

Postprocess Postmortem, by Kristopher Lotier. The WAC Clearinghouse/University Press of Colorado, 2021. 220 pp.

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Before there was *postprocess*—a word, a name—there were some seeds: scattered ideas, tenets, and principles that hadn't yet been bound together in a conceptual package. (Lotier 4)

As an ancient axiom from the analects of Confucius goes, the beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names (必也正名乎). Modern education has similarly cast in its foundation the tendency to organize and categorize information. By labeling affinity subjects with distinctive names, scholars participate in knowledge making, teaching, and continued learning. In this special 50th anniversary celebration edition of *Composition Studies*, I have elected to review a book that looks back at a period when the term *postprocess* was made popular by writing teachers and researchers who were seeking The Next Big Thing in composition during a time when everything else did the same—at the turn of the millennium. Kristopher Lotier's *Postprocess Postmortem*, though sounding morbid, is apt for an occasion such as this special edition because *postprocess* theory was supposedly introduced to respond to the eminent *process* era that took off in 1972, in large part due to Donald Murray's essay in *College Composition and Communication*, "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product." That was the year *Freshman English News* (the previous name of *Composition Studies*) was founded. Early contents in *FEN* included commentaries and reports on *process* methods in composition pedagogy. Lotier's historiography begins at this era and takes readers on a ride into the new century while performing a rhetorical autopsy on the purported demise of *postprocess* after 2008 (Heard 283; *Beyond Postprocess*).

In his introductory chapter, Lotier sets out to chart the origins and trajectories of *postprocess* theory in order to situate it within the larger discourse of composition pedagogy in the American tradition. In this first chapter, he details his historiographic research method for tracing the lineage of *postprocess*. Readers may appreciate his description of the revisionist, zoom-in-zoom-out technique in outlining historical timelines and emergence of ideas, a method that resembles a mashup of rhetorical circulation and citation analysis. After qualifying his methodology, Lotier effectively summarizes the key discussions that will be featured in the following chapters. Then, 18 pages in, he finally gets to the historical origins and distinctions between *post-process* (hyphenated) and *postprocess* (unhyphenated) that he has been teasing from the beginning of the book. I'll leave it to the readers to enjoy the thrill by finding

Lotier's interpretation here on their own. At any rate, one can expect to read about the progressive "theory wars" (18) that have caused great debates among cognitive, expressivist, social, and constructivist theorists in the late 80s and through the early 2000s.

Into the second chapter, Lotier discusses the paradigm-formation and movement/theory-building phenomena in writing studies enthusiastically. An important highlight in this chapter is the author's take on the field's criticisms on postprocess theory, including that of Bruce McComiskey (*Teaching*), Helen Foster (*Networked*), Richard Fulkerson ("Of Pre- and Post-process"), and John Whicker ("Narratives"), all of whom Lotier calls out specifically. While Lotier agrees with Lisa Ede's argument for "healthy suspicions" toward disciplinary taxonomies, he reminds readers that Ede, too, said that taxonomies are important for organizing thinking (*Situating*). So, Lotier hopes that critics would give postprocess a fair chance to advance field knowledge, rather than simply dismissing it. In the remainder of the chapter, Lotier synthesizes the scholarship surrounding Thomas Kent's *Paralogic Rhetoric*, a fundamental literature that informs Lotier's overall thesis. In closing the chapter, he presents Kent's approach to talking about disciplinary formations, i.e., vocabularies, as a way to characterize postprocess. Except for its relevance to naming and organizing theory, however, I do not feel strongly about the usefulness of the notion of vocabulary for the purposes of defending postprocess.

Chapters 3 and 4 take readers into the heart of the book in terms of serious postmortem as Lotier dissects a broad-based effort in the 1980s and 90s that sought to reintegrate theories of reading with writing theories. Lotier finds that such effort has resulted in the displacement of process theory, and in turn formulated a critical core premise of postprocess—writing is interpretive. Additionally, through his onerous unpacking of Martin Nystrand and Louise Wetherbee Phelps' works, Lotier has identified two other premises that have been commonly accepted as threshold concepts for writing—writing is public and writing is situated. Together, these premises complicate process theory. Here, Lotier makes a detour northward; he calls attention to three scholars from a Canadian university—Russell Hunt, James Reither, and Douglas Vipond—whose collective (and collaborative) works have been deemed by Anthony Paré ("Toward") as the foundation of postprocess pedagogy. In tracing this "alternate genealogy of postprocess writing and pedagogy" (Lotier 92), he takes readers down a historic journey through stories that have been largely contained by geographical borders and the close-knit community called Inkshed (a newsletter turned conference turned academic press), thus making chapter 4 one of the two most enthralling chapters for me—the other being the opening chapter.

From Canada, Lotier returns to Kent's scholarship in chapter 5 to further explicate the development of postprocess from *Writing in the Disciplines*

(WID) and technical/professional communication viewpoints. Interestingly, the chapter opens with Sid Dobrin's critique of Kent's paralogic hermeneutics (*Postcomposition; Constructing*) as unfitting for teaching writing due to the pedagogical imperatives imparted on postprocess, hence limiting its applicability to the project of composition studies as we know it. Lotier quite masterfully weaves together the ripple effects of Dobrin's influence in the ultimate transformation of composition into writing studies, with support from field advocate Charles Bazerman. Lotier then turns to WID and non-first-year-writing contexts where postprocess has also extended effects. For a technical communication scholar like myself, this part of the book sparks joy as Lotier shares insights about the influence of Kent's work on his colleagues in professional communication (e.g., Nancy Roundy Blyler; Rebecca Burnett; Charles Kostelnick; David Russell; and Charlotte Thralls), albeit all of them were at that time working at the same institution; that is, Iowa State University.

In chapter 6, Lotier uses his previously published article of the same title, "Around 1986," to anchor postprocess in invention-related discourses that were somewhat revitalized by Marilyn Cooper's essay, "The Ecology of Writing." This revitalization is perhaps most evident in how Cooper was taken up by socio-epistemic rhetoricians and then most recently new-materialist theorists, who, per Lotier's observation, hold opposite ideas about discourse. In this telling case that could only be shown by time, Lotier demonstrates how concepts evolve based on their uptakes and applications. Through the lens of inventional rhetoric, Lotier hints at the possible cause of death for postprocess—readers construct meanings of texts as much as authors do. And since meanings are never static, as they change over time, postprocess may have suffered from its vague, abstract, and open nature, resulting in inconsistent uptakes and contentions against its applicability in modern pedagogies. Of course, this is my own reading of the case. Readers may find more in-depth deliberations on the tension between postprocess and invention before the end of this chapter.

Closing the book, Lotier ironically offers an invitation to leave matters at the open, suggesting that postprocess isn't really dead-dead. Within these final pages, Lotier ignites hope. Postprocess is not just a period or a theory to convince educators of a specific way of teaching writing. Rather, postprocess is writing that shows greater awareness of contexts, including time, place, audience, and many more factors that composition teachers often invoke—an "intensification" (Lotier 187) of what process paradigm offers but with intentions to boost its dynamism. I do like the way Lotier puts it, that postprocess suggests a "need to study and teach writing in the myriad places where it arises" (189-190). Always-already, writing is situated; writing is public; writing is interpretive. Whether we acknowledge it or not, many of us who teach writing are subscribed to such tenets. Where I hoped the conclusion would

lead is a next step—perhaps a transprocess trajectory that could take us into a third-space where process intersects with agency, positionality, ethics, and justice. Post—whether after, beyond, or free of—process signals change. Our current climate demands that change socially, professionally, personally, and globally. Transformative and transformational composition may be a diacritic extrication for our humane future(s).

As we commemorate the 50th year of the founding of *Composition Studies*, Lotier's *Postprocess Postmortem* serves as a reminder about the lively dynamics of our field, as well as a captivating account of where we have come from and where we may be going. For one, I hope we are headed into a more equitable space of publishing where knowledge isn't guarded behind paywalls, thus my selection of Lotier's open-access book for a review in this special edition. As readers may concur, *Postprocess Postmortem* provides a critical yet generous critique of composition history. It is appropriate for graduate seminars in composition theory and pedagogy practicum, and its methods can be useful to students and scholars alike who are interested in historiography and fieldwide citations research. For me, this was an unputdownable read, thanks in part to the luxury of a winter break and work-free days. Earnestly, Lotier reminds me that change is the only constant; our field and our journal are *externalized* (to borrow Lotier's emphasis) by what we actively pursue in the present, just as the *pre* and *post* prefixes could only be externalized by—yes, you guessed it right—process.

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