

BOOK REVIEW

Thinking Globally, Composing Locally: Rethinking Online Writing in the Age of the Global Internet, edited by R. Rice and K. St. Amant, Logan, UT, Utah State University Press, 2018, 365 pp., \$39.95 (paperback), \$32.95 (eBook), ISBN: 978-1-60732-663-2.

With the increasing presence of digital writing spaces, writers can now reach an increasingly diverse, global audience. Yet, the increase in the number of spaces is both an affordance and challenge in communication as identities, cultures, and communicative practices often differ. *Thinking Globally, Composing Locally*, a collection edited by Rich Rice and Kirk St. Amant, highlights audience diversity as advantage/difficulty with a greater focus on identifying “friction points” that encumber cross-cultural communication. Rice and St. Amant believe identifying these points offers a better understanding of current global writing contexts by furthering the dimensions of audience and purpose within the rhetorical triangle, thus creating practical applications to improve online writing approaches.

Based on technical communication and writing studies, this text aims to reexamine online writing practices in both the professional and academic worlds. The “3C’s” – *contacting*, *conveying*, and *connecting* – are the primary areas contributors identify as friction points. *Contacting* pertains to the medium in which a writer communicates with her intended audience; *conveying* focuses on the audience’s reception of the communication and the ensuing action as a result; and *connecting* concentrates on established community as a result of contact and conveyance. Rice and St. Amant view these three categories as essential goals of technical communicators using online media in an international context and serve as the section headings for individual chapters in the text. This book is not focused on writers passively delivering information from a local to global context efficiently; it is about unifying diverse participants by bridging their individually unique cultures within inter-active networks to foster collaboration and understanding.

The first section on “contact” presents five chapters focusing primarily on various media utilized for online communication. In the opening chapter, Walwema identifies “cultural and structural differences, linguistic challenges, and belief systems” (p. 20) as challenges that digital notebooks, which include digital collaborative platforms “initiated by the writer” (p.16), can address when used in pedagogical settings. Grounded in a “cosmopolitan *ethos*” (p. 23), students engage with global communities as they compose via digital notebooks that allow for dialog rather than isolated composition practices. In Chapter 2, with more focus on professional contexts, Nguyen, Turner, and Lauren clarify experience maps as visualizations designed to capture a client’s experience with a product or service as a common practice that can rhetorically create a generalized and often limited reality that misses the full importance of cultural meaning for the individual. Their ethnographic case study creating experience maps highlights the difficulties of capturing the cultural nuances of individual experience. In Chapter 3, drawing from her larger ethnographic study of literacy development in online forums, Lee describes how global users navigate online forums and adjust to the accepted language conventions of that particular online community. She then extrapolates her findings to pedagogical contexts to suggest applying similar forum structures for students to learn autonomously. Chapter 4 by Davidson identifies ePortfolios and blogfolios as spaces, similar to Heidegger’s bridge, for *ethos* to exist and unite the fragmented identity of online writers dispersed across digital spaces. Her discussion echoes part of Walwema’s chapter on digital notebooks and cosmopolitanism but extends it further with more emphasis on the students’ reflection of “... the evolving nature of writing ... in global networks” (p. 89). Chapter 5 presents Lane and Unger’s efforts to construct an improved network of CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication or 4Cs) participants that is more sensitive and dedicated to local concerns in host

cities. By tracing their efforts over a three-year span of 4Cs, they establish “networked engagement” as method in linking global initiatives with specific local environments.

The next five-chapter section addresses “conveying” or how people receive and interpret communication in online settings as well as its effect. Blum Malley’s Chapter 6 presents her qualitative study and argues ludic or playful communication in asynchronous discussion boards should be encouraged by writing teachers as it creates online communities. Through coding, she notices students often use paralinguistic cues presented “textually and graphically” (p. 126) in addition to relational writing to create a “social fabric in digital, networked, and intercultural spaces” (p. 137). In Chapter 7, Clinnin, Halasek, McCorkle, Delagrange, Lloyd Dewitt, Michaels, and Selfe shifts to a much larger online classroom (MOOCs) and discusses how participatory design continuously shapes the course and participant engagement. The researchers noticed that peer review often bled into other spaces not always designed for such use, including “Facebook and Google+” (p.149), thus allowing students to complete the activity while consequently establishing personal online communities that connected students of local language practices from a global MOOC. In Chapter 8, Engelson provides an abbreviated version of her mixed-method ethnographic study of Indonesian scholars as they navigated the complexities of “access,” particularly with obtaining digital resources not accessible via phones, facing new expectations of academic publishing, and encountering “linguistic imperialism” (p.164), all of which are included in her phrase “global information divide” (p.164). She concludes with a practical pedagogical activity encouraging students to consider research as a globally collaborative venture. Pihlaja moves beyond just interpersonal communication in Chapter 9 to recognize the greater context of international communication and calls for activity theory and actor-network theory to be key methods of analysis. His argument is that researchers must use methods that “prevent stereotyping tendencies to which we are all susceptible” (p. 197) in order to fully comprehend how people communicate from local spaces within global contexts without overgeneralizing all participation in global networks as similar. Concluding this section in Chapter 10, Milagros describes his study of Turkish students’ meta-analyses of how they used different technologies for a multimodal assignment, revealing their ability to create knowledge and negotiate different identities. He argues instructors need to create opportunities for intercultural writers to assume roles of agency where their previous knowledge can be recognized, allowing them to be more participatory rather than passive receptors of information.

The final five chapters in section three, *connecting*, are focused on the community that results from contacting and conveying. Kourbani discusses her mixed-methods study of writing center asynchronous online feedback in Chapter 11 and whether non-native speakers made language-level (grammar and mechanics) or content-level (expression of ideas) adjustments and what extenuating factors influenced these actions. Chapter 12 by Hirsu provides a powerful example of the importance of *connecting* by examining the short film *Kony 2012*’s “spreadability” (distribution across multiple platforms) but lack of “drillability” (involved awareness of local context) and the need for a greater awareness of “digital actions” with “cultural consequences” (p.273). In Chapter 13, Bridgman continues the “practices over products” (p. 280) discussion in her study of hybrid embodiments – the simultaneous presence of an author across digital and physical spaces – during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Some revolution participants maintained a digital presence in addition to the physical, supporting the ongoing revolution online during government attempts to suppress community protests. In Chapter 14, Lamsal describes an ethnographic study of Bhutanese refugees that highlights literacy as nuanced and embedded in “broader social goals and cultural practices” (p. 304) rather than a “schooled literacy” (p. 317) with particular standards. He concludes that scholars must recognize the practices of refugee students who develop their literacy skills for academia outside of academic contexts.

In the final chapter, Hocutt and Brown discuss glocalization and Google Apps for Education (software and products for core education practices). They identify the exciting yet concerning nature of composing in such digital platforms where writing is both lateral (local context) and vertical (global context). It fosters increased collaboration and community development yet links these communities to global contexts that might exploit their work.

Thinking Globally, Composing Locally eclectic collection of voices, studies, and perspectives reflects Rice and St. Amant's desire to provide "starting points [to] help individuals focus on and approach frameworks [...] to understand varied and diverse contexts for online writing" (p. 5). The metaphor of "mapping a terrain" (p. 340) mentioned in the afterword more than adequately describes the nature of this book, one that notes differences in local contexts and strategies to navigate those areas. Furthermore, the terrain is often changing, so it "must be continuously (re) examined and (re)mapped" (p. 341). The book is exceptional as both introduction and illustration of challenges to communication in online environments, particularly those that refocus notions of audience identity. Though the chapters take different approaches, each offers more than just theoretical bases for approaching friction points identified. This text proves to be invaluable for professionals in technical communication fields as well as scholars and instructors studying online global communication, but may be less applicable for readers searching for a guidebook for everyday participation in such a context or a textbook for lower-level courses.

One characteristic of the book that should be celebrated is the rhetorical underpinning throughout the chapters. The rhetorical focus is not surprising, but it does differentiate this text from others that are merely how-to best practices. The practical examples the authors provide not only provide ways to approach the nebulous nature of audience but also indicate current practices limit audience to a static and controlled identity. Essentially, the collection is a consideration of online environments within the perspective of writing ecologies. Whether considering the technological affordances and impacts (*contact* section) or the cultural influences writers bring with them (*convey* section) or both (*connect* section), audience and purpose were distributed through these influences.

Another thread of the book that was not explicitly mentioned is agency. Two chapters incorporated agency as section headings (Engelson; Hirsu) and others touch on the idea of agency in their discussions (Lee; Clinnin et. al.; Blum Malley, Pilar Milagros; Bridgman); however, altered audience identity should include consideration of agency as the audience's capacity to act in contexts that might not highlight that capacity originally, especially in connection with ethos as Walwema and Davidson do. Identifying friction points is to improve awareness of them; equally, awareness of agency in frameworks addressing those friction points should be just as important, which might be part of the extended discussion Rice and St. Amant call for in their conclusion.

Rice and St. Amant acknowledge their work builds on Scott, Longo, and Wills's (2007) *Critical Power Tools: Cultural Studies Approaches to Technical Communication*, which seeks to broaden the understanding of cultural contexts where technical communication resides. By doing so, they also focus on inequities emanating from standards of conformity and desire to deconstruct oversimplifications of the technical communicator's role. Johnson-Eilola and Selber's (2013) edited collection, *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* is an even broader text discussing issues in the field, but its fourth section, "Developing Field Knowledge," includes individual chapters on genre, writing, information design, new media, collaboration, and international environments – the final topic was written by Kirk St. Amant – is essentially what *Thinking Globally, Composing Locally* blends into one focus for consideration.

Rice and St. Amant admit the book is not all-encompassing in regards to the friction points and possible approaches, yet it should be seen as an incredibly relevant and valuable contribution to the field.

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