Review Essay

What Do We Want from Books?

Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location
Lisa Ede

Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies
Edited by Andrea A. Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane

Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference
Nedra Reynolds

I.

Writing in Rhetoric Review some fifteen years ago, Stephen North initiated a brief conversation about book reviews in the field of rhetoric and composition. While conceding that “reviews are the small change of academic writing,” he hopes that they might one day become “the occasion for vital, visible, memorable exchanges” (348, 349). To create the occasion, he advocates establishing “a centralized but (somehow) nonmonolithic, nonhegemonic review publica-
tion," perhaps funded jointly by NCTE and MLA, and he speculates that “technological changes, especially computer networks, will help make such a scheme workable” (360, 361). North contends that among his proposal’s benefits would be the creation of discursive space in which authors and readers can negotiate what they want from reviews. Absent this negotiation, North fears that reviews will continue to be “pronouncements” that always “chart a cautious course” (356, 358). A year later, Mark Wiley answered North in the pages of JAC, agreeing that reviews should be accorded more value, but doubting that the negotiation afforded by a review periodical would help achieve that aim. Instead, Wiley recommends that reviews published in journals should “become reflexive and interpretive, themselves inquiries into the very ways of conducting research, scholarship, and practice” (483). Done this way, Wiley believes, reviews could come to be appreciated as “an integral part of an ecology of critical practices” that constitute “serious talk seeking after truth” about both “another’s work” and the “discipline’s identity” (489, 490).

North and Wiley may have disagreed about what book reviews should do for the field, but it strikes me that they were in substantial, though unspoken, agreement that scholarly books were poised, circa 1990, to contribute significantly to the making of knowledge in composition. They express anxiety that such knowledge might be overlooked because of flaws in the field’s book reviewing practices. Their concern that books be noticed is consistent with other book-related developments in the early 1990s, such as the emergence of an annual bibliography sponsored by CCCC and the launch of several book series in rhetoric and composition by university, association, and commercial presses.1 Perhaps the field’s turn toward books was inevitable given its increasing complexity: authors needed more space to work out complex ideas than was available to them in academic journals. But would these books be read? To what uses would readers put them? And how would the rhythm of reading—an attuned to the appearance of journals on a quarterly basis—be changed by the introduction of texts that take longer to write and longer to produce? Fifteen years ago, the answers to these questions were far from obvious.2

So they remain fifteen years later, in part because the field’s discussion about books and their utility has focused on a single, narrow—albeit important—topic: the efficacy of books as tokens of intellectual achievement in the tenure and promotion process. True, some career-oriented commentaries recognize that the value of scholarship extends beyond the creation of job security. In his contribution to Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition (1997), Jasper Neel observed: “The academic rage in the humanities these days is to write a
book, particularly a ‘scholarly’ book published (if at all possible) by a university press. One can define one’s location in the academic pecking order by the number and status of books required for tenure at one’s university” (91). “This book fetish,” Neel added, “is fairly new” (91).3 At about the same time, John Schilb offered a concurring opinion. Writing in his contribution to *Academic Advancement in Composition Studies* (1997), Schilb counseled English department heads:

> As far as its written scholarship is concerned, the field of composition studies has been predominantly article-driven. This situation reflects the habits of academic presses: Although many presses have regularly published books of literary criticism, only some of them have published volumes on composition theory and research. In the last few years, things have improved, with several composition series being launched and an increasing number of collections and monographs being published. Also, because the number of dissertations in composition studies has increased exponentially in the past decade, there are more potential composition books around. (27)

More potential books. More series in which these books might be published. But more readers? And, crucially, more readers spurred to write with reference to the books they are reading, thereby weaving new interpretive strands into the field’s intellectual fabric?

Such broad questions about how we use books have yet to be addressed satisfactorily, even as we have begun to think more intentionally about what books are and whether they will continue to exist in their most familiar form. Thanks to the efforts of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the Modern Language Association (MLA), we now have a better understanding of where academic book publishing stands today, but there is still tremendous uncertainty about where it is headed (see MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing; MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion; Alonso et al.).4 I consider this future as I conclude my essay. Suffice it to say here that fewer and perhaps different kinds of scholarly books may be published going forward.

“[U]nssettling” is the word that *Pedagogy* co-editors Jennifer Holberg and Marcy Taylor use to describe the present turmoil in humanities publishing. Yet in the midst of this turmoil they recognize that “one of the most important opportunities we’ll have in this scholarly generation” is the chance for humanists to rethink their “professional values and activities” (6). I concur. Our field should seize the opportunity to expand its discussion of books to consider more than just their consequences for careers, important as that is. We must
think comprehensively about what we want from books—both monographs and edited collections—and what we want for them, what their future role should be in rhetoric and composition. Discerning what we want from and for books will require hard conversations that entertain many perspectives. But whatever is said, we must not let go of the idea that books can be more than tokens of academic achievement, more than vehicles for professional advancement. As a first step, if we can arrive at some sense of how books currently contribute to the circulation of disciplinary knowledge, we can steady ourselves for a next step: adapting books as we understand them to emergent possibilities in scholarly communication. To the extent that these possibilities express a bias for speed and efficiency in the circulation of knowledge, I believe we will want to speak up for limits that defend the time it takes to assemble knowledge with great care.

The three books reviewed in this essay perform intellectual work worth special attention because of the care invested in their development over time. The books evidence thoughtful complexity born of rethinking and revision, processes that have produced in each case markedly original engagement with the scholarly contours of our field, and other fields, too. As such, they exemplify protocols of invention and arrangement whose styling in print must be adapted to delivery across media if we wish our scholarship to continue carrying forward a sense of the field’s intellectual history and location in academe.

The intersection of past and place, important in all three books, is appreciated differently in each one. Nedra Reynolds’s *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference* demonstrates the extraordinary commitment to learning involved in rendering the expertise of another discipline legible to our own. If *Geographies of Writing* is about stretching disciplinary boundaries, Lisa Ede’s *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location* is about recognizing—and never forgetting—how those boundaries were originally established. In accomplishing their aims, both Reynolds and Ede make unusually effective use of disciplinary book culture: Reynolds draws extensively from the literature of cultural geography, and Ede from the recent but nonetheless rich tradition of scholarly monographs in rhetoric and composition. In this way, both authors lift up voices from other books as they raise their own; the result is often harmonious, sometimes jarring, but always compelling. Of course, another way to orchestrate voices is to call them together, chapter by chapter, in an edited collection, as Andrea Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane do in *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial*
Studies. Lunsford and Ouzgane’s book grew out of a special issue of *JAC*, and the difference between the two illuminates the value that can be realized when additional time and pages usher new guests into the Burkean parlor.

My critical treatment of the three books under review elaborates on the foregoing observations and builds toward a conclusion in which I consider what the reception of each title tells us about the gap between what we often say we want from books and what we really do with them. I fear that if we straddle this gap unaware, we will lose the steady footing we need to reach for new ways of publishing long-form scholarship as older ways slip—or are torn—from our grasp.

II.

Reynolds’s *Geographies of Writing* has its origins in her dissertation, “Composition’s *Ethos* in the 1970s: Locations, Subjects, and Practices,” completed in 1991 at Miami University of Ohio under the direction of Susan Jarratt. The pathway from dissertation to book includes the publication of one dissertation chapter in slightly modified form, followed by the appearance of several additional chapters that were significantly reworked to introduce critical concepts from the field of cultural geography. Finally, in *Geographies of Writing*, Reynolds draws on extensive fieldwork to refine her earlier theorizing of literacy as a spatially situated cultural practice. I document this pathway from dissertation to book with the intent of profiling the intellectual labor required to produce what I take to be a field-changing publication.6

Reynolds’s first article from the dissertation project, “Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority,” appeared in *Rhetoric Review* in spring 1993. In it, her announced aim is “to suggest the potential of ethos to open up more spaces in which to study writers’ subject positions or identity formations, especially to examine how writers establish authority and enact responsibility from positions not traditionally considered authoritative” (326). She takes issue with classicists and rhetoricians whose scholarship stripped away the spatial dimension of *ethos* as it was understood in classical times, and she expresses support for scholars such as Michael Halloran who posit that a sense of place—specifically, public place—was central to Aristotle’s concept of *ethos*. However, Reynolds takes issue with Halloran’s celebration of that public space, noting its exclusivity: “slaves and women were not welcome to share the public space of experiences and ideas” (329). Rather than conceding that *ethos* is available conceptually only to those admitted with full rights...
of citizenship to public forums, including those defined in print, Reynolds explores the possibility of *ethos* existing outside of closed communities—English departments, for example. And so Reynolds imagines a study of Mina Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* that might “capture the *ethos* of composition studies in its early days” (335). The study would not be a close reading of Shaughnessy’s book, but rather would situate her argument alongside others emanating from institutions—in New York and beyond—that experienced dramatic change at the time Shaughnessy taught and wrote. Among these voices would be those of Shaughnessy’s students, without whom it would be impossible to responsibly “examine the places where our practices, language, and attitudes come together or collide with the *subjects* of these practices” (335).

Reynolds embarks on such a study in her dissertation, where her reading of Shaughnessy is the culmination of an examination of contributions to the profession’s *ethos* by Janet Emig, Peter Elbow, and James Kinneavy. In her chapter on Shaughnessy’s legacy, Reynolds necessarily focuses on the figure of the frontier, a place “between inclusion and exclusion, between the expectations of the American dream and the errors that stand in the way” (“Composition’s *Ethos*” 139). Shaughnessy, she observes, “wants to move writing and teachers of writing out of the ‘intense, troubled’ city and into the frontier,” where composition might do its work unfettered by such “barriers” as “the traditional concept of error most English teachers hold” (153). Although cognizant of Joseph Harris’s critique of the frontier metaphor, Reynolds appreciates its utility. She credits Shaughnessy with using it to advance a fresh idea of what composition “should be and whom it should serve,” a lasting contribution to the field’s *ethos* (172).

But what of the city? In both the dissertation and the *Rhetoric Review* piece, Reynolds discusses Iris Marion Young’s formulation of the city as a space in which social relations must constantly be negotiated: sometimes these struggles resolve harmoniously, but sometimes they do not, and the dynamic demographics of cities guarantees that what is agreed to one day may be up for renegotiation the next. But attractive as Reynolds finds Young’s theorizing, the city’s potential as metaphor remains unaddressed at dissertation’s end and in the first article published from it.

“*Ethos as Location*” concludes with the parenthetical notation that the 1993 CCCC Convention program featured “teaching writing in prisons and other typically marginalized sites,” an indication of the field’s willingness to “explore connections between space and authority, between the social and re-
sponsibility, between sites and the writing self” (336). Five years later, Reynolds begins “Composition’s Imagined Geographies,” the lead essay in the September 1998 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, with observations about recent scholarship that acknowledges the spatiality of writing (14). She returns to the metaphorical language of the frontier, again positing it as “one of composition’s most important imagined geographies” alongside two more recently emergent, “the city and cyberspace” (14). Absent from the argument is reference to *ethos* as a conceptual framework within which to understand these geographies. Instead, she focuses on what this framework has obscured: the “relationship between material spaces and actual practices” (14).

It is not that Reynolds neglected material spaces of actual practice in her dissertation and *Rhetoric Review* article. In those works, she cites Adrienne Rich among other feminist scholars who express eloquently the constraints imposed by spaces of instruction that are organized according to patriarchal logic. But in the *CCC* article, Reynolds extends this effort by drawing on a critical vocabulary about space, a vocabulary that deepens her analysis of the frontier metaphor in Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* and in subsequent composition scholarship (21–23). Hence Reynolds’s turn in the *CCC* article to cultural geographers whose postmodern and feminist theorizing provide a conceptual bridge to new, provocative ways of thinking about not just the discourse but also the materiality of space. Particularly useful are the notions of “time-space compression” and “transparent space,” both of which Reynolds uses to leverage her critique of composition’s frontier metaphor (13). But she extends the critique to the city metaphor—which she had previously embraced—asserting that “scholars and theorists may be glamorizing the city and overlooking some of the material realities—the same problem that exists with the frontier metaphor” (26). And she extends the critique further, to the realm of “cyberspace,” where she is concerned that the romance of frontier and city metaphors risks diverting attention from developments that threaten the integrity of pedagogy and labor in the teaching of writing.

Reynolds is careful to make cultural geography legible to composition by focusing on theorists whose arguments are inflected by the postmodern and feminist theorizing already familiar in rhetoric and composition—among them, Edward Soja, David Harvey, and Doreen Massey. What she is unable to do, of course, given the space constraints of a scholarly journal article, is to characterize the intellectual work that Soja, Harvey, Massey, and others are performing in their own discipline. Reynolds picks up this task in a 2000 *JAC* article, “Who’s Going to Cross This Border? Travel Metaphors, Material Conditions,
and Contested Places.” The *JAC* article marks an important development in Reynolds’s project: in addition to drawing from the work of cultural geographers (a wider range than in the *CCC* article), she introduces readers to cultural geography as a field, naming its primary assumptions, claims, and methods and relating them to the work of other students of culture (Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu) already known to many in composition. As before, she employs what she draws from cultural geography to mount a critique of scholarship in rhetoric and composition; she argues that Gregory Clark’s rhetorical analysis of travel metaphors in “Writing as Travel, or Rhetoric on the Road” (*CCC*, 1998) lacks awareness of the material limits that create differential access to spaces of privilege and that confine certain bodies to spaces where risk to well-being is a significant worry.

But what truly distinguishes the *JAC* article from Reynolds’s earlier *CCC* piece is her turn to fieldwork to discover what cultural geography meant to a group of students who were negotiating the spaces of their everyday lives. In so doing, she makes good on her earlier call for “[m]oving beyond ‘thick description’” in qualitative research to inquiry that accounts for the spatial relations that organize the discourses typically attended to by scholars in rhetoric and composition (“Composition’s Imagined Geographies” 30). Reynolds reports on her participant-observation work with third-year undergraduates pursuing the B.A. degree in geography at the University of Leeds. She watches as these students struggle to reconcile their theoretical knowledge of how space constructs social difference with their lived experience as students entering (or not) areas of Leeds where their identity, and the privilege attached to it, are subject to challenge. Reynolds brings this lesson in ideological and physical boundary crossing home to composition by challenging colleagues to study not only boundaries, but also the spaces they enclose: “Places—whether textual, material, or imaginary—are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of habitus. Theories of writing, therefore, should reflect this deeper understanding of place” (560). Building on work by Christina Haas (*Writing Technology*, 1996) and Anne Aronson (“Composing in a Material World,” 1999), Reynolds suggests that rhetoric and composition has far to go before it will arrive at a “cultural theory of writing” that is appropriately sensitive to the embodiment, conflict, and resistance of all discursive acts (560).

One cost of not having such a theory, Reynolds implies in a 2002 *Pedagogy* article (co-authored with Donna Bickford), is the unchecked impulse to combine service with learning in the first-year composition course in ways
that neglect “the structural reasons to help others” (Bickford and Reynolds 230). Reynolds and Bickford advocate “activism” as “a (perhaps) competing but (more often) complementary framework that expands the intent of some models of service-learning” (238). With such a framework, students would ask “not ‘Why can’t Johnny read?’ but ‘What causes illiteracy?’” (238). Answering such questions in an activist mode, students would need to engage in historical research aimed at “consciousness-raising,” as well as fieldwork that begins with critical reflection on the student-researcher’s “approach” to the scene of inquiry, a strategy meant to lead students to “analyze the politics of space, the effects of the built environment, the complexities of being the insider or the outsider, or the functions of surveillance and control in public or semipublic spaces” (238, 241, 242). Such activism—sometimes productive of dissent, sometimes not—need not take place off campus, for “[t]here are plenty of opportunities for students to experience geographies of exclusion right on campus” (244). They should not, in other words, “be left with the assumption that all is well in the college environment but there are real problems outside, where cultural difference ‘really’ exists” (244). Thus, the Pedagogy article would seem to bring Reynolds full circle, from her early call for the field of rhetoric and composition to examine writing in spaces outside the academy, to an insistence that sometimes it is best to analyze how literacies are constructed along the differential between access and exclusion on campus, right down to individual classrooms.

So what does Reynolds’s Geographies of Writing accomplish as a book that her sequence of articles over a decade does not? Plenty, I would argue. The space of a book—200-plus pages of text, notes, references, and index—creates opportunities for Reynolds to develop her project further. Chief among them is the chance to build a nuanced argument that coordinates engagement with ongoing dialogues in rhetoric and composition on the one hand with an unusually rich introduction to interdisciplinary knowledge drawn from cultural geography on the other. Reynolds invokes three everyday spatial practices—walking, mapping, and dwelling—as metaphors that organize her own inquiry. She shows, too, how the three practices, pursued in the real world, can lead writers to recognize the irreducible spatial properties—relative to “the body, the street, [and] the city”—of every imaginable literate act (3). How very far Geographies of Writing advances beyond Reynolds’s dissertation and articles becomes more apparent when the book’s chapters are carefully scrutinized.

Chapter 1, “Between Metaphor and Materiality,” incorporates the analysis of composition’s frontier and city metaphors begun in the CCC article and
refined in JAC, but in a way that clarifies why these metaphors must be succeeded by theorizing that places literate bodies—and the texts they write and read—in spatial relation to one another. Central to the chapter is a fascinating discussion of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and Edward Soja’s organization of Lefebvre’s thought into a “trialectics of spatiality,” which, according to Reynolds, “leaves binary concepts, like insider-outsider, floating in the middle or bouncing from one spot to another” (16). “[T]hirdspace,” she adds, “means exploding or transgressing binaries, not simply flipping them to restore the undervalued term” (16). This gloss on Lefebvre and Soja obviously requires elaboration: a passing reference to the work of Lefebvre (quoted from Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies*) in the CCC article and a parenthetical reference to Soja’s *Thirdspace* in the JAC article become a long passage in the book, like other long passages in chapter 1, that demonstrate the relevance of cultural geography to Reynolds’s aim of “keeping the material and the metaphorical interconnected, acknowledging that the real and the imagined are dependent upon one another” (46). While Reynolds’s critique of composition’s metaphors is well rehearsed in her CCC and JAC articles, theorizing the interconnection between metaphor and material is a project barely begun in the JAC piece. This necessary theorizing certainly gets its due in the book’s opening chapter.

Chapter 2, “Reading Landscapes and Walking the Streets: Geography and the Visual,” also draws from the CCC and JAC pieces, but adds a critique of geography’s preoccupation with the visual: it is, Reynolds writes, “very much a seeing discipline, whose premises and proofs, methodologies and conclusions, stem from visual evidence” (55). Within the book, this critique cuts two ways. The critique describes the limits of geographical knowledge, but in doing so illustrates a new generation of geographers’ productive struggle with those limits. One outcome of this struggle has been geographers’ openness to influence from cultural studies, which validates the position that “material artifacts are appropriated and their meanings transformed through oppositional social practices” (57). Furthermore, we learn that feminist geographers have evolved particularly powerful arguments about how “gender is implicated in the social construction of space and place” (60). These links to cultural studies and feminist thought are crucial: they provide epistemological bridges from rhetoric and composition into contemporary cultural geography at points where geography’s rethinking of visual evidence can be appreciated, if not fully understood. Reynolds then uses this thinking as a point of departure for sorting
out rhetoric and composition’s embrace of the visual, which she deems incau-
tious when the visual is not imagined, as it is now in cultural geography, as the
product of nameable material processes.

Chapter 3, “Maps of the Everyday: Habitual Pathways and Contested
Places,” incorporates and expands Reynolds’s report from her fieldwork at
Leeds, with a deeper positioning of her self at the scene of inquiry. The maps
and photographs from Leeds—simple enough to reproduce, but absent from
her journal articles—complement her description of the place and effectively
frame her report on how Leeds geography students mapped the community
around the university. In consequence, the gap between students’ critical knowl-
edge of geography and their practices of moving through space is accentuated.
Their “charged responses to certain places in Leeds” underscore “how difficult
it is to move learners to have a meaningful encounter with difference” (109). In
saying so, Reynolds stresses, as she perhaps could not in her earlier work, that
the cultural turn in geography, no less than the cultural turn in rhetoric and
composition, does not magically produce pedagogical interventions that en-
able students to overcome young lifetimes of consuming space unaware of what
is entailed in its production.

Chapter 4, “Streetwork: Seeing Difference Geographically,” continues
Reynolds’s report from the Leeds fieldwork, with emphasis on the method-
ological innovations required to support the cultural theory of writing she is
evolving. The report nicely illustrates Reynolds’s earlier point about the limits
of uncritical visual epistemologies: when students default to reading the sur-
faces around them without investigating how those surfaces were constructed,
they are ultimately unable to think and write cogently about the power those
surfaces radiate. As Reynolds asserts, this finding—explored in the realm of
service learning in U.S. colleges—should give us pause. Although she arrived
at the same conclusion in her co-authored Pedagogy article, the warning is all
the more credible for the careful empirical research underpinning it.

Chapter 5, “Learning to Dwell: Inhabiting Spaces and Discourses,” draws
once again from the Leeds fieldwork to support the conclusion that “dwelling
as metaphor is helpful in re-imagining acts of writing in material ways” (168).
Having explored the materiality of writing through “walking” and “mapping,”
Reynolds turns in conclusion to the idea that there are important connections
to be drawn between our habitual ways of “dwelling” in texts and in places.
Learning to take a critical stance toward both kinds of dwelling can reveal
how the “geography of difference” goes unnoticed in the everyday encounters
most familiar to us, textually and spatially (174). Helping students recognize such local difference, Reynolds advocates, is a crucial step toward encouraging more self-aware—more responsible—writing.

Make no mistake. Something is lost in the refashioning of the journal articles into a book. Put under erasure is the early impulse to organize the argument around a redefinition of ethos. Reynolds does not conceal this fact, acknowledging, in thanking Susan Jarratt at the outset, that “our work on ethos certainly haunts this project” (xii). Just as the book is more complex than the sum of texts from which it originates, it is also more challenging to read than those individual texts. Reynolds is aware of this problem: she cautions that we should not “neglect the very real ways in which some readers—even well-educated, eager, or sincere readers—feel excluded from certain texts, discourses, or conversations” because their rhetorical architecture is unfamiliar and uninviting, and therefore difficult to dwell in (165). She follows her own advice with admirable results. Geographies of Writing grants access to a disciplinary future that is, thanks to Reynolds’s considerable effort, much better equipped to recognize how scholars, teachers, and students of composition are situated in a world of complex, locally different, and globally interdependent institutions.

III.

Lisa Ede shares Reynolds’s concern for the future of composition. She, too, insists that it be grounded in a clarified sense of the spatial relations that fix composition’s coordinates in the U.S. academy, and more broadly in the world. But rather than turning outward, as Reynolds does, for the intellectual energy to map these relations, Ede argues that the energy needed to chart composition’s onward course lies unrecognized—or, more accurately, misrecognized—in its past. It is her task in Situating Composition to revisit various moments of misrecognition and to set the record straight, especially with regard to “the writing process movement” and its purported distortion by colleagues who are more invested in practicing “theoretical critique” than in the practice of teaching college writing and documenting its outcomes. Along the way, Ede shows us that “theoretical critique” exerts its most powerful and durable influence through scholarly books, hence the need for a carefully wrought book-length rejoinder.

In her preface, Ede notes that Situating Composition “represents my effort to make sense of the recent development of composition as an academic
Ede's work is situated in a long-standing scholarly conversation about the nature and status of composition as an academic discipline—and about the multiple consequences of composition's professionalization (ix). It is to this bookshelf that Ede returns repeatedly as she works painstakingly toward conclusions about what she calls the “paradox” of scholars simultaneously wishing to inhabit and escape an institutional location defined by its teaching and service obligations (222). Ede investigates this paradox with great care: she backs her criticism of colleagues’ scholarship by examining carefully chosen excerpts from their articles and, more often, from their book-length arguments. These readings accumulate persuasive power across the book’s 200-plus pages, culminating in “a constructive vision of productive change” that takes the form of fifteen strategies for simultaneously improving the “practice of theory” and the “practice of teaching” in composition (192, 207).

Ede arranges *Situating Composition* in three parts. The first establishes her subjectivity—someone with significant ties to what coalesced in the 1970s as the writing process movement and then delineates the book’s scope and method. The second part comprises a detailed rereading of the movement’s rise and fall, in which Ede tells of its fate at the hands of colleagues who encouraged the division of theory from practice, privileging the former and ignoring or even denigrating the latter. In the book’s final section, Ede argues for the continuing relevance of scholarship on the writing process, scholarship that transcends the theory-practice binary she finds so counterproductive.

Each section of *Situating Composition* pivots around a discussion of books, many of them titles from the bookshelf named in her preface. She puts the titles in service of a narrative that charts decline from a past when theorizing composition and its teaching were not alienated. For example, in addressing the question “How can we best understand composition’s development as a discipline?” in her first chapter, Ede gestures to sixteen germinal sources, ten
of which are books, including the titles by Crowley, Faigley, Gallagher, Horner, Miller, North, and Sirc that she named in her preface (15). These seven titles recur one chapter later as Ede enumerates sixteen sources, ten of them books, in which scholars explore the “productive uses they might make” of understanding composition’s development (24). In chapter 3, Ede enlarges her bibliography by citing a number of histories, as well as several collections that foreground contemporary autobiographical reflections on “living” through the profession’s recent changes (60). Most of the histories and reflections Ede cites are worked out in book-length detail. This book-centered approach to naming authorities, recurrent throughout Situating Composition, achieves the laudable end of underscoring the extent to which our field’s most difficult and important conversations continue to unfold across the pages of scholarly monographs.

And as Situating Composition itself unfolds, the citation of books often serves Ede as a point of departure for interrogating critical positions with which she wishes to take issue. The positions of two colleagues in particular receive this treatment: Sharon Crowley and Susan Miller. Their books, Composition in the University and Textual Carnivals, respectively, figure prominently as Ede argues that compositionists today neglect, at their peril, the inseparable intellectual and practical innovations of the writing process movement. In Part II of Situating Composition, making frequent reference to Crowley and Miller, Ede laments lost interest in the writing process movement. As she tells it, some who identified with this movement were primarily interested in advancing a pedagogy that emphasized the various activities (planning, drafting, revision, etc.) that individuals appear to engage in as they write. But others took the movement as a point of departure for theorizing how, in a general way, writing is accomplished. Such theorizing was done, Ede suggests, within a “paradigm” — that is, within an intellectual space defined by consensus on the fundamental nature of language and the world. But paradigms shift as consensus changes, and new paradigms give rise to insurgent theories that are incommensurate with the old. Adherents to each successive paradigm in composition are certain their predecessors got writing wrong, and hope they have it right. They hope, too, that getting it right means, once and for all, that they can get writing pedagogy right, too. Indeed, Ede concludes: “[P]aradigm hope encourages scholars to believe that, once developed, the right theory can—simply by virtue of being right—effect change at the level of practice” (77).

At the conclusion of Situating Composition, Ede leaves readers with advice about how to conduct composition scholarship such that it avoids the
pitfalls of a “theoretical critique” that obscures “issues of audience and rhetorical situation” (199). In general, the advice steers colleagues toward foregrounding the voices of teachers and students, and further toward locating these voices in culturally and institutionally specific scenes of learning. Some readers may find that the tone of Ede’s advice regarding “theoretical critique” is indicative of a desire to have the last word in her dialogue with the Crowley of Composition in the University and the Miller of Textual Carnivals. I prefer a reading that acknowledges Ede’s awareness that the dialogue will continue. After all, she begins her book with questions big enough that they cannot be answered satisfactorily without falling into conversation with others.8

And so she does. In scholarship roughly concurrent with Situating Composition’s appearance, Crowley stresses that college composition is only tenuously related to the rhetorical tradition of which it is often said to be a part (“Composition”). Contrary to Ede’s position, it is Crowley’s contention that the writing process movement did not restore what rhetoric lost when Harvard and other colleges and universities instituted the first-year composition-rhetoric requirement. Crowley urges scholars to continue working toward re-establishing the academic study—and teaching—of rhetoric. In her estimation, its insights are desperately needed at a time when the practice of rhetoric in civic spaces is so very dysfunctional: “attention to rhetorical theory can affect the quality of practice insofar as theory articulates and disseminates alternative strategies of invention into the culture at large, particularly if they are taught in school” (Toward a Civil Discourse 28).

Miller largely agrees with Crowley’s diagnosis that composition—an amalgam of theory, practice, and labor—does not have a bright future as an academic discipline. Composition’s chief liability is this: it is historically anchored in an institutional location to which public access has long been highly regulated (“Writing Studies as a Mode of Inquiry” and “Why Composition Studies Disappeared and What Happened Then”). Indeed, in Miller’s view, no amount of theorizing is likely to reform composition’s bias toward college classrooms where distinctions of social class are too often routinely reinforced. Miller’s antidote is to recommend study not of composition but of writing, an endeavor of tremendous historical breadth and cultural depth. In Miller’s formulation of “writing studies,” theorizing pedagogies and curricula is important, so long as this theorizing is grounded in careful examination of the many forms of evidence, including texts, that provide insight into the myriad quotidian situations in which writing is learned and practiced. Miller’s Assuming the Positions, a tightly focused study of commonplace books in the Virginia Historical
Society archive, illustrates one rigorous approach to inquiry in writing studies; *Trust in Texts*, her wide-angled critique of “the” rhetorical tradition, exemplifies another.

Of course, the conversation among Ede, Crowley, and Miller I have imagined here represents readerly work on my part that stretches beyond the covers of *Situating Composition*. But I believe that is precisely the kind of intertextual effort Ede calls us to do when she asks such big questions as “What centripetal forces give composition coherence and stability? What centrifugal forces threaten to pull composition apart? What boundary work has composition had to undertake in order to support its claims for status as a discipline or field?” (4). I eagerly await Ede’s return to these critical questions. When she does return, she will doubtless reckon with a new set of books on the bookshelf—Reynolds’s included—that will enable further interrogation of how our discipline’s metaphorical boundaries are being reconfigured in response to tangible institutional changes brought on by shifts in the global flow of capital, bodies, and ideas (e.g., Bousquet; Smit).

IV.

The global flow of capital, bodies, and ideas is anything but free and fair, an observation delivered in the humanities most forcefully by scholars who examine the aftermath of European colonialism and U.S. imperialism. It is unsurprising, then, that colleagues in rhetoric and composition, no strangers to the theoretical and practical implications of power differentials, have taken an interest in postcolonial scholarship that pays close critical attention to cultural encounters marked by asymmetries of power. In mid-1996, Andrea Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane issued a call for submissions to a special issue of *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* “devoted to composition theory and postcolonial studies” (Ouzgane, “CFP”). Lunsford and Ouzgane asked potential authors to refrain from “critiquing literary texts or […] describing particular classroom techniques” and instead to focus “on analyses of how concepts articulated within postcolonial studies affect, or can affect, writing and reading processes, theories of composing, theories and practices of literacy, the history and politics of rhetoric and composition, or other related issues.” What Lunsford and Ouzgane sought might be imagined as a next step beyond what *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* had accomplished more than a decade before (Horner).

By the time Lunsford and Ouzgane issued their call, the field had already
begun taking interest in what postcolonial studies had to offer. *JAC* had published Henry Giroux’s “Paulo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism” in 1992, and the following year the *Journal of Basic Writing* featured Pamela Gay’s “Rereading Shaughnessy from a Postcolonial Perspective.” In 1994, *College English* featured reviews of two books by scholars of postcoloniality and two essays, by Patricia Bizzell and Richard Miller, that explored the implications of Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of the cultural “contact zone.” The arrival of Lunsford and Ouzgane’s *JAC* special issue in 1998 substantially broadened the scope of interaction between composition and postcolonial studies with nine articles and a lengthy interview with Gloria Anzaldúa. The issue’s contents provoked Min-Zhan Lu to respond in the next volume of *JAC* with “The Vitality of the Ungrateful Receiver: Making Giving Mutual between Composition and Postcolonial Studies.”

As the title of Lu’s response suggests, she warns composition scholars against uncritical acceptance of postcolonial theorizing that ignores classrooms and the students and teachers who inhabit them. She insists, too, that postcolonial theorists could “become more reflexive about the ways in which teachers’ reading postures […] set constraints on how students go about writing and rewriting their relations to institutional power” (351). Nearly two-thirds of Lu’s response is given over to criticism of Anzaldúa for disregarding what composition studies might bring to her postcolonial project. Lu concludes by noting that she hopes “to jump start rather than to exhaust how composition teachers and scholars might go about confronting the institutional givens of composition’s exchange with postcolonial studies” (354). About the time Lu’s response appeared in print, Lunsford and Ouzgane put out a new call, this time for contributions to an edited collection covering much the same conceptual territory as their *JAC* special issue. Interestingly, gone from the call is the admonition against “describing particular classroom techniques.” Instead, prospective authors are invited to explore, among other topics, the “classroom as a ‘contact zone’” and “unequal power relationships in the classroom” (Ouzgane, “UPDATE”).

The volume resulting from Lunsford and Ouzgane’s second call, *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies*, incorporates four articles and the Anzaldúa interview from their *JAC* special issue, along with seven new chapters. It also includes a revision of Lu’s *JAC* critique, which is sandwiched between the editors’ brief introduction and Lunsford’s interview with Anzaldúa. Given all of these elements, Lunsford and Ouzgane’s editorial challenge was
considerable. To begin with, Lu’s critique demands that the editors strike a judicious balance between treatments of postcolonial theory developed by literary scholars and those evolved by scholars in composition and rhetoric. Further, Anzaldúa’s wide-ranging commentary on the postcolonial condition anticipates contributions that feature surprising improvisations on postcolonial theory. To the editors’ great credit, the chapters in *Crossing Borderlands* largely fulfill the expectations raised by Lu and Anzaldúa. In so doing, the chapters demonstrate that postcolonial studies offers a conceptual vocabulary that complements the efforts that Reynolds, Ede, and others have made to situate local studies of writing and its teaching within networks of institutional power that stretch globally. The coherence of this demonstration rests on Lunsford and Ouzgane’s talent for orchestrating scholarly voices whose disagreements produce opportunities for further research and innovative practice.

Setting the stage for a coherent reading experience, Lunsford and Ouzgane make the conventional introductory gesture of promising to “extend” scholarly “conversation,” first by moving to “consolidate” what has previously been said on the subject at hand, and then by laying out that consolidation as “grounding” upon which the field may “build” a new framework for fresh inquiry (4). But there is reason to question the solidity of this foundation. Not only must we bear in mind what Reynolds and Ede teach us about the footing and future of composition as a discipline. We must also consider the contrast between Lunsford and Ouzgane’s description of postcolonial studies as a “body of work [that] coheres around an exploration of power relations between Western and Third World countries” (1, emphasis added) and a contributor’s claim that “[t]here is really no agreement on what constitutes the ‘postcolonial’” (157). How, then, to construct a book that can hold together as the conceptual terrain beneath it shifts? Lunsford and Ouzgane answer this question with more than just the eight-page chapter that constitutes their introduction. The two chapters that follow theirs—Lu’s “Composing Postcolonial Studies” and Lunsford’s “Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality”—build out the introductory architecture that *Crossing Borderlands* requires.

In essence, Lunsford and Ouzgane charge Lu and Anzaldúa with providing a critical overview of the book’s chapters, a task that Lu accepts with relish. As in her *JAC* response, Lu’s “invested” reading is one that counsels composition teachers and scholars to be “ungrateful” recipients of what
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postcolonial studies has to offer (9). Throughout, Lu turns to Lunsford’s interview with Anzaldúa to illustrate how the posture of ingratitude—how being critical of what Anzaldúa offers composition—is vital to our discipline’s integrity. For example, Lu takes Anzaldúa’s happy acknowledgment that composition scholars cite her work as an occasion to question why “books in composition” are not among the academic titles with which Anzaldúa is familiar (13). This is a question worth bearing in mind while reading Lunsford’s wide-ranging interview with Anzaldúa, the third and final element of the book’s introductory suite. The interview explores the idea of “mestiza rhetoric,” a term that Lunsford applies to the “multiple writing strategies” enacted by Anzaldúa that produce “nonbinary identity” in words and the world, a liberating outcome that requires much struggle to achieve (34). In conversational turns that might be said to anticipate Lu’s critique, Anzaldúa hints at how mestiza rhetoric might be elaborated and taught as she discusses a “book project” about “composition and postcolonial issues of identity,” whose initial chapters “have to do with the writing process, that have to do with rhetoric, that have to do with composition” (43). Central to this rhetoric is compustura, which “means seaming together fragments to make a garment which you wear, which represents you, your identity and reality in the world” (43). Recalling her days (and expertise) as a seamstress, Anzaldúa imagines a rhetoric that displays the elements of identity side by side, that does not layer them so as to obscure one element with another. Unfortunately, just how this rhetoric might materialize pedagogically may never be fully known: Anzaldúa passed away in May 2004 from complications related to diabetes.

Well before her passing, Anzaldúa’s voice was heard in the composition classroom, sometimes in ways she found surprising. For example, she remarks on how an excerpt from Borderlands/La Frontera was incorporated into a particular composition text’s unit on place: “The students are supposed to take that little piece of writing, and write a letter saying what I wrote, assuming my place, and signing the letter ‘Gloria Anzaldúa’[…] I don’t know how the students are supposed to do this” (62–63). Surprising, yes, but Anzaldúa was cognizant of the multiple pressures that shape such assignments. With regard to writing pedagogical material, she is aware that “the publishers tend to be conservative” because of the “censorship” practiced in states such as Texas (46). As a consequence, she always asked herself, “How much can I get away with pushing at the norms, at the conventions?” (46). This pressure to write conventionally is not only external: “I’ve internalized my mom’s voice, the
neoconservative right voice, the morality voice. I’m always fighting those voices” (47). Little wonder, then, that in advancing “another way of ordering, another way of composing, another rhetoric,” Anzaldúa is conflicted (48). It may be true, as Lu points out, that Anzaldúa is invested in a problematic “developmental plot” (17). “Whatever field it is, you have to know your way around,” we hear Anzaldúa say (49). But she twists the plot, putting it in service of her “Trojan Burra” approach to preparing college students to “make changes from the inside” of the university (48). Anzaldúa suggests that the importance of this pedagogy cannot be underestimated, for its postcolonial sensibility sets up resistance to “the neocolonization of people’s minds,” without which “[y]ou get the erasure of certain histories, the erasure of ideas, the erasure of voices, the erasure of languages, the erasure of books” (51).

Is there an ongoing role for composition in resisting the erasures to which Anzaldúa testifies, and which she witnessed in the reception and (mis)appropriation of her ideas, her voices, and her books? And in fulfilling this role, must composition’s probable complicity in sustaining such erasures be recognized? The remaining chapters in Crossing Borderlands attempt to answer one or both of these questions. Some chapters theorize answers that are intended to be applicable in the classroom. Other chapters describe local classroom practices in ways that illuminate how practice can inform theorizing about writing and its teaching.

Among the chapters that foreground theory are Gary Olson’s and R. Mark Hall and Mary Rosner’s, both of which scrutinize compositionists’ appropriation of Mary Louise Pratt’s work on cultural contact zones. Olson worries that composition scholars have taken a “highly evocative” term and “diluted” its explanatory power (86, 87). He concludes that composition must develop “a nuanced notion of Other [. . .] if our theorizing of contact zones is to be truly useful” (93). Hall and Rosner concur, but caution that Pratt’s construct, if rehabilitated, must not be characterized as having “the stability of a black box” (99). That is, contact zones should not be seen as necessarily privileging “difference and the adversarial discourses that result from it,” this because discursive activities in contact zones have the potential to produce more than just agonism (108). Additional chapters comment on composition’s appropriation of Pratt’s work, as well as that of other scholars identified with postcolonial studies. In her contribution, Louise Rodríguez Connal argues for the utility of hybridity as a concept with subversive potential that could push composition researchers beyond their reliance on conventional characterizations of ethnic
subjectivity (208). And while welcoming the sort of appropriation represented in Connal’s work, Deepika Bahri cautions against the “unreflective deployment” of certain “theoretical constructions of postcolonialism” such as subalternity that are “altogether too suspiciously welcome in the academy” because of their “contained radicalism” (73). Still other chapters bring attention to critical interventions that have yet to be welcomed in composition. Martin Behr’s chapter on testimonio explores the potential of a genre within which writers who have been subject to colonial exploitation can “use features of Western genres” to render “collective experiences of colonization and marginalization” legible to non-native audiences “without adopting […] colonial attitudes” (142). But, as Susan Jarratt argues in her chapter, testimonio can be distorted by Western eyes that perceive it as an exercise in representation. The trouble with representation, Jarratt asserts, is its reliance on metaphor, which often distorts or obscures features of indigenous community by forcing comparisons with familiar aspects of colonizing cultures.

Many of the theory-saturated chapters in Crossing Borderlands reference works of postcolonial theory by what Bahri calls “the expected triumvirate of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak” (67). It is true that Bhabha’s The Location of Culture, Said’s Orientalism and Culture of Imperialism, and Spivak’s In Other Worlds are cited across multiple chapters. Generally, though, these books are mentioned in passing, without much text given over to situating them in a narrative descriptive of postcolonial studies’ development. So it goes with edited collections, wherein individual chapters are, as a rule, too short to perform the sort of interdisciplinary contextualizing accomplished in Reynolds’s book. But there are exceptions in Crossing Borderlands, and they tend not to feature the “expected triumvirate,” but rather books by scholars whose agendas complicate received notions of gender. Hall and Rosner study the reception across disciplines of Pratt’s Imperial Eyes, while Jarratt and Bahri draw into their analyses scholarship by feminist postcolonial scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha (Woman, Native, Other) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, which she edited with Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres).

Among the chapters mentioned so far, a fair number fit Ede’s description of “theoretical critique” (132). Interestingly, her objection that such critique precludes attention to practice is answered in Crossing Borderlands by chapters that test the assertions of postcolonial theory in communities and classrooms. The result is not quite the blending of theoretical and practical discourse
apparent in Anzaldúa’s interview and oeuvre, but there is at least a balance struck between verbal abstraction and its concrete implications in classroom pedagogy and community policymaking.

Two chapters, by Pamela Gay and Jaime Armin Mejía, focus on students’ experience in classrooms where linked curricular and demographic shifts have brought identity to the forefront of discussion. In the class Gay examines, which featured student interaction on an email listserv, an “angry discussion string about multiculturalism” presented her “with an opportunity to move beyond inclusion and to begin to explore engagement” (226). With that engagement documented in a listserv transcript, Gay argues that there is an opportunity to “look and look again” at ideological conflict between students, and to take advantage of such reflection in “re-framing” discussion so that it focuses on ways to sustain interactions between students whose differences, unchecked, might not lead to productive ends (236). Mejía, too, is concerned about sustaining difficult dialogues. He reports on the “internal colonialism” experienced by students of color who live along the U.S.-Mexican border, arguing that “[f]rom a U.S.-Mexico borderlands perspective, we cannot afford to create sites of cultural conflict where crossover collaborations with students’ cultural backgrounds and pedagogies aren’t taken advantage of and cultivated. People from all cultural backgrounds, after all, have wisdom they should not doubt and which can help us form what we should all desire—democracy” (197).

The emergence of democracy from cross-border and cross-cultural engagements is far from inevitable, as C. Jan Swearingen’s chapter reminds readers. Her critical reassessment of the “Ebonics” controversy in the Oakland schools asks why “the flood of Ebonics editorials,” which reflected “an astonishing degree of resistance, misunderstanding, distortions, dismissal and thinly veiled racism,” was so unaffected by potentially relevant research taking place in that “parallel universe known as academia” (243, 245). She criticizes the trend in such research toward locally situated studies, arguing that “to combine a local-only rule for literacy studies with a politically based objection to ethnic cultural designations such as Black oral culture would seem to impede the goal of local studies by erasing the terms needed for defining local identities” (251–52).

One attraction of postcolonial studies is its sophisticated understanding of the material circumstances out of which people speak and act. Gay, Mejía, and Swearingen touch on this understanding, but two other contributors truly embrace it. Both focus on how teacherly subjectivities that are marked as
postcolonial play out in the classroom. In an essay whose style departs from scholarly convention, Aneil Rallin stipulates that “[a]s a teacher, my main goal is to radicalize my students,” and as an academic writer, he confesses that he is “not always interested in thoughts that connect perfectly” (144, 149). His writing is fragmented, he says, because teaching, as a political commitment, requires so very much of his time. And if his fractured prose raises more questions than it answers, so be it: “Writing is not tolerated as a questioning but only as an answer, as something fixed and not as something that is uncertain in its movement, in its ambitions, something that is unfinished” (156). But how to change this disabling situation? Another contributor ventures an answer. Declaring his “identity as a postcolonial subject,” David Dzaka insists that the “continuities between colonial and postcolonial epistemologies and relationships promoted by the school system qualitatively affect the writing efforts of students who claim such a background” (157, 159). From experience, he details the “typical college writing class in Ghana,” from which he personally emerged with “no personal power […] to generate original thought, to confidently weigh it against the ideas of others” (161, 166). As a consequence, his “writing came under fire in graduate school” (168). Reflecting on this past, Dzaka argues that “[i]t is crucial to understand that when postcolonial learners exhibit shallowness in their writing, it is not because they are incapable of being expressive, interesting, deep thinkers” (169). It is because the legacy of colonial education continues to place strict limits on expression critical of authority and convention.

Rallin’s and Dzaka’s chapters characterize scenes of learning where access to scholarly material is complicated by serious constraints on time and money—which leads to a question that must be asked of a book that carries the title *Crossing Borderlands*. It may cross borderlands metaphorically speaking, but does it do so materially? How widely available is the book, domestically and internationally? A search of OCLC records indicates that *Crossing Borderlands* is not in the library collection of California State University, San Marcos, where Rallin taught at the time he wrote his chapter, though it is in the collection of York University, Canada, where he now teaches. It is difficult to tell whether the book is in the collection of the University of Ghana, where Dzaka began his postsecondary education; its library holdings cannot be searched online. But the book is in the collections at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, where he completed his Ph.D., and Messiah College in Pennsylvania, where he now teaches. Worldwide, the book is in 342 of the circulating
collections that register holdings with OCLC, most of them four-year universities in the United States. Just 13 U.S. community college libraries have the book cataloged, and it is in only 8 collections outside of North America and Western Europe. Moreover, Crossing Borderlands has a limited digital presence: parts of the introduction, Lu’s chapter, and the Anzaldúa interview are available via Google Books, but that is all.\textsuperscript{12}

What this means is that Crossing Borderlands is not publicly accessible at many of the two-year U.S. institutions where student identities are at their most diverse, nor is the book positioned for easy uptake into international dialogues where literacy and the postcolonial condition might intersect. This is not a failing of the volume’s editors or its publisher. Yet given the arguments Crossing Borderlands presents, its limited availability should prompt concern about the future of books in a field whose scholars—like all of the contributors to Lunsford and Ouzgane’s book, and like Reynolds and Ede—intend their research to enhance the teaching of academic writing, in the United States and abroad.

\textbf{V.}  
Sixteen years ago, Stephen North could worry about book reviewing precisely because scholarly books in rhetoric and composition, as vessels for disciplined arguments, mattered more than they ever had before. But the forces that brought books to prominence in the field, circa 1990, in no way guaranteed an audience for them. For books to have impact, a bridge between their authors and prospective readers had to be built. North saw reviews as that bridge—and for good reason. No other pathway of communication was suited to the role of disseminating news of books hot off the (university) press. And no genre aside from the review was so well adapted to the work of sorting books according to topic and quality, an essential function if the volume of book publication were to increase, as it did. But the book review genre was not built for speed. Indeed, North complained that the “slow pace of the whole review process” held back the field’s exposure to new knowledge (356). Today, reviews may still be slow to appear, but other pathways to news about books have been opened. Online library catalogs, publishers’ catalogs, book digitization initiatives, and bookselling sites all announce important details about books as soon as they are published, if not before. Scholars need not rely on reviews alone, or really at all, to learn about books of potential interest to them.\textsuperscript{13}

So what good are book reviews, especially those as tardy as this one? While
I regret the delay in completing my assignment, I have found that something is gained when a reviewer is released from the obligation to herald a book’s arrival. The resulting review can be more reflective: it can trace a book’s development, evaluate its quality, and appraise its early reception. I concentrate on the last step, reception, in this final section of my review. Doing so lets me look at how the three titles under consideration have performed as books: as physical repositories of arguments that can be referenced in the service of various rhetorical aims that count as scholarship in the field. More pointedly, this approach allows me to examine how the three books are realizing their potential to promote interest in their common subject: the spatiality of writing, writing instruction, and the study of writing. I undertake this examination by asking and answering a sequence of questions, all of which lead to the query I posed in the title of this essay: What do we want from books?

To begin, then, let me restate the question that opened this section. Are reviews essential to a book’s reception? To date, Ede’s Situating Composition has been reviewed—on balance, favorably—in Composition Studies, College English, and Rhetoric Review. It has not, however, been much cited in published scholarship, though it does receive mention in Wendy Hesford’s recent PMLA article on “Global Turns and Cautions in Rhetoric and Composition Studies.” Hesford cites Reynolds’s book, too, as do scholars across an intriguing range of print venues. Regarding Geographies of Writing, mine is one of the first print reviews, although an “online exclusive” review appears on the Composition Studies website. Lunsford and Ouzgane’s collection has been reviewed in the pages of Teachers College Record and College Literature, journals whose audiences likely do not intersect much with the overlapping readership of College English and College Composition and Communication, in which a few of the collection’s chapters have been cited. So while authors and publishers might hope that books will generate reviews as a first step toward citation by scholars in the field, there is some evidence that the link between reviews and citations is modest at best. Surely, the fairness of generalizing from three cases is subject to debate. Still, it is undeniable that scholars routinely encounter new titles in online venues that simply did not exist in 1990. Take Reynolds’s book, for example. Its full contents can be searched on the Amazon.com site, and it is available in “Snippet View” through Google Books. Ede’s book also can be searched on the Google Books site, with results presented in “Snippet View.” And, as already noted, parts of Lunsford and Ouzgane’s collection can be accessed in “Limited Preview” mode on the Google Books site. Further, both
Amazon and Google permit users to post reviews of the books, and both sites link—albeit in highly selective fashion—to web-browsable sources that mention the books, including blogs maintained by scholars in the field.

Now, once we choose to read a scholarly book, regardless of how we find it, then what? If the book’s argument influences our own thinking and writing, convention dictates that we are responsible for saying so by way of formal citation in our prose. Yet there is wide variation in just how we cite our peers’ influential books. For instance, in her *PMLA* essay, Hesford’s reference to Ede’s and Reynolds’s books is descriptive, and she points to this description as evidence for the general claim that scholars in composition are alert to how “[t]he contradictory effects of globalization,” with “its polarizing as well as democratizing functions, suggest the need for a critical localism and research methods that recognize the ongoing cultural work of ‘local’ spaces” (790). Description suffices nicely in an essay meant to introduce *PMLA*’s diverse readership to new scholarly directions in a field not well understood by the association’s core membership in literary studies. The descriptive mode also plays well when the citation occurs in a journal outside the field of English Studies. David Livingstone, a formidable figure in cultural geography, describes Reynolds’s book in an essay that concludes a special issue of the *British Journal of the History of Science* on spatial metaphor in reports of scientific discovery. In sum, description is a sensible approach to referencing books for readers outside of our field, and a necessary mode of communication when someone outside the field looks in on our work.

But should we expect more than description when colleagues in rhetoric and composition cite one another’s new scholarship? We might, but if we do, we may be disappointed, at least in the case of the three books under review. There has yet to emerge much serious engagement with the arguments Reynolds, Ede, and the contributors to Lunsford and Ouzgane’s collection put forth. Perhaps it is still too soon to find more than glancing mentions of authors and titles only. Such mentions have the effect of expressing solidarity with ideas; that is all to the good, but it is not enough. Reynolds and Ede mean to provoke constructive arguments, and Lunsford and Ouzgane arrange their collection to achieve that effect, too. Citations that merely register a book’s existence fail to tap its intellectual energy, often years in the making. What a loss to the field when this is all the notice a book ever garners.

Which begs the question: When books are cited, do we need evidence that they have actually been read? There are both righteous and practical answers to this question, and they differ. The righteous answer is, of course, yes.
But the practical answer pays heed to what Richard Lanham calls the “economics of attention”: a recognition that, among other things, “[s]cholarly research continues to heap mountain on mountain” (20–21). Consequently, as we strive to reach some summits, we may choose to regard others from afar. Disciplinary convention allows for this possibility in the form of passing citations, my complaints about them notwithstanding. In fact, brief, breezy mentions are the norm. Such is the premise Pierre Bayard floats in How to Talk about Books You Haven’t Read: “With cultural literacy comes the inherent threat of vanishing into other people’s books, a threat it is vital to escape if we are to create any work of our own” (25). We can make good this escape, Bayard claims, only if we sometimes acknowledge that “it is not any specific book that counts, but the totality of all books,” the implication being that “[p]laying exclusive attention to an individual volume causes us to risk losing sight of that totality, as well as the qualities in each book that figure in the larger scheme” (31). Some may find cynicism in Bayard’s position, even a threatening strain of anti-intellectualism. But the fact remains that a brief citation is sometimes all that is needed to locate a book’s argument in one or another intellectual tradition. It then falls to readers—to us—to visit that location if we wish to experience a book in its full complexity.

Still, I would hope that the best of our new books will receive more than momentary notice reasonably soon after they debut. Now that awareness of Geographies of Writing, Situating Composition, and Crossing Borderlands is spreading through the field, we should anticipate that scholars will build on the passing and descriptive citations that are in circulation. Let us hope that critical conversation is next. I am anxious for it to happen soon: in 2007, a number of journal articles—on spatial rhetorics, on first-year composition, on the postcolonial discourse—missed opportunities to present stronger arguments by drawing on what Reynolds, Ede, and the contributors to Lunsford and Ouzgane’s collection ask us to consider. Will 2008 bring the wider acknowledgment these authors’ arguments deserve?14

I trust it will. Studied recognition of good scholarly books takes time to evolve. Geographies of Writing, Situating Composition, and Crossing Borderlands are perfect demonstrations of this fact: each book was years in the making. So while we contemplate the economic pressures and technological innovations that are reshaping scholarly communication, let us remember a lesson we can take away from reading the books reviewed in this essay. Technological developments that broaden and ease access to such scholarship are doubtless of great benefit to the discipline.15 But the writerly work of creating scholarship...
of lasting value, and the readerly work of locating it meaningfully in our tradi-
tions of thought, will still take time and cannot be rushed. That is what we
should want from books, irrespective of their form: ample space and time to
think together about the questions that define—and, yes, challenge—our col-
clective stake in the work we choose to do together.

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Notes
1. According to CompPile bibliographers, Southern Methodist University Press ini-
tiated its SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric in 1989 (“Edited Series”). In
1992, the University of Pittsburgh Press launched its Pittsburgh Series in Compo-
sition, Literacy, and Culture with four titles. NCTE’s Refiguring English Studies
series debuted in 1994, and Heinemann-Boynton/Cook’s CrossCurrents series be-
gan in 1995. Ablex offered the first title in its New Directions in Computers and
Composition Studies series in 1996. Of course, at least one continuing book series
in composition and rhetoric predates those just listed: Studies in Writing and Rheto-
ic, sponsored by CCCC and published by Southern Illinois University Press, is-
issued its first title in 1983.

2. There is precedent for taking concerns about book reviewing as symptomatic of
uncertainty about books and their market appeal to readers. Times of transition in
book publishing—be it academic or trade—give rise to anxiety about the quality,
extent, or function of book reviewing. In the early 1960s, for example, when trade
publishers wanted to get serious books into the hands of postwar college gradu-
ates, the content of the New York Times Book Review was found wanting (Hardwick;
Epstein 116–22). Today, one can draw a plausible connection between handwringing
about the decline of newspaper book reviewing (Wasserman) to worries about the
business of books (see Schiffrin on books for the trade, and contributors to Abel
and Newlin for an appraisal of the economics of scholarly publishing).

3. The field’s embrace of journal publication as a preferred mode of scholarly com-
munication was only about a decade old when books challenged that preference.
In 1984, Robert Connors concluded a review of the field’s journals this way: “Like it
or not […] we are launched. Composition studies is a genuine discipline, no longer
merely a hobby, or avocation, or punishment, and through our scholarly contribu-
tions to journals we can direct this fledgling discipline in a number of directions”
(364).
4. The stories of crisis told by ACLS and MLA certainly apply to book publication in composition and rhetoric (see also Waters). It is reasonable to surmise that, in the early 1990s, demand for scholarly books in the field came reliably from research libraries, and less reliably from graduate seminars and individual scholars. Today, library budgets no longer support the acquisition of composition and rhetoric titles as they once did. A survey of OCLC records indicates that research library holdings of CCCC “best book” winners were routinely in the 300–400 range until about 1995, when the numbers began declining, with a few exceptions, toward their current level in the 200-copy range (see “CCCC Outstanding Book Award”). The graduate seminar market for some titles might have grown over the years, but it is impossible to tell because publishers do not release sales statistics on individual titles.

5. The literature on scholarly publishing across media is evolving quickly. Among recent contributions, see John B. Thompson’s *Books in the Digital Age*, especially chapter 15, “The Hidden Revolution: Reinventing the Life Cycle of the Book,” and Christine L. Borgman’s *Scholarship in the Digital Age*, especially chapter 8, “Disciplines, Documents, and Data.” See also *University Publishing in a Digital Age*, a report by Laura Brown, former president of Oxford University Press USA, and the Strategic Services group of the Ithaka higher education consulting group (Brown, Griffiths, and Rascoff).

6. On the revision of dissertations into books, see Germano; contributors to Luey. All stress the considerable difference between successful dissertations and influential books.

7. Even given this criticism of composition’s embrace of the city metaphor, some scholars contend that Reynolds’s theorizing exhibits a subtle bias toward metropolitan literacies and, implicitly, against literacies practiced in rural locales (see Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 12–14).

8. The ten questions with which Ede begins the book appear to have been long in the making (3–4). They resonate strongly with the set of questions that conclude Ede’s “Reading the Writing Process,” published a decade before *Situating Composition* (41).

9. A number of senior scholars in composition and rhetoric have joined Ede in publishing important, critical reflections on the field (see Bartholomae; Lunsford; Mailloux; Rose).

10. See contributors to Loomba et al. for a lengthy discussion of what postcolonial studies is and does.

11. Anzaldúa’s book may yet be forthcoming. Draft chapters of a “Writing Guide” are cataloged in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, deposited in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Box 55
contains a manuscript and chapter outline, as well as draft pieces that bear such inviting titles as “Autohistorias as Process Writing” (1997), “Compositioning: Theories of Art” (2000), “Nepantla and the Creative Process” (2002), and “Conocimiento” (2001). At this time, much material related to the book is “closed until publication or release” by her estate, but some pieces (e.g., “La artista y su comunidad” [1997]) may be viewed by researchers.

12. It is worth noting that JAC library availability is limited to 311 research institutions, according to OCLC, and that Lunsford and Ouzgane’s special issue, and Lu’s response to it, are not in the online JAC archive (http://www.jacweb.org). For a discussion of the implications of globally uneven access to U.S. and European scholarly production, see Canagarajah 157–82.


14. Such notice need not come only by way of scholarly citation. A Google search of the titles under review, restricted to the .edu domain, reveals that all three books are being assigned in graduate seminars.

15. Several small scholarly publishers in the field make titles readily available in digital form (“Digital Books on the WAC Clearinghouse”; Parlor Press). But the infrastructure required to multiply and scale up such operations is considerable (see Borgman 13–31), and the politics of digital publication are vexing (see Institute for the Future of the Book). Meantime, there is reason to believe that book publication in print will be with us for some time to come (Anderson; Duguid; Grafton).

Works Cited


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