



Rewriting Work

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Lora Anderson's compilation *Rewriting Work* promises to take on "how technical and professional communication has changed over the last two decades," through an examination of place. Much of the complication in the collection is about how we, as a field, conceptualize and operationalize the collapse of "place" in and within technical and professional communications (TPC) research. After Anderson's introduction, Jeremy Rosselot-Merritt and Janel Bloch's first chapter examining definitions of workplace is a thorough look at how "workplace" has been operationalized or theorized in major TPC journals within that time span. In Chapter 2, Lisa Melonçon, the editor for the series the book belongs to, seeks to reestablish local context as an important rhetorical feature in both a geographic sense and in an organizational sense through the coinage of "micro-context," not to be confused with micro-level activity, as a scope of analysis somewhere between "rhetorical ecologies," and "rhetorical situations," for a specific material place. In Chapter 3, Lance Cummings engages in autoethnographic research of an international software development company linking their students' reactions to social/play of spaces at

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the company's offices to *phatic* (a kind of ethos) kinds of communication activity both mediated and not mediated. Specifically, they call for kinds of educational experiences in particular kinds of mediated rhetorical situations.

After Cummings' chapter, the following chapters take the idea of place on more conceptually, placing research methods in narratives and interviews frames. Brian Fitzpatrick and Jessica McCaughey position freelance worker narratives in Chapter 4, one of an illustrator and the other of a commercial director drawing. The authors draw on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1991) concept of discourse communities to examine archived narratives of their two professionals discussing how freelancers navigate identity and authority within and outside organizations that they are hired by rather than are a part of. For Chapter 5, Ann Hill Duin and Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch interviewed 20 members of their program's advisory board over the course of a year and a half, concluding that identity, literacy, and collaboration skills are the most important parts of a technical writer's job. It's important to note here that "identity" stands in for organizational or team roles rather than how most humanists would understand the term while "literacy" stands in for specific technological use. Where literacy occupies something between tool use and social skills and situational rhetorical awareness. With Chapter 6, Mark A. Hannah and Chris Lam propose "a new way of thinking about workplace adaptability" based on reflection and theorization of one of the author's professional experiences. The compilation closes out with Chapter 7 where Kelli Cargile Cook, Bethany Pitchford, and Joni Litsey describe the textual analysis of 176 entry-level variations of "communication" job ads.

TPC practitioners, scholars, and program administrators are aware that workplaces have been disrupted by changes to labor, technology, and large societal shifts in recent years. For the graduate student in technical communication, Rosselot-Merritt and Bloch's chapter provides an excellent sense of grounding of how a term or concept shifts in a field over time. They are quite clear about their methods in selection and analysis. Duin and Breuch's chapter provides a wonderful methods section, robust in detail and worthy as an example of how to describe, refine, and process interview data to make strong claims. And while I might quibble over their conflation of "identity," and "professional role," Duin and Breuch's chapter provides an excellent primer on what technical communicators do on teams and in organizations away from any sort of rigid disciplinary orientation. Their excellent description of their data gathering, refining, and analyzing would be a welcome resource for an instructor looking to tackle these issues in a research methods portion of a class. As a whole, the collection has many competing definitions of place, labor, organizational "culture," and mediation. As a result, the compilation could, structured properly, provide meaningful grist for classroom discussion.

Ultimately, the kinds of workplaces and infrastructures we depend on influence the kinds of professional rhetorical activity we engage in. As I have been finishing up this review, the Society of Technical Communication has announced its cessation of operations, making claims about "what technical communicators do" more

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uncertain than at other times. Fundamentally, many of the actual questions being asked in *Rewriting Work* are questions about work and labor as much as they are about "place." How to bind and capture what counts as labor and place from an empirical and research standpoint is an interesting, complicated, and expensive kind of question to ask, as the myriad of methodological choices made in this collection show. Many of the chapters seem to have their answer to that question but, unfortunately, also seem insistent on others coming to the same conclusions and assuming the same purposes.

These questions are an example of what should "count," as a workplace in TPC and, at least from a programmatic perspective, what we should be teaching. The kinds of issues approached in the collection are the kind that might be included for an advanced course on place in TPC. That is probably a more interesting question for graduate students than upper division majors, as it could yield interesting methodological and theoretical discussions and options, for example, paired with JoAnne Yates' *Control through Communication* or Beverly Sauer's *The Rhetoric of Risk*.

References

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