Characterizing the opposition she experienced from a vocal group of faculty members while dean, Kolodny wonders if “vicious antagonisms” against her were generated because she was “a change agent—a woman change agent—and [if] for some, that combination was intolerable.” In fact, the faculty resistance to her proposed reforms gives credence to her definition of antifeminist intellectual harassment. Her term as dean, she admits in the “Personal Preface,” also exacted a physical and personal price as her punishing eighty hour work weeks worsened her struggle with chronic rheumatoid arthritis, a condition that made simple activities like shaking hands intolerable and walking painful. The interjection of such personal details makes Kolodny’s change narrative even more compelling.

Yet, Kolodny’s progressive stance casts some doubt as to appropriateness of the book’s title. Why call it Failing the Future when the author avoids a rhetoric of failure and despair? Why not Facing the Future, an oft-cited phrase in the book, or Embracing the Future? Also a seamless quality pervades some of the change-oriented, how-to chapters, which may cause readers to wonder if conflict and dissension were suppressed in the writing of change narratives. The author seems surprisingly and refreshingly free of the self-reflexive doubt that is so often a ruling emotion for critics and commentators of higher education. One wonders, however, if the persistent and tenacious Kolodny was ever plagued by doubt, or if she had to compromise her sense of ethical conduct during her five-year term. These are minor quibbles with an otherwise inspiring and ambitious book. To her lengthy list of credits as a ground-breaking feminist scholar, Americanist, and dean, Kolodny can now add to her list of accomplishments that of feminist public intellectual and educational reformer. We are fortunate to have a voice sounding such a hopeful note above the doomsday tumult of commentators and analysts. Let us hope this book will succeed in its mission to encourage a progressive and diverse generation of higher education administrators. We certainly need them.


Reviewed by Todd Taylor, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Together and separately, Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe have edited a large volume of work over the last decade and a half: fifteen volumes of the journal Computers and Composition; three editions of the CCCC Bibliography; at last count, seven edited collections since 1989—well over 5000 pages of edited material since 1986. Until now, however, only Selfe has authored monographs: two concise and practical guides to establishing computer writing programs. Thus, Computers and the Teaching of Writing, coauthored with Paul LeBlanc and Charles
Moran, has been a long time coming. This book is particularly important not only because all four of its authors are highly influential, but also because it is the first history of its kind to be written on the subject.


In preparing to teach a graduate seminar on literacy and technology, I had already compiled my own version of the history now covered in this book, and the history in *Computers and The Teaching of Writing* reflected the research I conducted and adds much that I missed: I didn't hesitate to add it to the required readings for that course. This book also observes the importance of the remarkably supportive and communal atmosphere among scholars in the field of computers and writing, an observation that also reflects my personal experience.

Evaluating the book's style, however, is a complicated matter. Earlier I emphasized Hawisher's and Selfe's work as editors because an editor's mosaic-like frame of reference and habits of thinking clearly shape this book, and the book reads much like an edited collection. Of course, the quad-authorship contributes significantly to this mosaic effect, but there's also a preface from Lisa Gerrard; an afterword by the authors; transcribed memoir-type interviews with Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Hugh Burns, Lisa Gerrard, Michael Joyce, Helen Schwartz, Patricia Sullivan, and Myron Tuman; and a transcript of an online conversation among members of the "new generation" of scholars in the field such as Locke Carter, Eric Crump, Michael Day, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Becky Rickly, and Pamela Takayoshi. In addition, the title page lists Sibylle Gruber and Margaret Faler Sweany as "associate editors" of this book. Add to this parade of names the seemingly hundreds of other authors whose words appear in epigraph-like excerpts printed in narrow, shaded columns on the outside edges of approximately half the pages (à la Derrida's *Glas*), and it should be clear that, in terms of style, this is an unusual and experimental book. Likewise, the presentation of the historical narrative is fragmented throughout. Although the chapters are arranged in a continuous chronology from 1979 to 1994, the interiors of these chapters are composed of brief narratives that sometimes take on the quality of sound bytes.

While what I have described so far might suggest that this book is incoherent and chaotic, my sense is that Hawisher and her colleagues consciously and actively sought a fragmented approach with the hope that the shards comprising the mosaic would eventually come together and produce an intelligible composite for their readers. Consequently, the key to any review of this book should be: Do they pull it off? That is, does the experiment indeed produce an "intelligible composite" or even "useful noise?"
Reader response to experiments of this type will vary greatly, of course. On the one hand, many of my colleagues see any divergence from conventional scholarly formats as sophomoric and gimmicky—drawing attention to the medium rather than the message, trying to win points with readers through style rather than rigorous research and refined prose. On the other hand, there are those who would hate to believe that as intellectuals whose charge is the pursuit of new ideas and knowledge, we are constricted by scholarly conventions to such a degree that we cannot be open to experimental texts such as Computers and the Teaching of Writing. Most of the book's experiments work for me. I especially like the marginal epigraphs. I find them both intriguing (it was interesting to try to puzzle together the marginalia with the interior prose) and thought-provoking (the comments in the margins often led me off the page and into a kind of reverie). But I'm probably more forgiving than most when it comes to experimental scholarship. A good litmus test might be whether or not you enjoy the journal Writing on the Edge. If you do, then you're more likely to enjoy this book; if not, then its style may be too distracting. Either way, there is no avoiding the experimental dimensions of this book; they are pervasive.

It may be that the most interesting issue regarding Computers and the Teaching of Writing concerns the question, What justifies the experimentation; why did the authors choose this format? Two reasons come to mind. First, the authors are highly conscious of the pitfalls of writing histories. They emphasize repeatedly their appreciation of the gravity and necessity of composing histories, and they are very careful to present their narrative as only one of many possible narratives. Second, they seem to be reacting to the unique sensibilities of the community of scholars in the field of computers and writing. Some of the most outspoken leaders in the field are staunch critics of scholarship in conventional, print form. This book seems to be an attempt to represent in print some of the ways in which online texts challenge and alter traditional formats. In other words, it seems that the authors wanted this book to appear hypertextual. For me, however, the experiments in this book fall short when the authors try too hard to please everybody. They overemphasize their awareness of the limitations of their historical narrative and are too apologetic about it. And if some cyberscholars are unable to appreciate the value of this important work, even in heretical print form, then they have put the cart before the horse. The reputation of these four authors and their work is substantial enough for them to have made polite nods to such important objections and then to have gotten on with the business of presenting an authoritative history. If the quality of that history becomes diluted at points in this book, it is because these four are exceedingly accommodating.