Raúl Sánchez's *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies* poses a formidable challenge to theorists and practitioners of composition pedagogy. Sánchez contends, rightly in my view, that the field is dominated by a "hermeneutic disposition [that] limits composition theory's ability to characterize writing as anything more than a technology of representation" (3). He suggests in his opening chapter that the operation of composition studies' hermeneutic-representational orientation is most clearly manifested through the work of three concepts in the field: knowledge, ideology, and culture. According to Sánchez, the emergence and proliferation of these concepts in composition studies have taken scholars' attention away from what should be their proper object of study: the phenomenon of writing. For him, "writing is undertheorized" and "in its place are offered alternative terms such as *discourse, language, or signification*" (9). "Writing," Sánchez continues, "is almost exclusively our field's term, in ways that *discourse, language, and signification* are not" (10).

Writing bears a heavy burden in Sánchez's project, in at least two senses. First, as suggested above, it becomes the basket into which composition studies is invited to place all of its proverbial eggs. Second, for Sánchez, writing has something of a transcendental status in the Kantian sense. More specifically, writing is understood as *the* condition of possibility that "underlies all the conceptual, theoretical, philosophical, and even rhetorical activity habitually brought to bear on writing" (7; emphasis added). For instance, rather than understand thinking as something shaped by writing, Sánchez wants us to understand thinking as a *term* whose status, function, and effectivity are enabled by writing itself—and not something distinct from or outside writing, which is then represented by or through writing. For Sánchez, the same can be said for any term, concept, idea, or theory. All terms, et cetera
are enabled by the dynamics of writing. It should be noted, however, that Sánchez’s sense of writing is not typical. Indeed, he invokes Jacques Derrida’s early work on writing as a frame through which “to re-envision the enterprise of composition theory” (5).

Sánchez urges his readers to acknowledge a distinction between deconstruction (as it has been articulated and practiced by many in the United States) and grammatology. Deconstruction has become a name for an all too familiar hermeneutic/interpretive exercise in demystification and revelatory critique. Grammatology, on the other hand, designates a concern with writing as the condition of possibility that enables the very happening and experience of difference and, thus, identity-individuation-presence. However, writing as the condition of possibility of difference—or, to be more precise, the dynamics of differencing-differentiating-presencing—should not be confused with our common understanding of writing as an empirically observable practice enacted by subjects. For the Derridean grammatologist, writing as a condition of possibility, or “arche-writing,” is what enables the articulation of any difference between writing and the subjects who perform that practice. Indeed, it is the condition of possibility for the happening and experience of the difference and relation(s) between any two (or more) terms, things, actions, or phenomena. To put it all too simply, for example, if the differential relation between cat and mat is essential to what enables them to function as distinct signifiers, as structuralist linguistics posits, then arche-writing is what makes that differential relation possible. This, in part, is why Derrida’s work is designated as post-structuralist, inasmuch as what makes differential relations possible is not attended to by structuralist linguistics.

At the same time, while arche-writing is irreducible to empirically observable writing, the two cannot be absolutely separated. However, empirical writing cannot be used to explain arche-writing inasmuch as the latter is the former’s condition of possibility. Herein lies what I see as one of the fundamental problems with Sánchez’s disciplinary renovation project: although he cites the
Derridean idea of arche-writing as a central feature of his conception of writing, empirical writing and some generalized notion of "writing" that is neither empirical writing nor arche-writing seem to be at the center of Sánchez's project. Consequently, the difficulties implied by grammatology and arche-writing for the possibility of a discipline of writing are attenuated in favor of what I would describe as neo-pragmatist nominalism. Before elaborating on these remarks, however, I want to attend to some of the work performed by Sánchez in subsequent chapters.

Sánchez's second chapter, "The Discourse of Knowledge in Composition Theory," challenges the status and function of knowledge as a term in the field. Composition's focus on writing as "knowledge production," for example, is, according to Sánchez, symptomatic of its obsession with epistemological questions, which are themselves expressions of a representational framework. Composition's emphasis on questions of how language shapes the ways we represent the world (and thus come to know that world) presupposes a firm distinction between the nondiscursive world and the discourses that re-present it. Questioning that presupposition, Sánchez argues "that writing can be thoroughly theorized without recourse to a discourse of knowledge and the ideology of representation" (16–17). In other words, "the persistence of the epistemic perspective in composition theory" is a consequence of our field's forgetting, as it were, that "knowledge is a title, a name, given to valued collections of statements, always and only after the (f)act of their production" (18). Knowledge and its related concepts (for example, knowing, thinking, subject, object, truth) are best understood, suggests Sánchez, as tactically deployed terms, discursive strategies capable of particular functions and effects. "Their use as terms," Sánchez writes, "would be a shorthand for the sorting of sentences and statements, while writing would become [be understood as] at once the generative matrix from which such shorthands emerge as well as the human practice by which they do so" (31).

Though summarized here with only the broadest strokes, Sánchez's critique of the status of knowledge in composition
studies is thought-provoking. For in problematizing knowledge in the manner he does, and thus a constellation of related terms, Sánchez destabilizes the very ground upon which contemporary composition is built. Furthermore, although not discussed above, Sánchez suggests possibilities for how knowledge might be re-understood and redeployed in composition studies.

Sánchez continues destabilizing composition's conceptual foundations in chapter three, "Composition's Ideology Apparatus." As the chapter's title suggests, here the target is the concept of ideology, which gained a great deal of traction in composition studies with the influential work of the late Jim Berlin, among others. Sánchez's intention here is not to eliminate ideology from the vocabulary of composition studies. Rather, he aims to rearticulate ideology's relation to the phenomenon of writing. Like knowledge, Sánchez contends that ideology cannot be understood outside of the dynamics of writing; it must be understood, instead, as an effect and function of writing. And if the current status and functions of knowledge in composition studies are symptomatic of a fetishization of epistemological questions, ideology's operation in composition is, to borrow a phrase from Sánchez, expressive of the field's "ontological baggage" (14). That is, according to Sánchez, ideology functions in composition studies as an unquestionable ontological given, an ahistorical condition of being human. Moreover, he argues, this ontological conception of ideology understands being a subject primarily through knowing rather than doing (episteme rather than praxis), once again demonstrating composition studies' epistemic bias. From this onto-epistemic perspective, ideology precedes writing. However, by redescribing the relation between ideologies and acts of writing, Sánchez attempts to understand ideologies as expressions of ways of doing/existing with-in writing rather than that which orchestrates writing.

It is probably clear by now that Sánchez's overarching strategy in approaching the reinvention of composition can be described as the employment of a basic principle: Writing comes first. However, his chapters are not reducible to a simple repetition of this principle. For example, in chapter four, "Theories of Culture in Composition
"Theory," Sánchez articulates a compelling, although still debatable, analysis of how textual interpretation has eclipsed what should be composition's focus: textual (re)production. Sánchez sees the dominance of interpretation as a consequence of composition's prevailing hermeneutic-representational orientation. Of particular interest is his commentary on how cultural theory incorporated from other fields has come to function in concert with composition's stress on interpretation. In short, Sánchez argues that the increased prevalence and use of cultural theory in composition studies—along with the concomitant emergence and proliferation of an approach to cultural studies influenced by the Birmingham School—can be understood, in part, as the discipline's response to an increased demand for the "usefulness" of English studies' curricula.

As Sánchez describes it, the cultural capital accrued to students who completed degrees in English studies had diminished significantly. According to Sánchez, in an effort to recapture its former status as a repository and dispenser of cultural capital, virtually every field in English shifted its emphasis from text as article (essay, novel, and so forth) to culture-as-text, that is, culture and its artifacts and practices as interpretable signs. Consequently, this "allows English to assert that it trains people to become astute 'readers' of their text-saturated, sign-saturated surroundings in order to become better cultural analysts. This claim, in turn, allows English to bid for conceptual and political centrality in the humanities" (63). Whether such events are a problem in terms of literary studies' curricula and English's status in the humanities is an open question. Sánchez claims that in composition studies, however, the result of the culture-as-text paradigm—a decidedly hermeneutic paradigm—is that students "read more than they write, and their writing is often only meant to serve as evidence of their reading" (70). In effect, such a pedagogy tends to produce writers who are interpreters of texts rather than producers of them. The emphasis, in other words, is on what culture-as-text means rather than training students to understand the dynamics and practices of making meaningful texts.
They write about culture, Sánchez suggests, rather than participating in culture and its (re)production as writers.

While one may disagree with what may be an all too easy distinction between writing about culture and participating in culture through writing, Sánchez’s analysis of the pervasiveness and effects of hermeneutic-representational theory via the culture-as-text paradigm is must-read material for scholars and teachers in composition studies. Also especially worthy of readers’ time and attention are Sánchez’s ideas about how culture and cultural theory might be rethought vis-à-vis writing, and thus composition studies. His engagements with the work of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are particularly interesting in this regard.

Sánchez’s final chapter, “Writing Without Subjects,” is perhaps his most provocative. His central claim is straightforward and bold: “I want to argue that hermeneutics has so transformed two of composition studies’ core models with which to think about writing—rhetoric and the subject—that we should now set them aside, because the cost to reclaim them would not be repaid” (85–86). As a rhetorically trained compositionist who is interested in questions of subjectivity and agency, I must admit to having an automatic bias against the latter part of Sánchez’s claim. At the same time, however, I do agree that the versions of rhetoric and subjectivity targeted by Sánchez’s criticisms need to be “set aside,” if you will. The question then becomes whether these versions are as pervasive as he contends. Sánchez claims that “to the extent that rhetoric in the twentieth century has been theorized as a general hermeneutic, it prescribes a highly individualized and prediscursive notion of the subject, one that cannot help composition studies account, theoretically or empirically, for the current production and circulation of writing” (87). Evaluating this claim would require a more thorough engagement with the analyses and arguments of this and earlier chapters than can be offered here. However, Sánchez’s project is worthy of such engagement, and I encourage all compositionists, not just those with investments in rhetoric and subjectivity, to undertake the task.
To round out this review, I want to highlight a claim that is made in the book’s final chapter and appears in various ways throughout the book as a whole. For doing so will return us to the issue raised above regarding a tension between Sánchez’s aim of articulating a Derridean or grammatological approach to composition theory and what I described as pragmatist nominalism. At the heart of this tension is a problematic central to Sánchez’s project: representation. The claim of Sánchez that I want to highlight takes this basic form: contemporary composition theory “do[es] not adequately describe what writing is and how it works” (95; emphasis added). Here are just a few of its other articulations (all emphases added): “I am interested in making it possible for composition theory to offer better descriptions of writing, accounts that better match the textual realities many people experience today” (2); “I will show how a very familiar and now inaccurate model of writing has persisted doggedly in composition theory” (3); and Sánchez proposes a non-representational conception of writing “in order to more accurately explain the (f)act of writing” (59). What is common to the basic form of Sánchez’s claim and its variations is the operation of an epistemic imperative at the heart of a representational theory of writing and language, that is, the need to produce a term, concept, theory, or discourse that adequately or accurately matches the reality of something—in this case, “what writing is.”

In one sense, Sánchez seems to be critiquing the hermeneutic-representational model of writing for not accurately re-presenting what writing (really) is and how it (really) works. Using the terms “description” and “model” in place of representation, I submit, does not do enough work to displace the centrality and functions of representation, particularly for a project that seeks to offer a non-representational theory of language in its place. Put somewhat differently, Sánchez does not sufficiently grapple with the difficulties that come along with displacing representation. Moreover, the desire to “more accurately explain” what writing is seems symptomatic of being loaded down by the very ontological baggage Sánchez would have us leave behind. However, the very notion of simply choosing to leave ontology behind is not so simple; the
same can be said of epistemology, the subject, and a host of other related terms. This, perhaps, is one of the lessons of Derrida's grammatology, and his thought more generally, that Sánchez "fails" (if that word is even fair, given the Herculean task he has courageously undertaken) to follow in his own project.

More precisely, Derrida's grammatology operates "outside" ontology, or metaphysics, as he would have referred to it, by working rigorously with-in it, knowing that such a project is, in a certain sense, made possible by the very ontological tradition or discourse grammatology seeks to "move beyond." In other words, part of what Derrida teaches us is that striving to leave metaphysics behind—that is, to transcend it—is the ultimate metaphysical desire. This is the problem that plagues so-called antifoundationalist philosophy and theory (of which Derrida's work is not a species, contrary to popular opinion). One of the ways grammatology responds to the paradoxical problem of how to work "outside" of metaphysics without simply reaffirming and reenacting the metaphysical desire of transcendence is by developing ways of working with-in metaphysics that disrupt and render questionable that discourse while simultaneously acknowledging one's indebtedness to and complicity with it. For the grammatologist, then, there is no pure place outside metaphysics from which one can practice post-metaphysical or antifoundationalist discourses. The question becomes, therefore, how to exist and act with-in "foundations" in ways that open possibilities for existence and action previously attenuated or precluded by how metaphysical and foundational discourses currently work. Most of Derrida's work can be characterized as responses to this question, performed as strategies of inhabitation and engagement that work with-in specific discourses. The fruits of these engagements sometimes take the form of familiar and yet very strange "concepts," such as difierance, trace, supplementarity, and arche-writing.

It is Sánchez's deployment of this last "concept" that I want to briefly explore. I would like to suggest that Sánchez's invocation of Derrida's notion of arche-writing is a shorthand way for him to make a claim that parallels one of Derrida's most (in)famous: that "there
is nothing outside the text." In effect, one of the central claims of Sánchez's project via his use of the Derridean "concept" of arche-writing is that there is nothing outside of writing. Such a move is not intrinsically problematic. Problems arise in Sánchez's text as a result of how the relation between arche-writing and empirically observable acts and artifacts of writing is articulated. Sánchez rightly points out that Derrida's idea of arche-writing is thoroughly abstract and non-empirical, and thus never actually present in any sense. However, as a response to charges that the abstractness of arche-writing makes it useless for composition, he reminds his readers that the distinction between arche- and empirical writing is not absolute—but there is a distinction, an important one. Nevertheless, in an effort to make arche-writing more useful for composition, Sánchez suggests that "intentionally blurring the differences between the two [arche- and empirical writing]" enables one "to assign empirical dimensions to Derrida's theory of writing." (8). The effect of this "empiricization" of arche-writing is that Sánchez, citing Sharon Crowley, can describe arche-writing as "human in-scription on the world's surface" (qtd. in Sánchez 8). "As such," he continues, "it can easily apply to any and all semiotic activity. Furthermore, any and all human activity can be described as semiotic, so one is always arche-writing" (8).

The complexities and nuances of Derrida's work and their implications for composition theory cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that Sánchez's empiricization of arche-writing effectively neutralizes the radicality of the "concept," transforming it from a problematic that challenges us to invent new ways of understanding the relationship between acts and events of writing and their conditions of possibility into a nominalistic conception of writing's (or language's) inescapable ubiquity. Granted, Sánchez's crypto-nominalism eschews a representational understanding of writing. However, where he takes us brings to mind more the antifoundationalism of Richard Rorty than the work of Jacques Derrida. (Indeed, readers should attend to Sánchez's citing of Rorty at crucial points in his argument.) Thus, I submit, a fruitful deployment of Derrida's thought in composition studies remains to
be done. What Sánchez offers us is a neo-pragmatist nominalism. Such a claim, however, is not necessarily a critique or invalidation of Sánchez’s project. That work has not been done here. Whatever disagreements or problems this reviewer has with some aspects of Sánchez’s work should not discourage compositionists from engaging a work of scholarship that poses and attempts to address bold and important questions.


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Locke Carter believes that composition is economically naïve. This edited volume is an attempt to remedy that naiveté and look at writing instruction from an economic perspective. In today’s global information economy, economic change increasingly shapes and is shaped by literate practices, and composition is on the front lines of such change. The essays in this volume investigate how composition and its associated disciplines—rhetoric, technical communication, and college English, which Carter collectively labels “applied rhetoric studies”—might better incorporate an economic perspective into theory and pedagogy. Carter (who holds an MBA) is writing from a strong free-market point of view. As the volume’s editor and author of its extended lead essay, he offers the fundamental thesis that much of composition theory is strongly Marxist or socialist in orientation, and such an orientation cuts us off from the world’s dominant free-market capitalist perspective. Still, the other contributors to this uneven volume offer insights that usefully complicate Carter’s laissez-faire perspective. We should understand that one unifying quality to economic