“MY WORK has for some time included multiple parts, created to coexist and thus create a density of layers, spatially, geometrically, sonically, visually, and textually.” So declared artist Renée Green in her 2004 essay “Why Systems?,” an incisive articulation of the additive method driving many of her works at that moment. The piece is one of the fifty-odd texts compiled for the first time in Other Planes of There, a five-hundred-plus-page volume of her selected writings titled after the 1964 album by Sun Ra. In this context, Green's statement proves equally apt in defining the broader modus operandi of her multifarious practice, which runs the gamut from installations and videos to photographs and audio pieces, but also encompasses a complex and diverse set of textual output, including essays, reviews, film scripts, working-process documents, (open) letters, and works of fiction. The restlessness of her writing alone is on full display in this volume, which spans nearly thirty years, from 1981 to 2010. The books opens with Green's Wesleyan University undergraduate honors thesis on the 1920s discourse surrounding African American art and ends with a polyvocal variation on the epistolary novel, accompanying her recent project Endless Dreams and Water Between, 2009. The presentation of such a comprehensive summation of Green's textual production in one tome emphasizes writing's formative role in the development of her expanded discursive practice, offering a textual mapping of the complex intersections and correspondences between the many planes of her oeuvre.

Since Conceptual art's shift of emphasis from visual to discursive output, critics have been prone—almost expected—to emphasize writing as an integral part of artistic practice. Indeed, an artist's
writings are often assumed to provide a kind of interpretive manual for his or her work. Yet while the texts collected here evidently present a valuable guide to the varied and shifting affiliations, references, influences, and contexts that make up the complex terrain of Green's work, they hardly function as mere explanations of her artistic project. Instead, the concentration of these writings expands our understanding of contemporary art and culture far beyond the limits of a singular oeuvre. Green's immense writerly output provides us with a sophisticated survey of the political, philosophical, aesthetic, and technological force fields that not only allowed her own practice to come into being and evolve dialogically but in fact constitute the current globalized dispositif of artistic production at large.

Indeed, by interweaving an astounding diversity of tones, modes, subjects, and genres into a single body of writing, Green reveals many of the underlying interactions and interconnections that would seem to shape our contemporary moment. In the pieces collected in the volume, Green oscillates between the poles of academic and literary ambition, combining the poetic with the analytic, the diaristic with the theoretical, the autobiographical with the systematic, the tentative with the polemical. Structured in five parts with the help of chapter headings tellingly derived from the lingua franca of such currently influential fields as historiography ("Genealogies"), sociological thought ("Encounters," "Positions"), and network technologies ("Circuits of Exchange," "Operations"), Green's texts proceed through rumination, meditation, and self-questioning instead of indulging in the rigid assertions and affirmative gestures that typically characterize the artist's manifesto. She sometimes amalgamates quotes, excerpts, impressions, and observations in truly essayistic manner (the results echoing the palimpsest-like superimposition of variegated materials in her artworks), while in other publications she develops the stricter argumentation of rigorous scholarship. Whether prompted by invitations to contribute to symposia, seminars, and journals or by the impulse toward self-reflection, these texts display Green's vast erudition in areas of interest ranging from postcolonial and feminist theory to media and cultural studies, from music, cinema, and popular culture to literature and the legacies of avant-garde art—as well as her ability to subject all of these topics to incessant scrutiny and interrogation.

Since the early 1990s, Green has been associated with the resurgence of site specificity, in conjunction with an expansive use of time-based media, in the interconnected art scenes of New York, Vienna, and Cologne. Yet if her work has indeed launched penetrating examinations of the notion of site, in her writing it is ideas of transmission and displacement—not the least in terms of diasporic communities in the US and beyond—that emerge as defining parameters of Green's thinking. This is evidenced, for instance, by seminal essays such as "Slippages" (1997), in which Green trenchantly analyzes the then-current debate around the "ethnographic turn" in post-Conceptual art; "Site-Specificity Unbound: Considering 'Participatory Mobility'" from the following year, in which she conceptualizes space in terms of a "network of operations," rather than as a literal site, and explores the concomitant difference between the spatial experiences that produce active memory and passive remembrance; and "Scenes from a Group Show: Project Unité" (1993), the artist's in-depth account of the ways in which she inhabited and addressed the space, communities, and themes at play in her participation in the exhibition "Project Unité," which took place in and around a partly derelict housing project by Le Corbusier in Firminy, France.

These critical reflections also present the itinerary of an artist constantly on the move; whether by choice or by necessity, Green was literally on a world tour (to evoke the title of the artist's 1993 project). Other Planes of There is thus an exemplary travelogue, formulating a new kind of peripatetic artistic subjectivity that has become the norm for the legions of professional producers of culture on the international biennial and gallery circuits. (Green herself casts a retrospective look at her trajectory in her introductory essay to the volume, titled "Other Planes, Different Phases, My Geometry, Times, Movements: Becomings Ongoing.") These shifts in subjectivity and identity are also the focus of another group of important essays from the heyday of confrontations over the supposed schisms between content and form, signified and signifier, politics and aesthetics, symbolic and real, that seemed to define so much critical discourse of the early 1990s (epitomized,
for example, in the fervent reactions to the 1993 Whitney Biennial, in which Green participated). Moreover, these texts document Green’s ongoing engagement with the expectations and confines confronted by African American artists. They grant readers the opportunity to revisit debates about the representation of the “other” that remain all too pertinent to our current moment; in her essay “I Won’t Play Other to Your Same” (1990), Green famously revealed the ways in which even ostensibly enlightened discourses of racial and cultural identity often only serve to reinforce the normalcy (and hegemony) of “non-otherness” rather than overcoming this binary. In essays such as “Spike Lee’s Mix” (1996), which explores the director’s movies and the corporatization of black culture; the various texts produced as part of her important early project Import/Export Funk Office, 1992; and “Trading on the Margin” (1991), which queries the market’s sudden embrace of minority artists, Green deals with the heightened visibility of black artists in both the art world and mainstream culture at that time, offering additional insights into her own incisive political thinking. Given the global reach of the art market and the proliferation of the biennial model (equally subtended by the ideology of a single world culture) that we have witnessed in the ensuing decades, both the artist’s insistence on difference and her clairvoyant analyses of repressive forms of “tolerance” remain touchstones for critical thinking and praxis.

All these forays exemplify Green’s attempts to expand the concept of site specificity to include not just an examination of the intrinsic qualities of a given place but an articulation of the interstices and absences by which it is equally defined. Green is acutely aware, too, of the fragility of sites themselves in our networked and virtual culture, and she has often countered a site’s imminent destruction, repression, or omission by cannily deploying the archival function of diverse media for the preservation, presentation, and dissemination of cultural memory. Most directly, since 1995, the artist has been working under the umbrella of a “dream company” styled as “FAM—Free Agent Media.” As documented in this volume, FAM has produced and circulated books, CD-ROMS, and videos outside of the confines of the publishing market. This faux-entrepreneurial endeavor has been complemented by an intense theorization of the archive, most concisely developed in the 2001 essay “Survival: Ruminations on Archival Lacunae.” Deploying in tandem the two sides of her media practice—the entrepreneurial and the archival—Green avoids succumbing to either the amnesia of technodeterminism or the melancholic quietism generated by the numerous artistic practices of recent years that have responded to technological developments by retrenching in nostalgia and obsolescence. By combining mnemonic reflection with a continuous investment in the latest technologies, Green’s practice navigates between these two impasses, which seem to govern both the production of contemporary art and its periodization by scholars and critics. In this respect, Other Planes of There offers both a critical genealogy of and a reflexive corrective to our present art-historical and political moment.