REVIEWS

Welch, Nancy. *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1997. 198 pp.

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Cross-Cultural Refusals of Excess

A twelve-year veteran of teaching university level composition in the USA, I have read Nancy Welch's *Getting Restless* in Japan, a country that refuses some aspects of the *excess* Welch prizes. In fact, *Getting Restless* was introduced and sent to me by "a bookstore too big for the physical world," Amazon.com, an illusion of space befitting the scarcity in Japan. Here beds fold inside closets in the morning, platforms employ 'pushers' to wedge passengers onto trains, and prunings are still incinerated in front yards. This is not only a formal society favoring public over private harmony (with a tendency to ignore or deny social problems). It is also a vertical society, where acceptance into a prestigious kindergarten can be more important than graduating from college, where the ladder to success starts with mothers goading kids into mastery of the national curriculum as they ascend the rungs of entrance examinations. Traditionally, Japanese students have learned by group imitation and non-reflective repetition of skills and forms. Perfection, embodied by the teacher, is the goal, and anything else is in the way. The system is changing, but the knell in many parts of East Asia is that students still need more creative and critical thinking, and less memorization, less 'excess' information scooped up and funneled

back in to their brains at weekend and afterhours study tables and cram schools.

At first glance it would appear that Japanese educational practices would find little resonance in *Getting Restless*. What Japanese call social harmony (and Americans, stifling conformity), Welch would see as exploring identity through a predetermined or ideal form. Identity for Welch should be more than a choice between conformity to social conventions and giving way to postmodern fragmentation and dissolution, more than a choice between assimilation to the categories of Japanese society and a Friday night bash at the karaoke bar. It is both accepting the images that society mirrors back to us as well as resisting them. And there is room to do this in the cracks and interstices of the rhetorical situation. More specifically, there is always room for revision and rethinking in the rhetorical richness of words themselves, the multiple, interrelated meanings by which they resonate, the histories they carry.

Welch enacts her ideas in a rhizomatous style that restlessly explores and reflects upon the sources available to student-writers and teachers, neither succumbing to the convenient scapegoating of the institution nor easy bashing of theorists supposedly out of touch with practice. Lacan's darkly deterministic theory of the divided, desiring subject, for instance, is transformed into something dynamic, the gap of maternal separation recast as a space where student-writers can reclaim, revise, resist.

It all appears very un-Japanese. Even Welch the teacher, at least the character that emerges in her anecdotes about working with students, is not the intellect she is in much of the book. Instead she sounds much like a mentoring-friend, and in that sense has little in common with her traditional Japanese counterpart.

But just as Welch urges revision, I must re-view my depiction of a Japanese education. While it is true that students lack individual voice in the classroom, that due to fear of shame or embarrassment they will consult each other and not the teacher for clarification in a lesson (after all, why should a teacher have to say something more than once?), Japanese expository prose

already appears to "conform" to some facets of Welch's idea of excess. One feature of Japanese expository prose is that it is less linear and direct than the American variety that marshals examples and reasoning in support of an opening generality. The inference-based form preferred in the West places the burden of coherence on the writer; however, the burden shifts to the reader in Japan (and to the listener in speech situations). Westerners expect signposts to guide them as they read, yet the Japanese text asks readers to provide transitional material. The Japanese love of formal perfection, particularly in the traditional arts such as tea ceremony, kimono, kendo, and ikebana (flower arrangement), requires a valuing of silence as well. It is not the silence of student banishment and isolation that Welch combats, however (though ostracism and bullying *are* problems in Japanese public schools). It is the silence of Zen, which, it would seem, would be welcome in Welch's curriculum. Yet zen has gone corporate; the stereotypical East meets West contrast has been upstaged by the homogenizing rhetoric of Nike—*Just Do It!*—and designer chic (Versace, Gucci, Giorgio Armani, et al), not to mention the attitude and status one invokes when buying trendy labels. It is this automatic consumerist form that afflicts both Americans and Japanese, an unreflective style and stance that Welch tirelessly and searchingly urges student-writers and teachers to wake up to.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake and Irwin Weiser, eds. *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives.* Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997. 407 pp.

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Over the past fifteen years, portfolios have gained a pedagogical and, to some extent, political prominence that is likely to continue into the twenty-first century. Hence, the importance of a book such as *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives* by Kathleen Blake Yancey and Irwin Weiser, which surveys a variety

of settings in which portfolios have been implemented and raises thought-provoking questions about what can happen when a pedagogy becomes institutionalized, in some instances, unquestioningly. Examining the status of portfolios today, Yancey and Weiser suggest that although portfolios have become an important professional buzzword, the "good-person's" method of assessing writing, their value can be weakened by careless imitation, knee-jerk implementation, and potential co-option by large scale testing programs. Divided into four sections, "Theory and Power," "Pedagogy and Teaching," "Professional Development," and "Technology," the book offers an important retrospective on the history of portfolios, presents new scholarship in the field, and includes reflections by classroom teachers and teacher educators at various levels.

The first section, "Theory and Power," begins with an article by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, which traces the interest in portfolios to the early eighties when it arose as an alternative to large scale proficiency exams. Characterizing portfolios as "a paradigm of the times" that has had a profound impact on teaching, Elbow and Belanoff point out that portfolios have enabled writing teachers to function as both supportive helpers and critical evaluators, and that their widespread adoption has contributed the important lesson "that people can do useful work in assessment without being on top of technical psychometrics" (21). However, Elbow and Belanoff's essay also cautions against the trivialization that can occur if portfolios become merely a fad or are imposed from above by administrators who want to appear "cutting edge." In the face of administrative mandate, those "ordered" to use portfolios tend to go through the motions uncritically, thereby short circuiting the thoughtfulness of the process. The section on theory and power includes several other pieces that balance reflective praise with notes of caution. Characterizing portfolios as a bridge between literary theory and composition practice, Robert Leigh Davis observes that we cannot "comprehend nor assess writing without a sense of context" and therefore that we cannot evaluate the autonomous student text

"apart from the local shaping environments in which it's produced" (35). To provide necessary context, Davis strongly advocates having students write an interpretive introduction in which they reflect on the circumstances out of which the portfolio emerged.

In a similarly cautionary vein, Brian Huot and Michael Williamson's article discusses the interrelationship between assessment, power, portfolios and curriculum, noting that any testing procedure, even one that seems to be as benign as portfolios, tends to reduce the curriculum to what can be measured. Because anything that is not assessed often disappears from the curriculum, portfolios can determine what will be emphasized in the classroom, thereby influencing the culture of the school. This article also points out that when administrators become committed to the idea of portfolios for political, rather than pedagogical reasons, writing assessment can function as a form of surveillance instead of as an educational tool. Susan Callahan's report on Kentucky's mandated writing portfolios raises similar concerns about using portfolios for accountability. Although portfolios were used in Kentucky to drive large-scale reform, some teachers found that they did not facilitate process teaching as intended and that they sometimes discouraged teachers from experimenting with writing tasks and assignments that were not directly intended for the portfolio. In these instances, the portfolio had become "the test." Other concerns about the use of assessment to drive instruction are raised by Sandra Murphy, who notes that the requirement that assignments be portfolio-eligible can result in standardization and often conflicts with student motivation. Murphy also raises important questions about what should be included in the portfolio in terms of assignments and what she refers to as "wild card pieces."

The second section of the book, "Pedagogy," contains six essays that illustrate different manifestations of portfolios at various sites. Mary Ann Smith examines classrooms from kindergarten through the twelfth grade in which portfolios were used as a means, rather than as an end, to learning, "designs that extend, rather than

freeze portfolio practice" (145). Sandra Stone's essay focuses on the use of portfolios in early literacy development and includes a number of children's pieces that illustrate reading and writing acquisition. Discussing her work with high school students, Mary Perry emphasizes the importance of involving students in defining purpose and clarifying audience, maintaining that portfolios must change constantly to be useful. Bill Condon discusses the use of portfolios at the post-secondary level as a means of building bridges between different sites, at students' entry to college, and in a writing-across-the-curriculum context, observing that portfolios are an important tool for linking diverse communities—teachers, learners, and administrators. Susan R. Dailey's essay is an account of how she used portfolios in an advanced legal writing course to enable peer critique, develop a sense of audience, and build confidence.

The third section, "Teaching and Professional Development," focuses on the use of portfolios in the context of teacher education as a means of stimulating reflection, developing confidence, and building professional identity. These articles emphasize that portfolios influence both instruction and assessment with important implications for implementing process pedagogy in the classroom. Section four focuses on portfolios and technology, with Cindy Selfe and Gail Hawisher warning against the uncritical acceptance of both portfolios and computers. Although the articles in this section emphasize the potential of both for the teaching of writing, they point out that no technology can provide a simple solution to a subject as complex as writing acquisition and that a successful "wedding" between the two depends on continuous learning on the part of classroom teachers and teacher educators.

For both teachers and administrators concerned with writing assessment, *Situating Portfolios* is an important book, not only because it presents so many manifestations and possibilities for implementing this important form of assessment, but also because it retains a critical perspective on a subject that has received almost unqualified endorsement. As Anderson's preface to *Winesburg Ohio* suggests, when a "truth" becomes universally

adopted and each person adopts that "truth" as his or her own, the "truth" no longer remains a truth but instead becomes a "grotesque." The questions raised in *Situating Portfolios* make it likely that this distortion will not happen to the concept of portfolios.

McLaughlin, Maureen and MaryEllen Vogt. *Portfolios in Teacher Education*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1996. 156 pp.

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I sat down to read *Portfolios in Teacher Education* about a month before my own summer school class in Foundations of Education was scheduled to begin. However, even a preliminary glance at the book was enough for me to form two impressions. Visually, I thought, the book looked like something written for elementary school teachers. From the cover design to font size, use of white space, and frequency of subheadings, the book has an unfortunately simplistic and decidedly non-academic look to it. But if the book was slightly off-putting visually, its content appeared much more engaging. I expected it to be a quick read, and thought it would give me a very concrete idea of how portfolios could be used in education courses—or in other courses where writing was not the primary focus.

That, as it turned out, was exactly what McLaughlin and Vogt set out to accomplish with their book. Martha Rapp Ruddell, in a forward to the volume, said that McLaughlin and Vogt have "lower[ed] the diving board" so that teachers without previous portfolio experience might feel able to jump in. Indeed, as I read about McLaughlin's and Vogt's experiences with portfolios, I found myself thinking about how I could use portfolios in my upcoming course. By the time I had finished reading about how students helped develop grading rubrics, how the authors encouraged students to come up with their own ways of

documenting learning, and how reflection was built into the portfolio process, I could see exactly how portfolios could be productively incorporated into the course I had envisioned.

McLaughlin and Vogt begin by explaining that they got into teaching with portfolios because they could no longer continue to advocate one process for assessment of learning while using another with their own students. Both teachers are at traditional institutions where letter grades are the rule and standardized tests are common. Even in that environment, which is not particularly conducive to innovative assessment, McLaughlin and Vogt became convinced that it was vital to find a more theoretically supportable means of measuring student learning. Portfolios, they found, more than met that need. Furthermore, portfolios allowed them to expand the range of "performances" that students could use to document their learning. Students in their classes developed personal and course goals, they took responsibility for achieving those goals, and they brainstormed ways of demonstrating progress toward goals in their portfolios. Although most of the portfolio materials were written products, they often took unconventional forms. For example, students wrote poetry and lesson plans, interview notes and cartoons. McLaughlin and Vogt found that their students were taking greater responsibility for their own learning because of the portfolios, as well as gaining an intrinsic understanding of how authentic performance indicators could be used in their own public school classrooms.

Portfolios in Teacher Education is definitely a book for novices in the portfolio world, especially in the professional or pre-professional disciplines. Teachers are walked through the entire portfolio process, and McLaughlin and Vogt provide answers to all the obvious questions (how can I grade something so ill-defined? how will students react to this change? how can I make this something more than a superficial shift?) based on their own experiences and the literature about portfolio practice. The strong practical orientation is both the strength and the weakness of the book. Serious philosophical questions about alternative assessment are largely unexplored. Potential problems in practice (so what

happens if my students resist this whole idea despite my enthusiasm and careful introduction of the process?) are also unaddressed, apparently because McLaughlin and Vogt have used portfolios effectively and had positive experiences with them.

At least two audiences will find themselves well-served by this book: those who like the theory of portfolios and need guidance in the process, and those who are interested in using portfolio assessment but need encouragement to actually take the plunge. Teachers in higher education, where students are typically expected to be reasonably motivated and self-directed, are especially likely to find applicability to their own classrooms. Readers who are more interested in a scholarly exploration of assessment theory will be dissatisfied with this book, and those who are inclined to avoid performance assessment are likely to be unpersuaded by the enthusiasm and success described by McLaughlin and Vogt.

White, Edward M., William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri, eds. *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices.* New York: MLA, 1996. 338 pp.

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Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices is the fourth book in the Modern Language Association's series on Composition. A better title for this collection might be *Writing Assessment: Politics, Politics, Politics*. This modified title would better prepare the reader for the true nature of all assessment policies and practices. However, modified title or not, this recent collection is an important book for composition instructors and others desiring an understanding of the writing assessment debate. Edward White describes the parameters of this debate as "which group or groups will accumulate the power to define the issues and problems of writing assessment, to set the agendas for research and the paradigms for practice?" (10). But rather than answering White's

question this collection asks it again and again, re-inscribing the diverse political agendas at work in postsecondary assessment. John Trimbur provides a "critical purchase" on the terms *politics* and *political* in his response essay. These two terms "foreground conflicts of interest, asymmetrical relations of power, hidden motives, and unforeseen consequences. From this perspective, political analysis should be able to help us read between the lines, so we see what is really going on in writing assessment" (45).

Assessment of student writing, necessary evil or useful pedagogical tool, is not going to go away. White's article, beginning the book, foregrounds the diverse interests that assessment serves: writing teachers, commercial and non-profit testing firms, researchers, minorities and other marginalized groups, politicians, and administrators. White points out, "each group sees itself not as one among a variety of interested parties but as the sole guardian of truth" (10). This careful linking of the players and their interested positions to the assessment debate contextualizes the articles that follow. But it also serves to constrain the debate within old and familiar parameters. In the introduction, the editors point out the varied backgrounds of the contributors. Roberta Camp and Hunter M. Breland work for the Educational Testing Service (ETS), arguably the most influential testing body in the country. Doug Shale, from the University of Calgary, is a statistician. But the diverse voices do not really represent any new positions on assessment, and the articles, with a few notable exceptions, accept the necessity of standardized testing.

It is a response essay that provides the counterpoint for the book's predictable arguments. At the end of Part III, Kurt Spellmeyer displays the political superstructure of the assessment question. Historically situating the current literacy "crisis" as a predictable and reactionary move to protect existing power relations, Spellmeyer asserts that "debates about who is literate are actually about the ownership of 'cultural capital!'" (175). In contrast to the collection's overall measured prose, Spellmeyer's vehement insistence that current assessment politics erase history

forces a focus on the inescapably political nature of assessment. Even ostensibly fair assessment creates information that can take on a life of its own. This life is not always benign. "Standardized testing is one of the most dangerous, invasive, and reactionary developments in the last hundred years of educational policy" (177). Spellmeyer exposes assessment's gatekeeping role; its politics, policies, and practices become clearly articulated as cultural speedbumps. There is no disinterested position in this debate, a debate that begs the question: Why assess? Spellmeyer's article provides a critical space from which the ETS's Hunter M. Breland's technology-worshipping article, and others, appear less foundational.

One of the weaker points of the collection is its predictability. Part IV: "Issues of Inclusion and Equity" deals with race, gender, and class in the assessment of writing. These incredibly important issues are presented intelligently but in a lackluster fashion. Sandra Kamusikiri, not surprisingly, encourages an Afrocentric assessment paradigm. This would be an assessment tool that recognizes linguistic variability as a choice not a problem. Deborah Holdstein insists that gender-based complications need to be acknowledged in testing. Similarly, Liz Hamp-Lyons calls for sensitive, well-designed, contextualized testing. Following Spellmeyer, these articles seem tepid and off the mark.

Throughout *Assessment of Writing* portfolios are held up by educators like Peter Elbow as an assessment paradigm. In Part V: "A Look to the Future," portfolios are carefully questioned. Richard Larson points to the invasive nature of portfolio assessment. What is tested by portfolios, teaching or writing? Who chooses the contents of a portfolio? Sandra Murphy and Barbara Grant also question the portfolio "bandwagon." They caution against any positivistic assessment paradigms. Knowledge does not equal skills, and portfolios can be shaped into skills testing.

White, in the final response, admits that the future looks much like the past: "Writing assessment remains a site of contention among competing power groups" (304). *Assessment of Writing* is an

intelligent and sometimes thought-provoking overview of testing in composition. It is an important and useful introductory collection of thoughtful articles about the writing assessment debate in college composition.

Dobrin, Sidney I. *Constructing Knowledges: the Politics of Theory-Building and Pedagogy in Composition.* Albany: SUNYP, 1997. 181 pp.

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What does this have to do with teaching writing? In its various forms (including the rhetorical), this is perhaps *the* dominant question in rhetoric and composition fora. At professional conference sessions and in graduate seminars, like a vent on a hot-air balloon this question is meant to bring discussion back from the rare air of "theory" to the apparently firm ground of composition pedagogy. One can be so certain of facing this question, from, say, a manuscript reviewer or member of a hiring committee, that the well-trained compositionist, by explicitly "linking" theory and pedagogy in advance, makes sure it is never asked. This anticipated interrogative functions like a silent yet mandatory exigence, what Sidney I. Dobrin, echoing Lynn Worsham, calls the "pedagogical imperative" (63). "In composition," Dobrin writes, "theories are privileged, rejected, criticized, embraced, or shown as interesting only when they are directly coupled with practice" (152). For Dobrin, questions about pedagogy (or, as he consistently writes, *practice*) keep the field firmly teathered to the writing classroom and retard the field's growth.

Arguing that "certain theoretical pursuits may lead to a better understanding of discourse without leading to immediate pedagogical development" (63–64), Dobrin considers a range of humanistic scholars whose own writing emerged far from the discourse of composition yet whose names have become central to composition theory—Foucault, Cixous, Rorty, Derrida, Freire.

In a few instances, Dobrin shows how the transmission of theory from diverse contexts to writing-classroom application—connections never imagined by the theorists—result in self-contradictory, conceptual Frankensteins. This phenomenon, which John Schilb, following Edward Said, has called "traveling theory" (*Rhetoric Review* 11: 1992), is apparent in Dobrin's critique of Ira Shor's application of Freire to North-American students, and perhaps best exemplified by the author's summary of Lynn Worsham's chapter in *Contending With Words*. Dobrin underscores Worsham's claim that radical feminist theory like Cixious' *écriture féminine*—theorized to work against androcentric, hegemonic writing practices—disrupts rather than supports the institutionalized teaching of writing.

Constructing Knowledges claims that recasting poststructuralist theories as composition pedagogies inevitably dulls the critical, transformative edge such theories suggest in their originating contexts. Working out this claim in the analysis of specific writing pedagogies, however, is not Dobrin's primary concern. He seems most interested in showing, simply, that the work of, say, historians and language philosophers—theory developed in other contexts for other purposes—*has* been appropriated by those designing composition pedagogies. Whether such pedagogies are theoretically defensible or even potentially "effective" in the contexts in which they might be offered is less important to Dobrin than the observation that much published composition theory exists to inform pedagogy. For example, his very brief reading of James Sosnoski's chapter in *Contending with Words* does not challenge Sosnoski's derivations of pedagogy from the theory offered elsewhere in that book; for Dobrin, Sosnoski's chapter, at a general level, reveals a kind of disciplined mania: "Sosnoski, like many other compositionists, exhibits a compulsion to locate theoretical endeavor in practical application" (61–62). Summing up the section on Foucault, Dobrin acknowledges that "to some degree his theories *can* be translated into effective pedagogies." He goes on to reason, though, that "[b]y recognizing this, scholars seem to be arguing that in order for Foucault to be of benefit to

composition, we must somehow be able to find practical application in his theories" (55).

Whatever else it might be, *Constructing Knowledges* is primarily an identity claim on the institutional enterprise that has grown up around the teaching of writing. Barely thirty years old by any standard, the field is still in flux; and like many of the contributors to Joseph Petraglia's *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction* (Erlbaum, 1995; see especially Goggin), Dobrin worries that an attention to pedagogy is a kind of albatross that no serious, research-oriented discipline can bear: "Making pedagogy a necessary end of theory places unneeded constraints or limitations on composition scholarship" (21). At present the "pedagogical imperative" is a powerful, deeply-rooted mechanism of discipline, one Dobrin believes "relegates us to a service position within academia" (87).

But who is this "us"? "Theory provides a framework," Dobrin writes, "within which one can operate, ask questions, even alter or refine principles of that theory based on new experience, new observation" (9). Such a definition seems to allow for the role of "theory" in the practice of teaching; yet Dobrin rather consistently *opposes* "practice" (teaching) with "theory," which by implication becomes composition's professional, published discourse. He characterizes his collective audience as teacher-scholars charged with a two-fold task: "to participate in a practice, our pedagogy; and to produce theory that explains the nature, fuction, and operation of written discourse" (6). This opposition is clearly held in place by the perceived threats of the "anti-theory position" which constrains "composition scholarship" (21) and "den[ies] a responsibility to intellectual endeavor, to the field . . . and to ourselves as professionals" (64). Readers whose primary institutional obligation is to teach, who are not expected to publish or are not compensated for publication, whose role "in composition" is defined by their classroom work and a desire to do it well—in other words, the vast majority of American post-secondary writing teachers—are obscured by Dobrin's implied "us." Many teachers who are not compensated to trade in the

professional discourse deploy the "pedagogical imperative" not as an unexamined fetish, but as a disciplined marker of their identities as practitioners whose workplace activities define their interest in and need for theory. They may recall that "theory" entered composition in the 1960s and 1970s for the announced purpose of informing the teaching of writing. And their often uncompromising pragmatism, perhaps a result of training and institutionalized expectation (discipline rather than feeble-mindedness), may cause them to wince when Dobrin promises, for example, that given theories "stand to offer substantial information regarding the social aspects of discourse" (146); however, such readers may not recognize themselves characterized by "fear" (12), "misunderstanding" (16), and a "lynch-mob anti-intellectualism" (20).

Already near the middle of Chapter One, I found myself wishing that Dobrin had taken greater pains to locate contemporaries with whom he disagrees and systematically engage their perspectives. Instead, he composes the "anti-theory position," which is generalized to the thinnest of straw arguments: "anti-intellectual, anti-theory proponents' positions against theoretical pursuit are born from a misunderstanding of the use of theory and how the activity of theorizing operates" (22). Unfortunately, he briefly assigns this stance to David Bleich, whose short review of Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality* becomes an odd and rather pointed lightening rod. In doing so, Dobrin unintentionally inscribes for himself the caricature of the condescending, obscurantist who patrols the border of privileged knowledge: "When outsiders encounter theoretical discourse, they often do not understand the jargon—"big words such as *postmodern, antifoundational, poststructural, feminist,* and so on—and they become confused and frustrated, as Bleich does" (23). Whether Bleich is confused and frustrated by Faigley's use of a discourse that is over his head or, as Bleich says, disappointed by Faigley's tendency to accept "postmodern terms as if they were themselves 'transparent' and not in need of reading" (*JAC* 14.1, 291) may remain open to question. In any case, Dobrin's crude

reduction of opposing views into a kind of buffoonish composite characterized by fear, loathing, and, by implication, irresponsibility (24), relieves him from investigating serious challenges to his own position. The result is a less important, less timely book.

Some might suggest that Dobrin's argument is less significant now than a decade ago, when it was advanced by Gary A. Olson, who contributes a strident Afterword to *Constructing Knowledges*. It has been a good long time already since the "theory wars" that grew out of the editorial choices at *College English* in the early- to mid-1980s. Scholarly journals such as *PRE/TEXT, JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, and *Rhetoric Review*, whose editors have publicly distanced themselves from concerns with writing pedagogy, have enjoyed a steadily increasing authority and influence throughout the 1990s. Scholarly and commercial presses, many of them uninterested in composing theory ten years ago, now systematically produce books unresponsive to the pedagogical imperative. Further, it is far more likely today that a challenge to scholarship uncoupled from the exigencies of practical situations will emerge from a theorized material politics rather than some cranky and alienated anti-theorist. For example, Evan Watkin's *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford, 1989) and Jim Sosnoski's *Token Professionals and Master Critics* (SUNYP, 1994) demonstrate that "theory" and "pedagogy" are firmly located in the compensated material practices and employment conditions of real people working real jobs. To read and write about discourse theory without concern for teaching writing is good work if you can get it; that most cannot has less to do with their capacity for the abstract than their institutional function as "teacher."

Surely Dobrin is right: "as scholars and teachers we [must] speculate further at all levels regarding discourse, whether the analysis of such speculations leads to immediate practical results or not" (155). Pedagogical theories do not exist in a vacuum, separated from theories of knowledge, of being, of culture; Dobrin's worthy contribution is in exhibiting a range of

theoretical questions that can be asked and answered about *writing*—the verb or the noun—in addition to how it might be taught. Dobrin is also right in insisting that "theory can exist without practical applications" (152); he simply stops short of acknowledging that theory, as scholarship, cannot exist without practical *im*plications. No theory exists outside the material conditions of its production and dissemination, and no consideration of "the politics of theory building" in composition can approach real significance without probing the consequences.