

Review of *Beyond Productivity: Embodied, Situated, and (Un)Balanced Faculty Writing Processes*

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Kim Hensley Owens and Derek Van Ittersum, Editors. *Beyond Productivity: Embodied, Situated, and (Un)Balanced Faculty Writing Processes*. University Press of Colorado, 2023. 251 pages.

In *Beyond Productivity: Embodied, Situated, and (Un)Balanced Faculty Writing Processes*, editors Kim Hensley Owens and Derek Van Ittersum showcase fourteen evocative “personal stories” (16) that address the draining demands of the antiquated “publish or perish” (61) mindset that permeates much of today’s academic landscape. Several of the book’s chapters question the applicability of this emphasis on publication in a post-pandemic world that has left countless scholars struggling to accept the daunting realization that there is “no normal to go back to” (25).

The attention to detail and overall accessibility of *Beyond Productivity* is nothing short of commendable. Owens and Ittersum unquestionably labored to ensure that the scholarship contained within this collection is both inviting and enjoyable for all readers. For example, in the table of contents, the title of each chapter is followed by the name of its respective author(s) and a brief list of single-word “tags” that summarize the themes of each chapter (vii-viii). These same tags can be found once more on the first page of each chapter. Such considerate additions allow readers and researchers alike to more efficiently locate the chapters that most align with their specific interests.

Beyond Productivity valiantly opposes the traditional reliance upon article publication as the premier metric for measuring an academician’s value as a member of the scholarly community. In the collection’s first chapter, “Situating Scholarly Writing Processes Across Life Contexts,” co-editors Kim Hensley Owens and Derek Van Ittersum boldly call for a foundational restructuring of academia itself. A successful reconstruction, Owens and Van Ittersum argue, would effectively advance the academic community “beyond productivity” (3) toward a more inclusive scholarly society that recognizes the “new demands” and “unstable conditions” of living in a post-pandemic world wherein we are incessantly inundated with circumstances that are “wildly beyond our individual control” (6).

Research into post-pandemic society is an emerging avenue of academic investigation following the widespread attempt to return to the norms of pre-pandemic life. The revelations provided by such uniquely personal scholarship as that found within *Beyond Productivity* are paramount to instigating and maintaining the healing processes many scholars find themselves currently navigating. Whether their work takes place online, in person, in a hybrid classroom environment, or in another academic space, new and established scholars alike will undoubtedly benefit from reading the heartfelt accounts that have been preserved within the pages of *Beyond Productivity*.

Each chapter provides notable insights into contemporary academic experiences. However, when the collection’s narratives are considered together, the overarching themes of *Beyond Productivity* masterfully reaffirm the reality of the traumatic experiences that have plagued the last five years. This collection serves as a powerful reminder that we have all faced unparalleled pain and uncertainty during the period that Hannah J. Rule refers to as “long-2020” (56) in the opening paragraph of the book’s fourth chapter, “Process Not Progress (Or, Not-Progress is Process).” According to Rule, the “unrelenting global pandemic,” “public health disinformation,” wildfires, demands for police and voting rights reform, and more resulted in an overwhelming influx of news reports and constant concerns that only worsened our mounting fears (56). Rule states that the increasing emotional toll of these events made it “just plain hard to write” during the calamities and catastrophes that claimed headline after headline (67)—a sentiment that is readily shared by many of *Beyond Productivity*’s other contributors.

For example, in the book's twelfth chapter, "The School Bus Never Came: How Crisis Shapes Writing Time," co-authors Melissa Dinsman and Heather Robinson comment on the "daily competition for psychic space" and the exhausting "drain on our physical and emotional energies" that resulted from "writing and parenting in a crisis, often at the same time" (194). Throughout this chapter, Dinsman and Robinson consider the scholarly significance of productivity and its connection to "academic identity" (195). This connection between productivity and identity, Dinsman and Robinson argue, was challenged during the pandemic, when the co-authors found themselves "forced to find new ways to balance" their "identities as parents, partners, academics, teachers, and writers" (195). This was further complicated by the need to discover ways of "managing writing in the pandemic," a task that required the invention of "day-to-day pandemic routines" that simultaneously promoted academic productivity and reinforced the importance of maintaining psychological health in unquestionably uncertain times (195).

The personal accounts contained within *Beyond Productivity* also contribute a wealth of scholarship to disability studies—a field of academic research that has experienced a resounding renaissance after the era Rule refers to as "long-2020" (56). One such contribution can be found in the collection's second chapter, "Sand Creeks and Productivity: A Writer's Reckoning of Personal and Academic Selves." In the subsection of this chapter titled, "Bodyless Writing Performances," Ann N. Amicucci criticizes the academic practice of "leaving the personal off the page and, more specifically, keeping the writer's multiple identities and embodied experience out of" their scholarship (28). Amicucci continues, stating that embodied writing "shows how the stories we tell and the arguments we make come through the lens of our embodied selves" (28).

Amicucci's fierce defense of embodied writing reaches its peak a few lines later, wherein a riveting call to action is shared with readers. Here, Amicucci joins "the chorus of composition and rhetoric scholars calling for bodies to be present on the page" by demanding that members of the academic community actively embrace and elevate embodied writing practices as a means by which scholars can effectively "explore our views and experiences from and through the body, despite the risks this choice presents" (28-29).

Amicucci's powerful prose is followed by Melanie Kill's "Relearning to Write in Crip Time (On the Tenure Clock)." Near the chapter's conclusion, Kill calls attention to "the considerable influence of bodies on writing" and displays a profound desire to "push back against ableist ideologies and policies that frame" scholars "with temporally marked, noticeable, and misfit bodies as unfit for academic work" (54). Kill ends the third chapter of *Beyond Productivity* by stating that the impatience of the academic community should be trained not upon one another, but instead upon the unethical "systems that dehumanize" its members and the "pace of structural change" (54).

In "When Writing Makes You Sick," the fifth chapter of *Beyond Productivity*, Tim Laquintano's commentary mirrors the sentiments present within the aforementioned chapters of Amicucci and Kill, respectively. Laquintano informs the audience that "writing is a physically grueling activity capable of inducing poor health outcomes," a fact that is too often forgotten when publications and presentations are valued over personal well-being (75). Much of the chapter's scholarship comments upon the "physiological consequences of writing" (74). Ultimately, such conversations result in Laquintano's "adamant" stance that "the glorification of unhealthy practices... in academia needs to stop" (76).

The contributions of *Beyond Productivity* to broader conversations about "health and wellness" are numerous (76). From calling into question academia's unwavering adherence to a policy of "publish or perish" (61), to scrutinizing the undue stresses placed upon the "early career researcher" (28) by a system created to benefit the established academic at the expense of those thrust into the tense "pre-tenure probationary period" (46-47), to repeatedly questioning the status of post-pandemic academia itself, *Beyond Productivity* forces the audience to consider not only the world as it is today, but as it could be tomorrow.

The deeply moving accounts contained within *Beyond Productivity* provide readers with a unique glimpse into academia during and immediately after one of the most tumultuous times in human history. The chapters of this collection offer a foundation upon which generations of researchers will construct their own analyses of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effective eradication of the normative practices of pre-2019 academia. From the collection's first page to its last, *Beyond Productivity* simultaneously questions the demands of an antiquated academic system and serves as a haunting reminder that the present will never perfectly mirror that of the pre-COVID-19 world, no matter how strongly we yearn for such a reunion with our pre-pandemic past.