

Florida, edited by Jeff Rice. Parlor Press, 2015. 304 pp.

*Reviewed by Jacob W. Craig, College of Charleston*

Extending the lineage of composition studies research examining space (e.g., Nedra Reynolds' foundational *Writing Geographies*), *Florida* further develops the methodological approach first introduced by Jeff Rice in his monograph, *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the Age of the Network*. Like *Digital Detroit*, *Florida* develops stories through details and fragments that are networked in choric or multiple, relational patterns of meaning. In his introduction to the edited collection, Rice encourages readers to approach *Florida* as neither a history nor a cultural critique but as a method for writing about space "that allows personal and non-personal meanings" to interact, making "a variety of identifications" of patterns possible (13). But while *Florida* and *Digital Detroit* share a similar intellectual frame and methodology for studying space, as an edited collection, *Florida* is a different project from *Digital Detroit*. Rather than developing a networked representation of *Florida* through his own memories and experiences, Rice provides for a wider range of meanings and patterns to emerge by inviting contributors to offer their own memories, experiences, observations, reflections, appreciations, and scholarship to develop a networked representation of Florida. Thus, *Florida* functions like "an internal Facebook page" that links Rice and his memories to other writers, other objects, other memories, and other sites of meaning beyond the Miami home that Rice describes in the introduction and in his contribution to the collection (8). As members of Rice's internal Facebook page, the other contributors draw on their experiences growing up in, studying in, or living in Florida, making a range of patterns available to trace, some of which include migration and mobility; dwelling and urban design; racial and religious discrimination; desire and psychosis. Ultimately, however, the patterns established in the book are left to the reader to identify and trace across the networked fragments that are curated in each chapter. In an effort to help readers identify patterns, the book is organized in five sections, each focused around a different approach to developing Florida's story as a networked space.

The first section, "Florida Patterns," is most informed by the concept of chora that frames the collection. Sean Morey's chapter, "A Network of Bones," is a strong beginning to this section and the book. Through his exploration of Key West as a choric space, Morey brings together his personal memories of fishing, Key West's topography, the legacies of Jimmy Buffett and Hemingway, and Key West's history as a pirate enclave that culminates in "the atmosphere of loss" that haunts Morey's Key West. Jeff Rice's contribution follows, wherein he

develops a Certeau-like spatial story of Kendall, a suburb of Miami. Weaving together his childhood memories, his scholarship (particularly, *The Rhetoric of Cool*), James Brown, boxing, gangsters, JFK, UFOs, and Hurricane David, Rice's spatial story represents the feeling that Miami is a site for secrecy, conspiracy, and mystery. Charlie Hailey's chapter, "Florida Trouse," focuses on the intransient mobile homes that have been a consistent feature of Florida's landscape since the 1930s. Hailey traces the significance of mobile homes to Florida's history and culture, examining them as sites of domesticity, escape, shelter, and DIY improvisation that helped transform Florida into "not just a place to dwell but the place to dream" (69).

The second section, "Florida Stories," features four personal narratives interwoven with history and scholarship. The section begins with Todd Taylor's memories of living in Tampa, tracing how Tampa has referenced other places (for instance, New Orleans and Miami) and people (for instance, Midwesterners and Cubans) for its identity, ultimately creating a place without a distinguishing signature. Next, Cassandra Branham and Megan McIntyre describe their childhood in New Port Richie through an assemblage of photographs and fragmented stories, ultimately revealing that the assemblage of people, economics, environments, and communities that comprise New Port Richie is a reflection of Florida: also an assemblage of varied and often-competing fragments. Lillie Anne Brown offers her memories growing up in Florida's capital city, Tallahassee, in the 1960s during the struggle for civil rights in the Jim Crow South, ultimately demonstrating how segregation shaped local geographies and economics while reaffirming Florida's status as a Southern state despite the histories of migration from the north and Midwest that shaped central and southern Florida. Steve Neuman's chapter, the final one in this section, extends Brown's examination of the impact of race and class on the geography of cities by turning again to Kendall's Jewish community.

The third section takes a different approach than the previous two by using Florida's environment as a heuristic for theorizing networks, spectacle, non-places, and reading. The approach of this section, organized under the rubric of Florida Studies, strongly resembles ecocomposition as Sid Dobrin and Christian Weisser have previously theorized. Each contributor to this section ultimately considers "what effects discourse has in mapping, constructing, shaping, defining, and understanding" Florida and what effects Florida's ecology and environment have on discourse (Dobrin and Weisser 573). Through his case study aimed at representing networks with greater complexity, Dilger examines West Palm's canal system, tracing how cultural, political, and legal networks shape and are influenced by the network of waterways in and around West Palm. James Beasley follows, theorizing gaze and spectacle through his case study of Ponte Verde Beach, the site for the most watched tournament in

golf, The Players. David Grant's chapter examines the non-placeness of Town 'n' Country, a census-designated suburb whose name, geography, and culture all contribute to a space vacant of history and master narratives, which can be productive sites for fabricating hopeful realities. Through his study of Florida's history of racial discrimination on beaches, Sidney Dobrin forwards the practice of "reading beaches" as paying attention to transitional spaces that affect, regulate, and discipline the bodies that occupy them (214).

In the final section, "Florida Theory," contributors bring together both personal and non-personal fragments of meaning in service of theory-making. Craig Saper with Adam Trowbridge and Jessica Westbrook's production and research group, Channel Two, examine Epcot's original designs and eventual realities to theorize Epcot as a site of psychosis and foreclosure: intentionally kept separate from reality and unable to fabricate successfully its utopic vision. Lauren Mitchell also focuses on the Orlando area, attending to "the city's boxes," particularly its various sites of retail, hospitality, domesticity, storage, and construction to consider how human desire influences Orlando's design, rendering the city's landscape incoherent and architects unable to design in ways that can improve the lives of inhabitants (250). Gregory Ulmer's concluding chapter returns to the book's framing concept of chora by creating a chorography different from Sean Morey's in the opening chapter. Focusing on a Superfund site of ground and air pollution outside of Gainesville, Florida, Ulmer samples an interactive exhibit that he terms a konsult: a genre that theorizes a region in order to amend a crisis in the "Well-Being" of the region (277). Ultimately, Ulmer's chapter both enacts chorography and forwards a design for chorography meant to educate and improve people's lives.

As indicated by Rice in the introduction, this book is an experiment in representing and analyzing space. Reading *Florida* feels somewhat like viewing a chaotic Prezi, jumping without warning from rhetorical and critical theory to creative nonfiction to descriptions of streets and cities to the historicization of places, objects, and people. Thus, reading this book feels much more like reading fragments than a coherent work, and that is very much the purpose. Knowing that one node links to another without a clear connection invites close consideration of what each fragment and memory means and how it relates to the rest of the network. Having spent time in Tallahassee for graduate school, I identified with the picture of Florida developed here: particularly, the sense that Florida's "boxes," specifically its strip malls, suggest that Florida is like anywhere while its history and landscape suggest that it is distinct from everywhere else. Living with these competing realities and patterns *is* Florida, and *Florida's* approach makes that recognition possible. Thus, as an approach to studying and analyzing space, *Florida* is a provocative model of spatial

scholarship, particularly for studying spaces like institutions and disciplinary formations that are also comprised of fragments rich in contradiction.

*Charleston, SC*

### **Works Cited**

Dobrin, Sidney I., and Christian R. Weisser. "Breaking Ground in EcoComposition: Exploring Relationships between Discourse and Environment." *College English*, vol. 64, no. 5, 2002, pp. 566-89.