Webbing Cyberfeminist Practice: Communities, Pedagogies, and Social Action, edited by Kristine Blair, Radhika Gajjala, and Christine Tulley. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2009. 364 pp.

Reviewed by Letizia Guglielmo, Kennesaw State University

Vocal, webbed, hypertextual—these words are both characteristic of and central to *Webbing Cyberfeminist Practice*, an exploration of feminist new media essential to discussions in rhetoric and composition studies. Part of the "New Dimensions in Computers and Composition" series edited by Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, the text's greatest strength rests within its ability to be at once accessible to beginning scholars and highly engaging for cyberfeminists for whom many of these essays will offer windows to continued work. The twenty-five contributors and three editors engage their readers in feminist practice on multiple levels: the text gives voice to many women scholars, it is centered on the intersections of feminism and new media, and it highlights the work and the voices of other feminists, those not necessarily listed as authors or contributors but whose important work is described within the pages of the collection. And in cases where the authors do describe the work of other women—on Web sites, blogs, email lists—they are ever-conscious of the power of their own gaze to silence voices and work not to write *about* these women but, instead, to write with them.

The collection is divided into three parts, each made up of five essays and one response, with a foreword and afterword by Hawisher and Cheris Kramarae, respectively. The text is self-reflective at every turn, with intertextual webs woven both within the individual pieces and through the three respondents' conversation with the essays, conversations that often flesh out where individual topics overlap and inform one another. In part 1, *Forming Virtual Kinships*, the contributors illustrate the importance of sharing stories—making the personal public—in moving toward social change. In the opening essay, Susanna Passonen explores issues of consumerism and branding targeted at young girls through doll companion Web sites and argues that the dolls become "ultimate models for consumer citizenship" (30) and reaffirm accepted social norms. Following her piece are three engaging essays illustrating how women have used the Web to work *against* social norms through digital memorials, infertility blogs, and pro-ana Web sites. Kris Nesbitt's piece introduces readers to memorials created for "babies lost before, during or shortly after birth" (43). These Web sites, Nesbitt explains, allow the women who create them not only to grieve their loss and to find support online, but also to write themselves into the role of mother and caregiver, one they are often denied offline. Perhaps most

striking in this essay—and reaffirmed in other sections of the text—is that in making public their pain, they are able to find private comfort. Illustrating a similar silencing of women's voices and how they can be expressed more effectively though the Web, Angela Haas's essay on infertility blogs analyzes their ability to "humanize the women writing them" (76) and to work against the dominant voice of the medical community often present in online infertility resources.

This interrogation of medical rhetoric offers an ideal introduction to the piece by Christa Downer, Morgan Gresham, Roxanne Kirkwood, and the late Sandi Reynolds—certainly one of the most engaging pieces within the collection. These four women explore pro-ana, or pro-anorexia, Web sites through a truly multivocal text that visually represents what is possible in hypertext and digital communication. This unique design enables a communal exchange made up of many voices and opinions, opinions often arranged in textboxes that illustrate visually the feminist "but" or interruption. In a deliberate attempt to speak *with* and not for these women, appropriately, Gresham's voice exists as the opening and closing for the essay as she self-identifies as "in recovery." Central to this section of the text, and also evident in Tulley's description of a digital community of academic women supporting each other through various stages of their careers, is Nancy Baym's assertion "that cyberfeminist spaces are those in which the personal is honored" (130) and in which voices are not silenced.

The second part of the text, *Redrawing Academic Borders*, begins with Claudia Herbst's exploration of the link between power in digital spaces and literacy, specifically knowledge of code language. She argues, as do other authors in this section, that the way to ensure that women's interests are served in digital spaces is to promote digital authorship among women, precisely what Mary Hocks addresses through an engaging and adaptable classroom assignment drawn from her Feminism and Technology seminar that calls on students to reinvent digital spaces. Grounded in the study of digital, feminist, and visual rhetorics, the assignment allows "students [to] discov[er] how easily and how completely assumptions and cultural values become embedded in technologies, which can work to oppress or leave out women, or anyone who doesn't fit the assumptions about identity embedded in the design" (246). Similarly, Susan Kirtley addresses gendered stereotypes about behavior with technology and implores feminist educators to discuss these issues with students, especially as they relate to literacy. Readers will find Kirtley's survey, provided in an appendix, worth replicating in their own courses as a window into this discussion. Also reflecting on classroom practice, Margaret M. Strain, Melissa Fore, and Kara Maloney share with readers their research on building community through computer-mediated communication (CMC) in first-year writing courses and blend this discussion with their own struggles to find community among themselves as feminist

researchers and teachers. Their reflections illustrate the amount of time and thought necessary for integrating CMC into teaching, and, when combined with Kathleen Torrens and Jeannette E. Riley's essay that follows, the student feedback on how online community is created can be particularly useful to first-year writing instructors moving toward hybrid or fully online courses. An important contribution to research in distance learning, Torrens and Riley's essay illustrates the benefits of feminist pedagogy in a fully online, team-taught Women's Studies course, a model that I see as easily adaptable to first-year writing courses. In a fitting response to this section, Cynthia Selfe calls on feminist teachers again to pay attention not only in engaging multimodal texts in their teaching but also in creating them and inviting their students to do the same in a move toward social change.

Although the essays in part 3, *Resisting Gender Hierarchies*, are less fluidly connected, they illustrate for readers, as Tara McPherson notes in her response, the ways in which women engage in acts of resistance through the use of technology. Mary Queen and Naida Zukic in their respective essays, open part 3 with a transnational focus, each cautioning readers of the dangers in a universally applied "one-third, U.S." gaze. "In doing so," Queen argues, "we ignore the ways in which women across the globe use internet technology to create and claim identities, agency, and political activism outside of the circulation of one-third-world, U.S.-centric rhetorics of power" (264). Queen provides a helpful transition to Zukic's analysis of *Sehakia*, a Web site "created for and by North African and Arab lesbians with a political goal of not only strategic interruption of other silences, but also identity-based community-building" (290). Both women succeed in expanding earlier discussions of "who can and may speak for whom" (291), offering readers windows to transnational feminism that may be applied in the classroom. With a shift away from this global focus, Deborah S. Bowen applies the traditional polyvocality of women's writing to online autobiographies, noting as Haas does in her discussion of blogs, that these feminist spaces allow women to create a "room of [their] own" within a public space. Bowen illustrates that beyond writing themselves, these women are able to create multivocal, multilayered texts through links, allowing other women to tell *their own* stories. Jordynn Jack's exploration of *We Have Brains*, a feminist blogging community in which she herself participated, illuminates the way in which women's writing and communication historically have been overlooked for not fitting a male model. Her analysis of this community becomes a helpful model for teachers of writing who wish to incorporate CMC into their courses. In a final example of these acts of resistance, Dànielle Nicole DeVoss examines images that depict cyberfeminist action as resistance to workplace technologies.

While it is disappointing, in light of the projected growth of online distance learning, not to see a more developed discussion of the potential impact of feminist practice on fully online writing courses in this text, the

authors and editors repeatedly acknowledge that these essays do not aim to address all areas of cyberfeminist practice, and appropriately, the text closes with an afterword foregrounding areas for continued research and inviting the voices of readers into this discussion. Cyberfeminist practice is evident not only in the work of the editors and contributors but also in how those with and about whom they write can incite change—in that way the impact of the text is cyclical, continual. As the authors bring these cyberfeminist voices to a new audience, they define, enact, promote, and illustrate potential for social change.

Kennesaw, Georgia

Writers Without Borders: Writing and Teaching Writing in Troubled Times, by Lynn Z. Bloom. West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2008. 231 pages.

Reviewed by Nick Plunkey, University of Nevada, Reno

Composition scholars and teachers have debated the role of personal narrative and language play in their writing courses, as well as the accessibility of academic prose, and *Writers Without Borders* continues these debates. Lynn Bloom argues that creative essays provide a useful method for encountering and enacting changes in our political, social, and technological environments. In eleven chapters, she describes essay qualities, traces the history of the essay, prompts pedagogical considerations for how essays can help address social and political issues, challenges writing program values, and provides practical and ethical solutions for problems that hard-copy and online publications present. This book benefits writing teachers who intend to incorporate essay writing into their courses, especially those that draw upon traditional genres (fiction, poetry, or essays) or those that address socio-political issues through writing. Those who teach from an interdisciplinary perspective as part of a writing program may be interested in Bloom's hopes for the essay genre across disciplines, yet she does not provide theoretical or practical approaches to how the essay genre and its qualities can suit interdisciplinary writing instruction. Bloom gives this book strength based on the knowledge she provides about the American literary canon, literary conventions, and stylistic discussions about how to transcend these conventions.

Bloom begins her discussion in (chapter 1) "Academic Essays and the Vertical Pronoun" by arguing that her values for persona, panache, intelligence, and grace in writing are re-emerging in contemporary academic writing, such as in literary criticism. Her discussion recalls Bartholomae's