

Foreword

My first notable experience with a collegiate space was at the University of Michigan's Residential College, where I enrolled as an undergraduate in 1987. The RC was located in the East Quad residence hall, a traditional brick building with courtyards, arches, and ivy. As a residential college, East Quad housed classrooms, faculty offices, a theater, two cafeterias, a café (the Halfway Inn—we called it the Half-ass), a library, and music practice rooms in addition to dorm rooms for several hundred students. The joke about a residential college is that you can roll out of bed and come to class in your pajamas—something which actually happened on occasion. Underlying that joke is a lesson about the importance of proximity, the co-location of disparate spaces and resources, and the ways that living and learning can be fruitfully integrated.

Daily routines in East Quad generated countless intellectual and social encounters. The walls displayed student artwork, and once when I asked a friend to comment on a pencil sketch, I received—free of charge!—a Drawing 101-style lecture on the importance of committing to a consistent source of light. The Benzinger Library provided comfortable couches and wide tables that let you spread out. I particularly liked the magazine rack, which introduced me to *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *Mother Jones*.

The late eighties were a transitional time for writing technologies. Many of us hated typewriters, but did not own a computer. When we needed to write a paper, we depended on public labs, like the one located in the basement of East Quad. I remain indebted to a lab “monitor” who managed to recover a file that had become corrupted the night before it was due.

Traveling around the Quad on any given day meant stumbling on various kinds of performances—formal and informal, spontaneous and rehearsed. I remember a production of the *Three Penny Opera* in the theater and local rock groups in the Half-ass. A drummer, I would sometimes recruit friends for jam sessions in one of the more out-of-the way basement lounges.

What I remember most about life in East Quad was talking—about ideas learned in class, politics, social issues, music, art, novels, films. We would cluster in lounges, in bay windows, and in the courtyards. Sometimes we would just sit on the floor in the hallways, leaning against the walls—two of us, five of us, twenty of us, talking talking talking. These conversations exposed me to new ideas and perspectives, caused me to question long-held assumptions. It was so easy. You didn't need to schedule an appointment or agree upon a location. Hundreds of interesting people were within a few second's walk. East Quad nurtured a density of intellectual, social, and cultural resources. Its corridors contained spaces for living, eating, playing, and learning—activities which blurred together in generative and exciting ways.

Compared to East Quad, graduate school was dispersed, diluted, spread-out. Classes took place in what seemed like randomly selected rooms in buildings across campus. You really only went to campus in the first place when you had some business there—taking a class, teaching a class, getting a book from the library. Coffee shops and bars became important sites of intellectual exchange.

In the final years of completing my doctorate at Michigan State University, I needed a job and stumbled into something called the "Writing Center." Neither a classroom nor a "study lounge," the Writing Center was a place where people—students, staff, faculty, community members—elected to go when they wanted to talk about writing: essays for class, cover letters for jobs, short stories for literary journals, papers to be delivered at conferences. As a "Graduate Writing Consultant," I joined in these conversations, and even got paid for it.

At that time, the Web was still new and so were the kinds of composing it engendered. A small group of folks at MSU's Writing Center were experimenting with ways to support new forms like nonlinear hypertexts, digital videos, animations, and more. These new genres forced us to interrogate our mission and identity. Could writing centers support such things? Even if we could, was it wise to do so?

Through a complex set of circumstances, I eventually became enchanted by the new possibilities associated with "digital rhetoric." After leaving MSU for a short time, I returned to accept a full-time faculty position as the Writing Center's Associate Director. While my job entailed a wide variety of responsibilities, my special charge was to develop the Center's "Composing and Teaching in Digital Environments" program. I worked with others to purchase new equipment (data projectors, video cameras, microphones, a laptop cart) and recruited knowledgeable student consultants who knew how to use these things.

In a way, I had stumbled into something like the learning environment of East Quad—a space full of conversation, a hub that brought people together to think, experiment, and figure things out. The spaces of the Center were multifaceted, including conference rooms, offices, a library, and a wide open space where people sat in pairs or small groups to talk. There were computers, data projectors, and white

boards. And food! Free coffee and water for everyone, and, if you came at the right time, cheese and crackers leftover from the previous night's event. People came to the Center to get help, to work, to hang out. From this mix of people, space, and resources (laptops, chart paper, magic markers, cameras, and coffee), surprising and innovative ideas, projects, and practices emerged, and each day held the potential for something new. Every day someone would burst into my office and force me to look at something they had discovered—a new tool, an innovative Web page, a viral video.

Reading through the chapters that make up *Cases on Higher Education Spaces*, I was powerfully reminded of the rich experiences I have had at U-M's East Quad and MSU's Writing Center, not because the spaces explored here precisely echo the spaces that have factored into my own experiences, but because at some level of abstraction, I sense a common set of informing principles that seem heuristically powerful: design spaces that connect people with each other; that connect people with tools and resources; that are flexible; that integrate disparate elements: different fields of knowledge and different facets of life (studying, playing, living, working).

In his exploration of the psychology of learning environments, Ken Graetz (2006) recites an established list of qualities of effective learning spaces: “coherence,” “complexity,” “legibility” (p. 6.11). But then he takes an orthogonal turn, asking “What of enchantment? Our students are enchanted by works of art, musical performances, and breathtaking landscapes, but do they find our learning environments enchanting?” (p. 6.11). I wouldn't necessarily have used the word at the time, but East Quad was an “enchanting” space for me, not necessarily because it achieved an aesthetic appeal (at moments it did, and that didn't hurt), but because it supported endless surprising generative connections between ontologically disparate elements: books, art, music, computers, and people people people.

Graetz may not condone my appropriation of his term, but I read the chapters in this book as explorations of enchanting spaces. You might not discern this at first, partly because the detached language of academic research is not always well suited to the direct revelation of enchantment. (Gaertz himself daringly resorts to the language of *Harry Potter*.) But look hard. Enchantment emerges, from complex configurations of the built environment (glass-walled conference rooms, spacious atriums, hidden alcoves), technologies (computers, PostIt notes, wands), and people (students, teachers, wizards). What's more, this book rejects the romantic myth that enchantment “just happens,” the myth that enchantment cannot be achieved through human intention, planning, and design. How can we create enchanting spaces? These chapters take that question seriously.

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REFERENCES

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