

Book Review *Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research after Literacy in American Lives*, edited by John Duffy, Julie Nelson Christoph, Eli Goldblatt, Nelson Graff, Rebecca S. Nowacek and Bryan Trabold

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Learning to read and write has taken place amid convulsive changes in economic and social life, educational expectations and communication technologies. This has been a time when the meaning of what it is to be literate has seemed to shift with nearly every new generation.

—Deborah Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*

Since the 1980s, Deborah Brandt's work has helped shape the interactions between composition and "New Literacy Studies" (NLS). NLS defines literacy not as an independent variable but as a varied set of social practices that need to be examined against their cultural, political and institutional contexts, often with ethnographic methods that can provide "thick descriptions" of literacy in action. This ethnographic framework has been adopted widely in studies of translingual literacies and the rhetorical dynamics of global political economies and locally situated collective action. Converging trends in studies of literacy, composition, and rhetoric led to the founding of *Literacy in Composition Studies* in 2013. *LiCS* was created to examine "the implications of Literacy Studies research, theory, and practice for Composition Studies," and it has featured leading contributors whose work has helped bridge literacy and composition studies. Several of those contributors are included in *Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research after Literacy in American Lives*, which examines the broader impact of Brandt's work on converging trends in composition and literacy studies.

Those convergences are clearly apparent in the varied concerns of the contributors to the volume, including Cynthia Selfe, Eli Goldblatt, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Ellen Cushman, and Anne Ruggles Gere. The contributors highlight how the shared concerns of literacy and composition studies have been shaped by changes in literate technologies, community literacy partnerships, research on marginalized rhetorical traditions, work with teaching and teachers, and transnational studies of literacy such as those included in this issue of *LiCS*. These varied areas of study have been shaped by ethnographic models and methods that reject universalistic conceptions of literacy and renew rhetoric's concern for collective action and situated, provisional, and contested interactions. While modern rhetorical studies tended to assume the stance of individual orators and writers, the interrelated trends in NLS and composition studies have been more broadly concerned with the political economies and collective capacities of literacy. From this perspective, individual agency

is identified with the forms of subjectivity that circulate within and across prevailing ideologies to define what is expected of citizens, aliens, and others who challenge such categorical distinctions.

The rhetorical potentials of these trends in composition and literacy studies were notably set out in 2001 in Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives*, which won a trifecta of awards—the MLA's Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize, the CCCC Outstanding Book Award, and the Grawemeyer educational award. The Grawemeyer has been awarded to other figures who have had the same sort multidisciplinary impact on literacy studies as Brandt, including Mike Rose and Shirley Brice Heath. Like Heath and Rose, Brandt published richly detailed ethnographic studies of how people acquire and exercise the powers of literacy. Brandt introduced the concept of "sponsors of literacy" as a reference point for her studies of the social and ideological dynamics at work in the learning of literacy, not only in the classroom but in kitchens, churches, and prison cells. Brandt's case studies extend over multiple generations and diverse backgrounds to track how literacy has evolved in settings ranging from family farms and rural communities to varied workplaces and community programs. As with the work of Heath and Rose, Brandt's studies have provided insights into how literacy is learned and exercised in ways that often reproduce and sometimes challenge institutional, racial, and economic hierarchies.

*Literacy, Economy, and Power* is divided into three broadly defined sections. The first section includes important historical studies by Ellen Cushman, Rhea Lathan, Carol Mattingly and Morris Young. Cushman's and Young's studies of the history of Native American rhetorics have been quite influential, as has Mattingly's study of nineteenth-century women's literacies. Lathan's work follows up on her dissertation research to examine the community educational work of civil rights activist Bernice Robinson. These wide-ranging studies share a guiding concern for Brandt's concept of sponsors of literacy. With Brandt's concept as a point of departure, these and other chapters in the collection advance converging lines of research that develop theoretical concepts through grounded studies. Such collaborative modes of inquiry are relatively rare in rhetoric and composition, for many publications in our area do not include the sort of systematic attention to related scholarship that is expected in better bounded fields of study. Cushman examines Elias Boudinot as a key sponsor of literacy in the Cherokee nation's efforts to establish a literate language and constitute a print sphere of deliberate discourse that would strengthen their claims to sovereignty against Andrew Jackson's efforts to force them off their ancestral lands. Young provides a complementary study of how the conversion narrative of Obookiah contributed to missionary activities in Hawai'i while also aiding indigenous peoples' efforts to represent themselves in their own terms. Other dimensions of these complex dynamics are examined in Mattingly's reassessment of traditional assumptions about how Protestant individualism fostered schooling in literacy in ways that the communalism of Catholicism did not, and in Lathan's analysis of how the African-American genre of testifying functioned as a sponsor of literacy in ways that complemented efforts to acquire and exercise rhetorical agency.

The second set of articles in *Literacy, Economy, and Power* include several that use Brandt's concept of literacy sponsors to develop case studies that include studies of translingual literacies such as those examined elsewhere in this issue. Drawing on interviews in contemporary Zanzibar, Julie Nelson Christoph contributes to the ethnographic work that Brandt and Heath used to challenge top-

down models of education that ignore the informal networks that shape the acquisition and exercise of literacy. Christoph's concern with intersubjective forms of collective agency is complemented by Kim Donehower's analysis of how rural US communities are sustained by associational groups that strengthen people's shared sense of place and purpose. Donehower works closely with Brandt's research in ways that are also advanced in the co-authored chapter by David Jolliffe and Brandt's former student Eli Goldblatt. Their chapter provides a useful case in point for considering how the convergence of literacy and composition studies has been facilitated by work in community literacy programs and related outreach activities in writing programs. Goldblatt and Jolliffe draw on their work in these areas to examine how institutional hierarchies are reproduced in the interactions among college students and the "neighborhood kids" whose literacy they "sponsor." Goldblatt and Jolliffe's study is aptly complemented by Michael Smith's examination of how these dynamics play out in English education. Smith's *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* is an outstanding example of how literacy studies can help professors and teachers of literacy expand their shared understanding of students' nonacademic literacies.

The second section of the collection also includes two pieces that develop the more theoretical dimensions of ethnographic studies of literacy. Building on their influential work with translingual literacies and the political economies of composition studies, Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu argue for "a model of literacy as translation that highlights the . . . labor of readers and writers," particularly work that creates "friction" challenging the "flow" of commodified forms of literacy through global political economies. Horner and Lu critique foundationalist and accommodationist models for failing to come to terms with the hybridized dynamics of monolingual forms of literacy. A very different theoretical take on Brandt's work is developed by Paul Prior's analysis of how phenomenology has figured into the intersubjective modes of knowledge identified with New Literacy Studies, and more generally with ethnographic methods of inquiry. Prior provides a detailed analysis of what he characterizes as Brandt's "phenomenological/ethnomethodological approach," examining the development of Brandt's work against broader "sociohistorical frameworks" to consider the contributions of phenomenology to understanding the provisional and recursive dynamics of literacy in action.

As with the rest of the collection, the final section of *Literacy, Economy, and Power* includes studies that readers of *LiCS* will find very helpful in reflecting upon broader developments in literacy and composition studies. Drawing on their influential programs of work, the final contributors examine Brandt's contributions to the sort of converging lines of analyses that move research programs forward in a substantive way. In their chapter, Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher, who have had a formative impact on how composition studies made sense of computer-mediated literacies, generously acknowledge Brandt's interview studies as having had a pivotal impact on their turn to oral histories of how people acquire, deploy, and transform digital literacies. Harvey J. Graff spends less time with Brandt's work than his own contributions to interdisciplinary studies of literacy, and Anne Ruggles Gere also uses her "Afterword" as an opportunity to reflect upon how her own work has developed in tandem with Brandt's and broader changes in literacy.

This collection is full of useful theoretical categories, overviews of shifting trends, and thick descriptions of the pragmatics of literacy in action. Literacy and composition studies have converged with the emergence of interactive technologies that have shifted our standpoint from the reader before the page to the writer at the screen. Brandt's work has helped us to understand that the shift from a readerly to a writerly standpoint has involved historic changes in literate technologies, epistemologies, and economies. Those changes have taken on global proportions as we have become more attentive to the circulation of literacy and languages across national boundaries. This movement is discussed in Leonard, Vieira, and Young's introduction to this special issue on the transnational turn in literacy and composition studies. The transnational frame of study can be seen as an extension of the ethnographic impetus that shaped the emergence of "new rhetorics" and "New Literacy Studies." This special issue amply documents the potentials of following through on the lines of research that Deborah Brandt helped to set out, and which *Literacy, Economy, and Power* examines. Transnational studies move beyond monolingualist idealizations of native speakers to identify hybridized identities and forms as the norm, not the exception. Studies of globally engaged and locally situated forms of collective action have renewed rhetoric and pluralized literacies in ways that are well represented in *Literacy, Economy, and Power*, and in this and other issues of *Literacy in Composition Studies*.