

Book Review

Mapping Recreational Literacies: Contemporary Adults at Play.

Margaret Mackey.

New York: Peter Lang, 2007, 255 pages.

Reviewed by Jennifer Rowsell
Rutgers, State University, NJ

Sometimes you read a book that makes you feel genuinely excited about your vocation. These are books that matter. *Mapping Recreational Literacies: Contemporary Adults at Play* by Margaret Mackey falls into the category of books that matter. The book let me take stock of the articles, chapters, and books that I have read over the past few years, and it extended how I feel about them, the field of multimodality and “new” literacies more generally. As Turkle (2007) observes, “We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with” (p. 5). Mackey lets us see how texts make us learn in varying ways while at the same time analyzing what it is about them that absorbs our attention.

With eloquence and measured analysis, Mackey offers a detailed picture of nine individuals and their textual worlds and how they interact with other textual worlds. The book serves as compelling evidence of how much we think and exist through objects in our worlds. To keep the concept of *mapping* fluid, Mackey structures her book around genres of texts and participants’ relationships to these genres. She artfully explores this landscape of textual networks by mapping (note the double meaning here) the stories of Ben, Courtney, Seth, and others and the tacit principles of their meaning-making onto the text content and design. Each of the nine meaning-makers carries his or her own unique cultural agency that is foregrounded with particular texts, and the case studies work well as a collective in discussion/implications sections. In the book Mackey takes account of the world of games, of picture books, of novels, of graphic stories—and she does so not cursorily, but rather fixes her gaze on what these texts do and, to return to Turkle, how we think with texts that we love. By invoking Rabinowitz’s four rules of reading, Mackey shows us that there are ways of connecting other research frameworks to multimodal theory. Mackey describes the “distinctive individuality of each participant,” and like Mackey, I would have expected some repetition in responses, but Mackey’s thick description of their textual worlds teased out how different their worlds were.

Jennifer Rowsell is an assistant professor in English education in the Graduate School of Education where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy education. She has co-written books and articles in the areas of new literacy studies, multimodality, family literacy, and multiliteracies. She is involved in three research studies: one looking at adolescent artifacts as a way into writing; an ARC-funded study in Australia and the United States on parents’ networks of information about literacy and literacy development; and research on the production of print and digital media as the basis of a pedagogy of innovation.

There are two noteworthy attributes to *Mapping Recreational Literacies*: (a) how Mackey attends to so many texts and their multimodal composition; and (b) Mackey's modal flexibility whereby she truly accounts for all modes as equal and fully explores the affordances and constraints of each. With these strengths I can see one weakness. This is the modest nature of her number of participants. Although case studies are effective in capturing detailed pictures of learners and the indicative nature of these pictures, nine seems like a small number.

Sitting somewhere between Kress' *Before Writing* and Barton and Hamilton's *Local Literacies*, *Mapping Recreational Literacies* would be valuable to several audiences: librarians would gain much from profiles of literate worlds; educators would acquire a more textured look at adult learners; and researchers in literacy, cultural studies, and discourse theory would find Mackey's work an enlightening, informed approach to multimodality that moves the field forward.

Some wonderful parts in Mackey's book are spoken with a candid, self-referential, and humorous voice. Mackey has written a book that shows us that we learn through our texts and that their physicality is so central to our meaning-making, yet they are so often rendered invisible next to other literacy issues.

Reference

Turkle, S. (Ed.). (2007). *Evocative objects: Things we think with*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.