tasks technologies, but each “constitutes” a “social system” (235). In other words, as teachers and WPAs, we are always using technologies to do assessment, always “assisted” in our writing assessments by technologies of various kinds—in fact, our assessments are technologies themselves—and that in turn these technologies are constructing social systems and black boxes that structure assessment, student arrangements, our jobs, our notions of our students’ competencies, our pedagogies, our classes, our world. While this insight is not identified in Ericsson and Haswell’s collection, it’s worth keeping in mind as one reads this necessary book. And given the overly enthusiastic collection by Shermis and Bernstein, this collection is an important counterweight to balance the scales.

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Works Cited


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As we become more enmeshed in an information economy, the places of composition studies continue to expand beyond classrooms and into actual and virtual public spheres. Coinciding with this cultural transition, the direction of our work within our classrooms and our scholarship is also changing: academic discourse is losing ground to public discourse, studies leading to generalized findings are being replaced with studies focusing on the situatedness of writing, and there is a growing sense that compositionists need not only be informed pedagogues and engaged scholars, but also socially-aware, active citizens. Responding to these economic and disciplinary shifts, editors Christopher J. Keller, Christian R. Weisser, and the fifteen contributors to The Locations of Composition offer the concepts of place, space, and location as a means of exploring these issues.
Compositionists, as Sidney Dobrin explains in the first chapter, have adopted spatial theory or at least its vocabulary to describe the work of the field. References to places, real and imagined, fill our scholarship: *topoi*, contact zones, classrooms, blogs, placement tests, writing centers, and discourse communities are but a few examples. The aim of this collection is to move from using this vocabulary to thinking critically about it, to explore, as the editors explain, “the relationship between places, the spaces they create, the locations that alter and (re)orient, and the ways the work of composition studies contributes to all of these activities” (5-6). In other words, rather than focusing on a particular place, the collection invites scholars to consider the impact of place on all aspects of composition studies. In line with this goal, contributors discuss a range of topics including: the place of composition within the university, the places students bring into the classroom, the places we ask students to occupy, the places of technology, the place of textbooks within our discipline, and the connections between place and rhetorical theory. These essays taken collectively, as such, not only ask readers to think critically about connections between place, space, location and composition studies, but also provide pedagogical practices that enable students to become involved in conversations about place.

Keller and Weisser begin by defining the text’s central terms: place, bounded physical and immaterial terrain imbued with value and meaning; space, undefined or unoccupied area that exists because of human interaction with place; and location, the metaphorical or physical positioning of an individual in relation to place. Though they offer these definitions, they recognize that each term is contextual and the definition, therefore, is flexible. Following a discussion of the terms, the editors explain their rationale for dividing the work into three general parts—Across the Field, Inside the Classroom and Beyond, and Among the Institutions—devoting each section to a broad exploration of place as it relates to composition studies. Some of these parts, however, lack the focus that is needed to make the section cohesive. Even the editors recognize that the boundaries of the parts are artificial, encouraging readers to “redive, reconnect, and replace these chapters” (12).

“Across the Field,” for example, aims to “examine different notions of place and location as they affect the field of composition studies in a broad sense” (6). Given this sweeping scope, not all of the essays clearly relate to one another; nevertheless, they are all rich explorations of the relationships between place and composition’s history, theory, and future. By examining the way we represent our history, the motives behind the focus on academic discourse, and the production of scholars within graduate courses, scholars such as Dobrin, Elizabeth Ervin, Peter Vanderberg and Jennifer Clary-Lemon fill this space with discussions centering on issues of
disciplinary identity formation. Within the first chapter, Dobrin picks up where Keller and Weisser leave off, offering a more in-depth analysis of the historical development of the concepts of space and place. Dobrin adds to this discussion the concept of occupation, critiquing the way composition studies, in its quest for academic validation, has rested in the safety of the place it now occupies within the university. Later Vanderberg and Clary-Lemon pick up this discussion of disciplinary identity, examining the way graduate students are introduced to the work of composition studies. They contend that though “reading published scholarship and producing texts that mirror its conventions have been the dominant pedagogical model,” community-based graduate education might be more ethical and effective, pushing students to consider how they represent the “other” in their work and pushing scholars to reconsider the value placed upon objectivity and generalizations (94). Between these essays exploring the history and future of the place of composition studies are Cynthia Hayne’s chapter on the pedagogical advantages of using MOOS to aid retention and Thomas Rickert’s review of the historical connection between place, invention, and *kairos*. While Rickert’s and Hayne’s chapters do not necessarily relate to the larger discussions about the identity of composition studies, they do similarly invite meta-thinking about place and its connections to technology and theory.

The essays within part 2, “Inside the Classroom and Beyond,” more closely relate to one another, offering excellent examples of praxis. John Ackerman’s development of a georhetorical pedagogical method and Robert Brooke and Jason McIntosh’s description of the ways deep maps can enable students to develop a civic identity, for example, provide theoretical rationales for classroom practices that help students see themselves as occupying physical and metaphorical places. Kristie Fleckenstein goes a step further, encouraging pedagogues to use imageword to re-envision the classroom as a place of compassion. Writers within this part also respond to the inclusion of new media in classrooms. While many have argued that technology and place are in opposition to one another, Tim Lindgren and Derek Owens point out that while new media complicates our notion of place, it also fosters connections between the local and the global. Using two online projects they developed, Lindgren and Owens provide examples of ways that technology can support the goals of place-based pedagogy. Since the development of such multi-modal projects brings issues of assessment and response to the fore, Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber describe usability methods, borrowed and adapted from a range of fields, that can be used to respond to, analyze, assess, and teach the various forms writing takes within traditional and digital environments. In sum, the essays within this section problematize the places that are already a part of our classrooms, provide strategies that help practitioners connect
writing to place, and invite compositionists to imagine ways of including new places within their classrooms.

The final part, “Among the Institutions,” includes essays that discuss certain “institutions” within the field of composition studies and how they relate to the larger institution of the university. Nancy Myers, for instance, reflects upon the location of Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student within the discipline, arguing that the textbook has become an institution because it relocates the past making it present, and highlights praxis in a way that inverts academic traditions. Nedra Reynolds takes the opposite approach, analyzing Harvard’s film Shaped By Writing to show how institutions and media representations shape students’ understanding of writing as placeless. Several of the other essays within this section critique the terms, ideas, and places that have become institutions within the field. Amy Devitt, for example, argues against the idea that the skills students gain within the first year writing course are transferable—as is—to other genres of academic writing, and Christopher Schroeder challenges the ability of concepts such as “discourse” and “identity” to encompass the range of locations students, especially ESL students, inhabit throughout their academic careers and everyday lives. The majority of these essays, similar to those in part 2, exhibit a good balance of theory and practice, making them useful reads for scholars and practitioners. Interestingly, however, this collection about place ends with Tom Deans’s call for service-learning pedagogy to focus less on place and more on activity, replacing the notion of stable discourse communities with explorations of the relationships between contexts and individual actions.

While spatial constraints keep me from fairly encapsulating each chapter, I assure readers that whether they gravitate toward new media studies, literacy studies, genre studies, postcolonial studies, or place-based pedagogy, there is something of interest within The Locations of Composition. Including such a breadth of topics, Keller and Weisser fulfill their goal of creating a text that functions “as an introduction to the different places of composition” (6). The limited amount of context and theoretical rationale provided by the editors, however, leaves the work of discerning “how [these different places] can and do relate to one another” up to readers (6). While, in the end, we are left without a map connecting all of these places, spaces, and locations, each of the contributors invite scholars to rethink the historical and current location of composition studies as the terrain of composition studies continues to expand.

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