors who have adopted the assignment. Students were asked to answer a brief questionnaire that identified them on simple

demographic data such as age, gender, and whether they grew up in a rural or urban environment. Along with the demographic information, students in my own classes were asked to write guided reflections throughout the composition process. The topic of student reflections ranged from the student's experiences listing and naming the communities they were a part of, to discussing the interview process and explaining the differences they encountered between insider and outsider perspectives of their communities. These reflections were conducted in a controlled electronic environment where each student could read their classmates reflections on the writing process. Besides providing me with a way to gauge student interest and engagement, the reflections allowed students to share their experiences together throughout the assignment. This turned out to have a positive effect on the students and facilitated the formation of a classroom 'safe house'.

To begin, I ask the students to create a social fingerprint. This is a mapping exercise that asks students to list the communities they are a part of and rank communities based on how strongly they feel the community defines them as people. The map is conducted on a 'copy' of their own fingerprint, allowing for multiple communities to share the same level of distinction. Communities are broken up into four areas, residential, occupational, recreational, and personal though students are free to make their own classifications. This process of identifying communities and ranking them can prove difficult for students many of whom have not thought about the breadth of communities they are a part of. Here is one student's response to this portion of the assignment:

When asked to think of which communities I belong to a few obvious one came to my mind at first. I am an American, a resident of Fargo, a student at [XXXX] etc. When I thought about the issue a little more I realize my

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hobbies that I like could count as a community also. I like to lift weights, so I would consider myself a member of the Wellness Center lifting community. We all have common goals and its easy to talk to anyone there, I have a sense of belonging. I realized that being a part of a community isn't always about geography. It's about being a part of something where people have common goals and can relate to one another as well as having a sense of belonging.

This is a good example of the kind of thinking that students must undertake when talking about communities. This student is acknowledging the perceived aspects of his social space (the geographical realities of place) as well as the lived aspects or social interactions and experiences that also contribute to the community as a social space. It is interesting to note how students perceive community. For some, community is tied to a location or the perceived notion of space: hometowns, neighborhoods, dormitories etc. Others pick out conceived notions of space and base their community lists off of them: Religious communities, families, interest groups etc.. Still others identify communities based on lived experiences: Wives of deployed soldiers, victims of natural disasters, and sufferers of specific health disorders. The community profile assignment does not dictate a specific definition of community, but rather allows students to choose what they wish, then requires them to explore the other factors that make it a social space.

The process of identifying communities and choosing one to explore is the primary way that this assignment seeks to ground itself in the material world of the student. Unlike the examples listed in the previous chapter, each student is allowed to choose a community they inhabit and explore that community's contact zone as it clashes with other entities.

Giving the choice to the students results in some clear patterns. Of 66 surveyed students 33 of them wrote about recreational communities, 13 wrote about residential communities, 12 wrote about personal communities, and eight wrote about occupational communities. For a complete list of communities students chose to write about see appendix B. By not requiring students to tackle highly sensitive issues in their lives the door is left open for them to choose unthreatening communities that they consider 'easy' topics. Take for example this students explanation of why he chose to write about the wakeboarding community.

> The community I chose was the wakeboard community. On my social fingerprint this community was pretty close to the center. It was kind of a tough decision when it came to choosing which community I was going to write about. I really didn't have any other communities in mind so when I finally decided to write about my community I stuck with it. I chose the community I did because I know a lot about it and its one of my favorite things to do. I figured it would be easy to write about and maybe it would make this assignment a bit more enjoyable to do if it was something I really liked.

On the other hand, some students take the opportunity to write about difficult aspects of their own lives and communities. One student sticks out in particular as an example of the necessity for the classroom safe-house. She was an older than average student who was struggling with infertility in her life and was thinking about writing on the community of infertile women she was a part of. Initially she came to me to discuss her reservations about writing on the topic. She described her hesitancy to share her condition

with the rest of the class. She eventually overcame her reservations and chose the infertility community to write about.

While writing about the infertility community may seem more in line with the unsettling nature of the contact zone, I argue that even those students who choose communities they are comfortable with eventually must face the places their communities clash with others. In these clashes the students are presented with the challenge of understanding the inherent power struggles that inevitably exist between cultures, struggles that gain potency by the student's own position within them. A closer break down of the assignment will help illustrate how students with widely different communities all must explore their own material contact zones.

To get students to focus on all three aspects of space as described by Lefebvre, the community profile asks for specific sections. For perceived space, students must write an introduction that describes a location or event associated with their community. Students are asked to describe this aspect of their community using the five senses as a guide with the goal of helping the reader experience what it's like being a part of that community. Depending on what type of community the student has chosen, this can either be an easy or difficult task. For a student who has chosen a community that is defined by a location this can be a relatively easy portion of the assignment. Take the student who chose to write about the wakeboarding community:

> 7 a.m., you are standing on the platform strapping on your boots and buckling your life jacket, as you insert your feet into the bindings the brisk water touches your feet, giving you a good indication of how cold you are going to be in a few moments. At this moment you are asking yourself if

this is all worth it. The engine turns over and you hear a loud roar followed

by the sound of large bubbles breaking the surface. The platform starts to

vibrate rapidly as fumes rise from the water and enter your nostrils. You

look out across the lake, as the sun peeks over the trees you now see that a

light fog lifts off the water. Finally you realize why you were up so damn

early and begin to believe it was all worth it. One more quick scan of the

lake and you notice there is not another boat in sight; the lake is yours.

In describing the lake, this student is outlining the perceived space that his community

inhabits. The perceived aspect is explored by asking students to describe physical spaces

associated with their community using the five senses. What does the community space

look like, what are the sounds and smells. As a result many students choose to employ

second person language to ask the reader to experience their community on a tactile level.

Such description becomes more difficult when the community a student chooses is based

on something without a clear geographical space. The following example shows how a

student writing about the singles community described the space in which her community

exists:

It's the first day of class and you're innocently glancing around the room

when someone quite attractive catches your eye. You instantly begin

processing your game plan for attack. You'll listen closely as everyone goes

around introducing themselves by name, make note of it, and will eventually

(after a non-creeperish amount of time of course) add them on Facebook.

When you finally receive that notification proclaiming you've been

accepted, you'll immediately proceed to scroll down until you get to the

information you're dying to know...their relationship status. Single?

Perfect, it's on.

Here the student is identifying not one but two spaces where her community exists, the physical geography of the classroom and the electronic space of social networking sites. Students writing about electronic communities must explore the complex social interactions of online identity. For instance, the student who chose a multiplayer online role playing game in which avatars are created and interact with the avatars of people from around the country and world must work harder to describe the perceived aspect of their community than the student who chose to write about the wakeboarding community. This happens because each community has a unique interplay with Lefebre's triad. The student who is a member of an online gaming community may be less aware of the perceived aspects of that social space, but more aware of the conceived since the gaming community is largely defined by a clear set of rules and expectations. The community profile assignment works to level out students understanding of their community, shoring up gaps between the lived, perceived and conceived aspects of their community.

To get students to explore the conceived aspect of their community they are required to provide a section on different perspectives of their community. To do this, students interview an insider as well as an outsider to see how these perceptions differ. Insider and outsider perspectives allow students to differentiate between the perceived aspect of their community as it exists in the physical representations of space their community inhabits, the lived aspect of their community as it pertains to the movements and interactions that take place within the social space, and the conceived notion of their

social space, or how people imagine it to be. The following is an excerpt from a student paper using an outsider's perspective of tourist season in their hometown:

> In the summer, the Blueberry Arts Festival is hosted at Whiteside Park, which consists of some tall birches and pines. Various tent booths are set up back to back, each displaying a multitude of artworks, craftsmanship, and even food. "Moving through the crowd during the festival is like swimming," states [xxx] who visits [xxx] nearly every summer, "you have to swim through and around the crowd to make your way".

The student follows this with his own view as well as that of a fellow insider:

> Over the years I've witnessed influx of tourists through my very window. At times, these very people sometimes can be quite frustrating and clueless. "I just hate it in the summer. They're so stupid when it comes to driving and it's like they're invading our town," says [xxxx], who has lived in [xxx] his entire life.

The difference between the way insiders and outsiders describe ones community helps students recognize the fluidity of the conceived notion of space. It also highlights the importance of Lefebvre's triad when dealing with contact zones. For the outsider, the perceived and conceived notion of the town is one without a clear contact zone between residents and tourists, whereas the insider identifies the tension between the two groups of people as a frustrating clash of cultures.

After isolating the perceived and conceived notion of the space their communities inhabit, students are asked to identify an issue or conflict within their community. This serves two functions. First it makes sure that students explore the lived property of their

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social space by not focusing on generalizations or nostalgia but on actual events happening in their community. Secondly, it puts students in the contact zone as their community grapples with issues external to itself. Going back to the wakeboarding paper, the student identifies a point of conflict between his and other communities essentially isolating a contact zone:

> In many areas boaters, tubers, and fishermen have issues with these riders. The best spots for wakeboarding tend to be the best spots for boaters, tubers and especially fishermen. Wakeboard boats are designed to make big wakes and generally have a lot of horsepower. The issue fishermen have with these riders is not so much the riders themselves, but the boats that they use. The fishermen are trying to have a peaceful day of fishing and these boats are going back and forth creating huge wakes, rocking the fishermen's boats and can be quite an annoyance.

The student then goes on to show the other side of the controversy:

> On the other hand these fishermen are sitting in spots where these wakeboarders wish to ride, making it hard to maneuver around these fishing boats while getting in a good session. "These fishing boats sit directly in our line and when we drive within a safe distance they always seem to get mad, but really we are obeying the law," says [xxx]. The fishermen are not tolerating these wakeboarders any longer and are complaining to the game and fish. The game and fish then set up no wake zones in desirable riding water.

The wakeboarding paper is a good example of the doors that open up for the second part of the contact zone approach I am arguing for. What started as a community profile about a topic the student felt comfortable with and chose because it would be 'easy' results in the identification of a contact zone between different groups of recreational water users and the government, a contact zone that is at the heart of a number of major issues surrounding overpopulation and the management of natural resources. This pattern continues, for instance, the profile of the singles community eventually identifies the contact zone between the online and face-to-face cultures that are taking shape as the use of technology continues to grow. The student who wrote about the infertility community eventually identifies two different cultures within her community, those who have the financial capability to seek treatment and those who do not. The contact zone that is created as these two cultures class echoes the ongoing class struggles in this country as well as topics of ethical health care that are at the forefront of our political climate. Each of these represents Pratt's concept of the contact zone as social spaces where cultures collide but they are each approached through concrete material connections within the student's life.

One complaint some may raise about the community profile assignment is that it does not go far enough in asking students to explore sensitive and difficult social problems. It is true that allowing students to choose their communities can result in students picking 'easy' communities, things they're interested in or topics they feel are unthreatening, however by working under the assumption that communities are social spaces with their own contact zones, asking students like those mentioned above to explore these communities results in a better understanding of how communities and other social spaces

function together. Ultimately, students identify and explore their own contact zones as they appear in their lives.

Not every community profile produced by students hits the mark on every aspect of the assignment. Most of the problems that arise in the community profile assignment stem from students emphasizing one aspect of the triad over another. Students might, for example, go to great lengths to describe a personal experience of theirs within the community that does not work toward establishing that community as a legitimate social space. Other students may be tempted to provide extensive background or historical information on their community and in so doing, ignore the lived aspect of their social spaces. Another difficulty many students have is keeping the description of their community objective. The result is a paper that falls into the idealized notion of community that Pratt was initially theorizing against. These difficulties exist, and make the community profile an assignment that demands a conscious pedagogy of instructing students on the importance of each leg of Lefebvre's triad.

When the assignment works well the community profile can present an enlightening glimpse into the social spaces of the student and push the student toward making new discoveries about their own identities. As an example, I will use a paper written by a student I will call Casey.

Casey chose to write about the rural community, the choice was not an easy one as he describes in a student response:

> When I was deciding what to write about, I had a couple ideas so that made
> it hard. I first thought of doing the community of hunters, but decided not to
> because ... I didn't. I really don't know why, just that I thought rural would

be better. I still feel that I could do the hunting community. Also I thought

of doing the community of those who enjoy the outdoors. I felt this could

possibly turn into too large of a topic so that is why I didn't do it. I

ultimately chose rural because I felt like I could give more details and

experiences about this than the others. Also I feel that I relate to this

community a little close than the others as well.

Casey begins his profile with a description of rural life that mixes the perceived qualities of

the space with idealized conceived notions of what it is like:

You awake to the sounds of the breeze rustling the leaves, birds singing

outside your window, and the crisp, fresh scent of an early summer morning.

Laying there for the first few seconds of being awake, you feel the sun's

warmth penetrate down below the covers from the rays shining in through

your open window. You turn over and glance outside to see the birds, but all

you see is the overwhelming expanse of pure deep blue sky beyond several

full and lush green branches of leaves. Even without seeing the birds, you

know exactly what type they are, mourning doves.

In the first few paragraphs of the profile, Casey outlines many of the perceived aspects of

the rural community as a social space drawing on idealized concepts but not providing any

first-hand knowledge that would link it to lived experience. At this point in the paper,

Casey is clearly thinking of the romantic notions of his community, a common gambit of

students who write about communities with strong personal connections to. He continues

his idealized description of his rural community:

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Away from the urban hustle and bustle, a person can avoid most of the

hurried commotion and noise. Out in the country where people can be

scarce, one is able to enjoy an almost completely quiet setting. Alone with

nature there are times when a person can only hear the singing of songbirds,

the distant cawing of a crow, the leaves rustling from the breeze, and the

occasional creaking of trees rubbing. This feeling of solidarity is a very

pleasant and sought after component of rural living that many people enjoy.

Eventually, Casey begins to supply examples of his own lived experience from his life in

the rural community. To do so, he explains common activities he and his family would

share organized by season. He describes watching deer exercise on the gravel road in front

of their house during the summertime. He talks about pulling his sister behind the three-

wheeler in the winter making trails in the snow. He provides this experience from the fall:

In the fall of the year we normally cut wood. For those who live in a heavily

wooded area where trees are abundant, they might not plant additional trees,

but rather cut the dead trees for wood to burn to heat their house or shed.

This is what we do each fall. We go through our woods and find the dead

trees that have not begun to rot. Then we cut it in to handle able lengths and

pile it where the sun can get at it to dry it for next year when we come back

and haul it in to burn.

Here he has clearly moved from the conceived notions of rural space to the lived aspect of

the community. It becomes clear by this point in the paper that Casey would continue to

think of his community in an idealized way. Everything is rosy, everything is warm and

soft. He has so far avoided discussing any of the difficulties associated with rural living.

So far, Casey is writing a pretty safe essay that does not challenge or push any of his ideas about his community. Finally, Casey identifies the contact zone of his community as the rural and urban cultures begin to clash:

> This community that use to be so serene and wild, is now feeling the effects of more traffic and use. With how intereactive our world has become today, the intereactons of the rural and urban communities are combining the two and linking them to one another in certain areas. It use to be that the rural lifestyle was kept at a slow and easy pace, but now that everyone interacts similarily, the rural atmosphere is being made more like that of the urban style. Although these two communitites will most likely never be combined into one, they are getting close in relation and similarity.

Here Casey is identifying a shift in the conceived and lived aspects of his community brought about by the encroachment of another. He has moved from an idealized notion of his community to a more honest expression of the forces influencing and changing the life he has led. Not only has he moved from an idealized to realized view of his community, the contact zone he has identified and the very language he uses to describe it, begins to expand to include a larger sense of the 'rural' community. By looking at the following response Casey provided regarding the nature of the contact zone he identified in his community, we can see some of his thought process as he tracks the collision of two cultures:

> The issue that I am going to discuss is about the expansion of cities into rural areas. The intersection of the communities of rural and urban styles is where this issue is taking place. With the urban expansion outwards, many

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places that use to be in the rural atmosphere are now getting crowded by city life. Also the general lifestyle of the rural residents is changing since there is so much interaction among different groups of people now days. The slower and more relaxed pace of rural dwellers is being caught up in the hustle of city life and making everyone feel rushed and in a hurry. These and others are some ways that the two communities have intersected.

Casey's community profile is a strong example of the type of discovery such an assignment asks of the students. I chose to highlight Casey's profile not because it was the best written or strongest example of the assignment, but rather I chose it because I believe it illustrates the movement students must make as they traverse the three aspects of their community. Without asking Casey to explore the lived experience of his community the profile would not have gone past the idealized notions of rural life that he described. He would have been able to walk away from the assignment feeling that his community was just the way he imagined it and under no pressure from outside forces. It is only by exploring all three aspects of space that Lefebvre describes that a contact zone can be discovered. The community profile itself is not a product of the contact zone, but rather an exercise used to help make student's aware of the contact zones they already inhabit. Once the student's have identified a contact zone they then are asked to create a researched argument or commentary exploring the contact zone using academic discourse.

CHAPTER 5. BEYOND THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

Once students have used the community profile to identify a social space they inhabit with clear material connections to the world, they are then asked to explore the contact zone in an academic argument paper. They must answer the question: What larger trend is the issue from your community profile connected to? Here is where students who chose "easy" topics realize that their communities and the problems they confront are part of larger social issues confronting their entire community. For instance, a student writing about the faith-based community they are a part of on campus identified the clash between young Christian students and the changing cultural values of secular youth. The student chose to write about the trend surrounding ways the Christian church is changing to attract members of the new generation. Another student who wrote about a local grocery store he worked in identified the clash between big corporations and local businesses in his community. He chose to write about the impacts of 'super' stores on local economies. Finally, a student writing about their inner-city high school community chose to write their argument paper about the growing trend of media depictions of violence and its impact on students.

These are just a few examples of the types of products created when students identify their own contact zones. It is here that the value becomes apparent for the community profile assignment and encouraging students to identify their own contact zones. While it would be possible for me as an instructor to assign a theme for the class such as local vs. corporate business or the impact of the media on cultural attitude doing so would disallow students from connecting these topics to their own personal communities.

Dissection of these products of the contact zones my students have discovered is a job for another paper. I believe one of the mistakes scholars have made in the past when trying to work with the contact zone has been an over-emphasis on the products created in the contact zone and not enough time spent on exploring how specific contact zones are chosen, discovered, and approached.

The projects described by the scholars in chapter three represent carefully thought out and challenging assignments. They no doubt provide students with the opportunity to explore issues of importance while practicing the academic discourse they will be expected to use throughout their collegiate careers. However, projects that seek to use the contact zone by breaking it into smaller more manageable pieces, or dictate the specific contact zone to be explored, can not fully make use of the power of the contact zone as Pratt describes it. The contact zone loses its status as a social space when it fails to recognize the conceived, perceived, and lived aspects of space. Once this happens the artifacts produced cease to be autoethnographic representations of the student's world and become abstractions, reports based on required reading, whose power to unsettle and disturb loses its potency. The contact zone becomes an imaginary place the students can enter and leave at their own discretion. Asking students to spend a significant amount of time and effort first identifying the social spaces they inhabit then asking them to explore the larger implications surrounding the contact zones they are a part of is the only way to ensure that each student in this new and diverse classroom culture is writing from a position of personal investment: a position that truly encompasses the risks and rewards of the contact zone.

The assignment I've outlined represents an initial trial in an effort to make use of authentic student contact zones and could be improved upon in future settings. One of the ways the assignment could be improved is to ask students to bring in texts and/or images that are created within their communities. Doing so would help this assignment more closely resemble Marback's vision of a material rhetoric that seeks to balance the textual and lived representations of a space. Incorporating images or video would also allow greater freedom for students to create documents that more closely resemble the ways they communicate within their own societies. Just as the Peruvian author Pratt describes wrote in a mixture of dominant and subverted cultures to create an autoethnographic text. Since the first year composition course represents for many students the first forays into academic writing, the community profile could function as a bridge between their own linguistic identities and the academic discourse they are being introduced to.

Now nearly twenty years old, Pratt's description of the contact zone remains an exciting and challenging place of learning and exploration. As a curricular model it can push theory forward and continue to provide fresh and exciting pedagogical activities. As a social space it can stimulate and challenge students to look at the places of cultural conflict within their own lives as places of possibilities to be explored.

The community profile assignment is one way to take advantage of the contact zones our students inhabit while turning the classroom into a safe house where the differences they encounter can be shared and explored. This paper conducted a spatial analysis of the contact zone as it exists in the material world, but the idea of social spaces and the way our students identify with them and move through them will continue to be a

rich site of research and discovery as our classrooms become more diverse and multicultural.

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APPENDIX A. COMMUNITY PROFILE ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Length: 3-4 pages single spaced

Objectives:
- Practice using field research methods: interviews, statistical research, observation techniques
- Practice design techniques: using columns, inserting pictures, using callouts
- Locate a students network of communities
- Identify current issues of controversy within a community
- Identify 'insider/outsider' perspectives of a given community

According to Dictionary.com, a community is *"A social, religious, occupational or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists."*

Much of our identities are based on which communities we are a part of. For instance, one might be a student, but also an alumni of a particular high school, a resident of a state, city, or nation, a member in a religious organization or a sports team, and any number of other possibilities. It is our ability to locate ourselves within our own communities while communicating with those of other communities that gives us the ability to enact compromise and change in our environment.

This assignment will ask you to identify the communities to which you belong, and choose one to introduce to me, the rest of the class, and any other general reader who may be interested. The community profile will also ask you to:
- Interview at least two subjects, one other member of the community you are writing about, and one person who is outside of this community.

- Re-think assumptions you may have regarding your community through the viewpoint of those who stand outside looking in.

- Employ elements of visual design to create a journalistic piece of writing complete with pictures, columns and callouts.

- Identify areas of controversy or prominent issues confronting you and your community as a whole.

- Recognize a specific discourse unique to your community. (Where and how do people in your community communicate with each other? With other communities?)

Is this assignment relevant to my education and life?
This assignment, perhaps more than any other we will complete, is rooted in your own individuality. As a member of the community, which you are profiling, you will be speaking as an authority with responsibility to fairly introduce and shed light on the aspects that make your community unique. Throughout your professional careers, you will be entering new communities each with their own specialized language, cultural, and socio-political customs. The ability to recognize yourself within a specific community and your community as part of a larger network of groups will help give you perspective and insight into how individual people, as well as groups of people, interact and relate.

Tips for writing a strong Community Profile:

- **Purpose:** This paper is meant to be an introduction to one of your communities, pulling out those aspects that make your community unique, and identifying for the reader issues and challenges that confront your community. Your purpose is not to compare your community with another, but rather identify it in the larger sphere of communities.
- **Relationship to Audience:** While I will be your primary audience for this assignment, I will not be asking you to pretend to be writing to a general reader. In this case, I *AM* a general reader, and you are the one with the inside knowledge. I will be reading as a person, interested in learning more about your communities. I will be basing your grade on your ability to maintain a professional and honest tone, while helping me understand what makes your community tick.
- **Genre:** The profile is a widely used genre that often appears in magazines and newspapers. It is different than a research paper or a biography in the fact that it is usually a first hand account that attempts to bring the subject to life for the reader. One of your challenges throughout this assignment will be to make your community and its inhabitants 'come alive' for the reader. This means using descriptive language, inserting real 'voices' into the profile through the use of interviews, using creative narrative to describe situations and interactions that help define your community, and any other creative methods you may put forth.
- **Style/Voice:** Since this assignment is modeled off of a more journalistic genre, your tone should be accessible to the average reader. In some cases, using the language, style, and voice of your community can be strategic ways to help the reader better understand the inner dynamics of the group. While you will be speaking as a member of your community and an authority, be careful to limit the use of first person, this will give your profile a more professional tone, and help keep the focus on the community and not the individual.
- **Social Context:** Relationships between different communities can sometimes be strained, and it is important for us to be mindful and respectful of other communities we may touch on throughout this assignment. While it is possible to respectfully explain differences between communities, negativity, slander, and bigotry will not be tolerated.

Making an Identity Map or 'Social Fingerprint'

According to Dictionary.com, a community is *"A social, religious, occupational or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists."*

Lets face it; it is difficult to be completely unique in any one aspect of our lives. Chances are someone else, somewhere, also loves peanut butter, sardine, and horseradish sandwiches. In fact, every one of the things that makes us individuals also places us in a community of others who share that hobby, trait, belief, or value. Rather than give up and say that we are all the same, however, we can look at individuality in another manner; the collection of communities to which we belong. This exercise will ask you to map out the communities to which you belong starting with the most broad and moving to more specific smaller groups.

For example, my identity map would start with the broadest classification possible, human, but it would quickly move to male, outdoorsman, snowboarder, fly fisher, backpacker, as well as student, instructor, gamer, Christian, North Dakotan, American, American-Norwegian, and so on. I share each of these communities with many other people, but taken as a whole, this tapestry of communities is what makes me a unique individual.

Directions:
- Using the following prompts as starting points, compile a list of communities that you are a part of.
- Begin to think about which community you identify with strongest
- Following the example in class, create your own 'Social Fingerprint"

Some helpful places to start listing communities:

Personal Communities: ethnicity, family, gender, religion
Residential Communities: Neighborhood, town, county, state, country
Occupational Communities: jobs, schools, areas of expertise, majors
Hobbies and Recreation: sports teams, organizations, interest groups (gamer, dancer, painter etc)

Community Profile Grading Rubric

Criteria for your paper	Evaluation
Appropriate use of organization. Your profile will cover many aspects of your community. It will be important to maintain a sense of organization as you move from an introduction to your community, peoples perspectives of your community, and issues confronting your community. Transitional statements will be key in moving between these sub sections.	
Interesting and lively introduction: It is a common strategy to begin a profile with an attention getting introduction. This may involve a dramatic scene from a community event, a vivid description of a place associated with the community, or an interesting conversation between community members.	
Introduction and explanation of key issues within your community As part of this assignment is bent towards helping you come up with a topic for your argumentative paper, identifying controversies, or challenges facing your community will be one of the key features of your profile. Issues should be adequately explained so someone not of your community can understand them.	
Demonstrate your ability to incorporate primary sources in a coherent manner. Use proper lead-ins, a mix of paraphrase and direct quotations, cite page numbers and authors include a works cited section. Along with your two interview subjects, I am asking you to provide statistical data on your community using a web or print based source. Make sure this source is reliable.	
Style/Design: Use of appropriate visual elements, pictures, callouts, columns. Style should be journalistic and accessible, give explanations if you use jargon or slang from your community.	

APPENDIX B. COMMUNITIES CHOSEN BY STUDENTS

Residential	Personal	Occupational	Recreational
• Dorms (4) • High School • Rural Community • Hometown (2)	• African American • Catholic • Children of Diabetics • Wives of deployed soldiers • Atheism • Extended Family • St. Pauls Newman Center • Women in serious relationships and college life • Infertility • Singles Community • Family • Freshman	• College Student • Abercrombie and Fitch • Relay for Life • Cancer Walk • Ranchers • Papa Murphy's Pizza • PETA • MN army reserve national guard • Lifeguards • Supply staff at Meritcare Hospital • Office of Multi cultural programs • Bois de Sioux Golf Course • Scheels Home and Hardware • West Acres Cinema	• Triathaletes • Fraternity/Sorority (3) • Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) • 4-H • ND leadership seminar • Bow Hunting Community • College Volleyball • Student Athletes • Women Athletes • Les Voyageurs Canoe Trip • Hunting • Swing Dancing • Football team • College paintball team • Youth softball • Hockey fans/team • Youth Baseball • Bison Turf • College Womens basketball team • 4-H Club • MN Lacrosse • College women's soccer • Lake conference softball • Sports Card Forum • Brainerd High School Triathalon • Ducks Unlimited • Girl Scouts of Hutchinson MN • Tanning • Softball Community • MN Twins Fans • Otakus/anime fans