

Spring 2019

## Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Lines Across America

Adam Hubrig  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [Adamhubrig88@gmail.com](mailto:Adamhubrig88@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/communityliteracy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hubrig, Adam. "Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Lines Across America." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2019, pp. 157-161. doi:10.25148/clj.13.2.009080.

This work is brought to you for free and open access by FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Community Literacy Journal* by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

## Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Lines Across America

**Barbara Couture and  
Patti Wojahn, Eds.**

University Press of Colorado, 2016. 314 pp.

**Reviewed by Adam Hubrig**

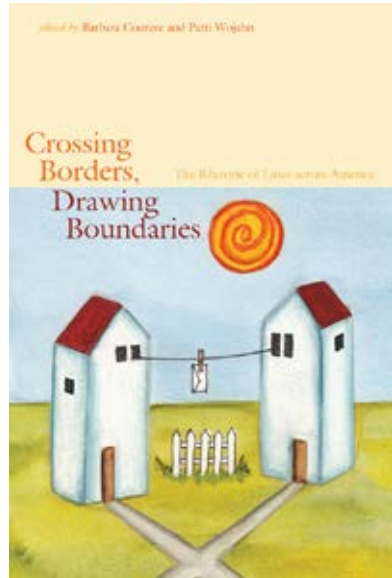
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

At a time when both physical and symbolic borders from national borders to socio-economic inequality are at the front of political debate, the exigency of *Crossing Borders, Drawing Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Lines Across America* cannot be overstated. The collection explores the rhetorics of borders and their immediate implications for our students, our classrooms, and our communities. The essays in this collection operate in concert to highlight how the rhetoric of lines impacts democratic discourse as well as offer sites of intervention for rhetoricians and compositionists.

The collection opens with a foreword by Nancy Welch titled “Crossing the Threshold.” Welch’s forward presents the main theme of the collection to “explore how borders are socially, historically, and linguistically constructed—and thus how they can be rhetorically examined and contested” (xi). Welch praises the collection authors for their recognition that the rhetoric of consciousness raising is inherently limited in rhetorical effect, but identifies this sort of rhetorical education a necessary threshold to cross—by teachers and students alike—for meaningful change to be achieved (xii).

In chapter one, collection editors Couture and Wojahn highlight the book’s organization and major themes. The book, divided into two sections, first concerns itself with “symbolic” boundaries, and the authors’ investigate imagined borders, like a national boundary and spirituality. The second section explores “living borders” and Couture and Wojahn’s sites of inquiry center on dismantling and challenging the rhetoric of spaces. The collection editors preview how several disparate threads of border rhetoric are gathered up to offer broader insights into thinking about the rhetorics of difference.

Part one opens with Victor Villanueva’s thoughtful application of Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical trope of the *metonym* to interrogate a hegemonic sense of nationalism in “Metonymic Borders and Our Sense of Nation.” Metonym, is defined by Vil-



lanueva as “a reduction with grand representational possibilities” (31), and he continues to use this rhetorical trope to unpack American cultural identity. Drawing on an American understanding of “nation” as complicated by its relationship to Puerto Rico and establishing how a sense of “nation” is deeply racialized, Villanueva argues that both a collective understanding of “border” and “nation” are “metonymy, a fiction within a fiction of a nation, a trope that serves racism in an era that no longer admits racism” (34). From this argument, Villanueva urges “We, the rhetoricians, can instead accept that part of what we must do [. . .] is both to see and to publicize the rhetoric at play and then work to demystify and dymythify the ideological” (41), a pressing call to action for public rhetoric scholars.

Christopher Schroeder continues inquiry into imagined borders in chapter three as he productively scrutinizes how notions of literacy and language create their own borders and boundaries and how code-switching works to cross these boundaries. Schroeder’s examination of a multilingual press in Chicago and an advice column written primarily in English that mixes Spanish into responses, seeks to challenge “tacit English-only language policies that reflect misunderstandings about the relative role of English within the larger debates. . . over the official designation of an official language, linguistic civil and political rights and educational policies for minority students” (52). Through this linguistic study of code-switching, Schroeder underscores how hierarchical perspectives about English are often tied to cultural identity.

In chapter four, Jonathan P. Rossing examines the potential of humor as a rhetorical intervention into cultural processes that create marginalized identities. Through a study of Stephen Colbert’s satirical representation of a conservative pundit, Rossing examines how rhetorically savvy humor “appropriates and defamiliarizes common arguments about immigration so as to call into question their logic” and ultimately deconstruct notions of racial borders (63). Rossing offers humor as site to create new meanings, perspectives, and understandings (69). While Rossing acknowledges that “humor alone will not transform our political landscape” (74), he points to its potentiality as a site for activists.

Chapter five thoughtfully takes up questions of rhetorical ethos as a possible site to build mutual understanding across many forms of difference. Karen P. Peirce’s chapter interrogates a limited understanding of arguments within composition studies—often established in first-year textbooks for students as “how to win arguments” and through limiting definitions of ethos to credibility (79). Peirce calls for a rhetorical approach that emphasizes “mutual understanding,” which “requires sensitivity, patience, and a desire to learn from each other” (83). While Peirce acknowledges the difficulty of shifting the status quo with regard to how argument is taught and understood the field, she establishes how an ethos of mutual understanding can productively challenge barriers of difference.

Tensions arising from the politics of language at the intersections of biliteracy and the English-only movement are the central focus of chapter six. Anita C. Hernandez, Jose A. Montelongo, and Roberta J. Herter examine the English-only movement’s impact on language learning and the accompanying stigmatization of the Latin-based Spanish language and its speakers. Through a historical tracing of the English-only

movement and attendant policies, the authors assert that “the English-only ideology fosters the assimilation of Anglo-American majoritarian perspectives, which makes people who are bilingual or who speak a language other than English feel belittled and subordinated” (96). To intervene in this subordination, the authors develop and employ a vocabulary research program which promotes English-Spanish biliteracy through an understanding of cognates, benefiting all students through a biliterate approach (102).

In chapter seven, Susan Schiller draws attention to cultural borders drawn around spirituality, which she carefully articulates as distinct from more dogmatic interpretations. Schiller argues that a spiritual pedagogy provides learners an opportunity to be creative decision makers and emphasizes democratic possibilities (114). By considering how current educational trends tend to promote conformity rather than creativity and acknowledging the difficulty in establishing classroom space for these practices, Schiller explores how creativity as a classroom practice can foster more holistic learning experiences for students (125).

Concluding part one, Monica Torres and Kathryn Valentine offer insight into the complex nature of cross-racial interactions and those interaction’s potential for student development. Torres and Valentine extend Kenneth Burke’s theoretical understanding of identification to ethnic and racial borders, complicating Burke’s concept through contemporary scholars who “have embraced, resisted, and extended Burke’s foundational concepts” (132). Drawing on the writing of Krista Ratcliffe, Bryan Crable, and Gloria Anzaldúa to complicate Burke, Torres and Valentine present a framework of identification that, like Anzaldúa’s, “acknowledges differences without sacrificing them” and can both articulate and recognize needs across difference (137). The authors then detail an application of their framework to undergraduate discussions across racial and ethnic lines, presenting how this work might productively complicate and inform the efforts of future teachers and researchers.

Opening part two, Randolph Cauthen turns our attention to the rhetorical strategies of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, shifting the collection’s focus to borders and boundaries as they relate to physical spaces. Cauthen applies a Burkean analysis to the rhetoric of the movement, focusing particularly on how Burke’s concepts of identification, division, consubstantiality and ontological guilt operated as Occupy took up physical space to challenge symbolic borders of social class. Cauthen argues that rhetoricians can apply these principles to make “a more profoundly inclusive community” possible and he asserts that Burke’s rhetorical theory can serve to intervene in the continual production of symbolic actions that divide us (166–167).

Tricia Serviss’s “American Rhetorics of Disappearance: Translocal Feminist Problem-Solving Rhetorics” continues this section’s inquiry into how border rhetoric connects to physical spaces. Through careful analysis of the “forced disappearance” of missing women in Juarez and Argentina and the rhetorical interventions taken by local activists there, Serviss argues for the importance of expanding rhetorical traditions by recognizing the rhetorical solutions of activists attuned to their particular environs, making a call for the importance of translocalism, which treats rhetorical problems as complex and contingent on local contexts. Serviss identifies two domi-

nant stories through which the activist work is understood: one a hierarchical inheritance of an activist rhetorical tradition, the other connected to the activist rhetorical interventions crafted by American activist women (177). This juxtaposition serves as a basis for Serviss's call for a translocal orientation in rhetorical studies.

Chapter nine presents Cori Brewster's analysis of public rhetoric as practiced by a local museum in Ontario, Oregon. Brewster interrogates a local museum's presentation of local history, tracing the rhetorical implications of this space and how it preserves whitewashed "progressive" narratives of racism and ethnocentrism (198), particularly in response to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II and treatment of Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers while omitting stories of white supremacy that also shaped local history. While Brewster is critical of "the combination of overgeneralization, overdetermination, and exclusion" that "effectively grafts contemporary colorblind storylines to longstanding rationalizations for community membership and entitlement", she concludes by pointing to how both museums and the communities they serve can better work to "shift, cross, or eliminate borders, both rhetorical and material" (203–204).

Extending this collection's grasp of material realities presented by borders, Vanessa Cozza investigates how cultural perceptions and expectations impact immigrant experiences. Cozza reimagines how Gloria Anzaldúa's "consciousness of Borderlands" can complicate and intervene in the segregated and compartmentalized viewpoints that would otherwise reinforce hegemonic cultural borders (212). Cozza establishes storytelling, through four women writers (Meri Nana-Ama Danaquah, Nina Barragan, Julia Alvarez, and Jamaica Kincaid), as a rhetorical intervention against compartmentalized understandings of borders that might serve to establish a Borderlands consciousness, incorporating her own storytelling as part of a family of immigrants who work continuously to make sense of their Borderlands positionalities (221). Cozza closes with implications for teachers who might incorporate more thoughtful investigation of border realities in their classrooms.

Chapter thirteen centers on the border constructed between universities and communities they might form partnerships with and how those borders might be better navigated in ethical response to power dynamics. Authors Elenore Long, Jennifer Clifton, Andrea Alden, and Judy Holiday argue for an inclusive and deliberate model of community engagement, presenting a five-part framework that approaches community-university partnerships from a perspective of intercultural inquiry (229). Drawing from the context of establishing a community literacy partnership with a refugee support center, the authors detail how their approach is rooted in a more equitable partnership, which interrupts logics of "institutional arrogance" that tend to center the university (231). The authors assert that collaborative design of the project created space for "effective participation, enlightened understanding, and control of the agenda" for all parties involved to create a more inclusive university-community partnership (245).

In "Rhetorical Education at the City's Edge: The Challenge of Public Rhetoric in Suburban America," author Robert Brooke argues that the "plight of suburban public rhetoric" leads to disengagement in public rhetoric for students. Brooke identifies

three factors that contribute to student disengagement in suburban landscapes: civic design which often eliminates tension and removes students from engaging with the deeper context of a region (258), neoliberal educational policy which tends to de-center local issues (260), and economic policy which often necessitates those seeking white-collar work to migrate from region to region (262).

Chapter fifteen, “In Sum and Review: The Rhetoric of Lines Across Us” serves to bookend the collection. Written by collection editors Barbara Couture and Patti Wojahn, the chapter unifies the collection as a whole, drawing attention to how democratic discourse can foster belonging to the resist borders and boundaries drawn by difference. Couture and Wojahn thoughtfully return to each author’s work to underscore how they contribute to the collection’s project of democratic discourse, calling for readers “to see anew and to deliberate the many lines that can simultaneously unite and divide—and define—us” (284).

Covering a broad conceptual framework of borders, the essays in this collection investigate both the rhetoric behind, as well as the lived experience of borders. Broad in its scope and approaches, this volume works cohesively to establish frameworks for thinking about how various borders function as inclusive or exclusive and where productive sites of rhetorical intervention might be possible. The thoughtful takes on the rhetoric of lines presented in this volume work together to highlight the central democratic project of the book, arguing that border rhetoric can reify or challenge both who participates in democratic discourse and what purposes our democratic discourse will serve.