

CHAPTER 5.

POSTCOMPOSITION: BEFORE AND AFTER POSTPROCESS

From the opening pages of his first monograph, *Constructing Knowledges*, Sidney Dobrin has examined the relationship between theory and practice in composition studies. In so doing, he has amply documented a pervasive view of theory among composition scholars: it is only valuable to the extent that it can “immediately affect classroom practice.” Theory-skeptical scholars commonly enforce what he (following Lynn Worsham) has called the “pedagogical imperative,” and thus disciplinary theorists are often forced to conclude their manuscripts with hasty and under-developed remarks concerning classroom applications (*Constructing* 64, 86-87). In contrast, Dobrin affirms that theories concerning writing can be both correct and valuable, even if (at first, and perhaps indefinitely) they hold no bearing on instructional conduct. Many organizations benefit from employing workers in Research and Development (R&D), even if the concepts they produce never pass from theoretical prototypes to production models, and so too can composition studies as a whole profit from the efforts of its dedicated theorists.

As I understand Dobrin and Worsham, resisting the pedagogical imperative amounts to theorizing freely without worrying about applications. Quite crucially, Dobrin does not argue that a theory—postprocess, for instance—should *never* be applied as a pedagogy or transformed into one; instead, he repeatedly insists that it should not have to be applied “immediately” in the form of pedagogy to be considered valuable (*Constructing* 63-64, 87, 147). By my estimation, Dobrin is not as anti-pedagogy as he is often imagined to be. Rather, in his contribution to the *Post-Process Theory* collection (1999), he himself considers some consequences that (paralogic hermeneutic) postprocess perspectives might entail for commonplace pedagogical practices. However, near his chapter’s beginning, he cautions, “*At the outset*,” that is, at such an early stage in their development, “paralogic hermeneutic theories seem to be not readily translatable into manageable pedagogies” themselves (“Paralogic Hermeneutic Theories” 133; emphasis added). And, even more tellingly, in his final paragraph he writes, “As I mentioned earlier, I am not going to suggest ways in which pedagogies can or should be developed in order to accomplish the goals of these theories. I am not sure if such translations to practice are possible *yet*” (147; emphasis added).

Even when Dobrin offers his strongest admonition in this regard—“stop talking about teaching”—he presents it in the form of a “new mantra for writing

studies,” rather than as a commandment (*Postcomposition* 190). “Stop talking about teaching” is a statement one would repeat to oneself, so as to avoid the internalized dictates of the pedagogical imperative, which at every turn affirms the opposite: *explain how this relates to teaching*. As Dobrin argues, that mantra might help scholars “to step beyond the limits of thinking about writing in terms of classroom application and observation, calling instead for research that begins to tear down the very boundaries of the field in order to develop more useful, accurate theories of writing” (*Postcomposition* 190).

Notably, when Dobrin first launched his critique of the pedagogical imperative, he did so in a chapter in which he aimed “to show how one particular line of theoretical inquiry—postprocess theory—has been intruded upon by composition’s pedagogical imperative in ways that have not produced workable pedagogies and have, in fact, denied major facets both of postprocess theories and theoretical pursuit in general” (63). Although Dobrin demonstrates the negative impacts of the pedagogical imperative on all theorizing about writing, it would remain conceptually tethered to postprocess in much subsequent research. As later scholars critiqued and/or extended his logic, however, some became confused on what resisting the pedagogical imperative would entail. The suggestion that scholars should not *have to* turn postprocess into a pedagogy was transformed to mean that scholars *should not* turn postprocess into a pedagogy. Thus, oddly, the critique of the pedagogical imperative transformed into an anti-pedagogical imperative. And, as Hannah J. Rule has pointed out, that anti-pedagogical imperative has produced negative consequences for postprocess, in particular: “it has led to cautiousness—even a moratorium—on rethinking pedagogical and process assumptions through certain postprocess and other postmodern claims” (*Situating* 15).

Dobrin illustrates two primary problems with the pedagogical imperative: it damages the field of composition as a whole, inasmuch as it constrains theoretical knowledge-making, and it damages the theories themselves. With reference to the first, he reasons, “Issues about discourse, language, and writing that exist beyond the classroom and that do not directly impact classroom practice must also be studied if we are to understand their operations. Theory does not necessarily have to inform pedagogy. The anti-intellectual positions that find theory useless unless it leads directly to classroom application deny a responsibility to the field” (*Constructing* 28). In addition, the knee-jerk tendency engendered by the pedagogical imperative—*theorize, then apply theory in practice as soon as possible*—“often . . . denies particular theories their revolutionary potential, discredits certain theories before they have been thoroughly explored, and, in effect, neutralizes the innovations individual theories offer the field in favor of already inscribed assumptions and practices” (64-65). Sometimes, the pedagogical rami-

fications or logical extensions of a given theory are not obvious or evident at first glance, and when hasty implementations fail, those setbacks can depress or even cancel future attempts.

Implicit with Dobrin's critique of the pedagogical imperative is a belief he commonly and extensively defends: "Composition studies' primary object of study is not writing or even the teaching of writing, as the field often claims; the field's primary object of study is the (student) subject" (*Postcomposition* 4). By his accounting, "such a focus greatly limits . . . what can be known about writing," and "it has fostered an anti-theoretical climate within the field," ultimately producing "intellectual stagnation" (4, 7). That is, most writers do not write for academic purposes, and academic writing (however broadly defined) only represents a miniscule subset of all writing produced worldwide within a given timespan. In addition, the distribution and circulation of academic texts follow much more predictable patterns than do those of non-academic ones. Many of the most interesting developments in the recent history of writing—especially those brought about by digitization—have relatively little to do with (narrowly defined) academic writing or academic writers. But, if knowledge-making in the field is constrained by what Paul Lynch calls the "Monday Morning Question"—"This theory (or idea, or philosophy) you're proposing is great and everything, but what am I supposed to do with it when the students show up on Monday morning?"—then theorists are implicitly prohibited from exploring those developments and their ramifications (*After Pedagogy* xi).

Therefore, in texts dating from the turn of the millennium onward, Dobrin has often conspicuously placed his own theorizing outside the bounds of composition studies proper, sometimes coining new disciplinary designations to do so. At one point or another, he has situated his own work within discourse studies, a term introduced by Stephen Yarbrough in *After Rhetoric*; ecomposition; postcomposition; and/or writing studies (*Ecomposition 2*; *Natural Discourse* 14, 83). For instance, he identifies the "the primary agenda" of his 2011 book *Postcomposition* as justifying "a move beyond the academic work of composition studies in favor of the revolutionary potential of the intellectual work of writing studies, specifically the work of writing theory, an endeavor likely best removed from the academic work of pedagogy and administration," that is, composition (24).

As a longtime exponent of postprocess and editor of one of the two primary edited collections on the subject, *Beyond Postprocess*, Dobrin understands his call towards disciplinary reform to be directly connected to postprocess theory, in particular. "At its core," he reasons, "postprocess serves as an institutional critique and an attempt to show that writing theory can sever itself from the sacrosanct subject as the central imperative of writing studies" (*Postcomposition* 129).

By this account, postprocess provides the tools—even the weaponry—necessary to sever the tie between writing research and writing pedagogy. Therefore, *Postcomposition* operates “with the intent of violence”; the book “does not work toward resolution; it is intentionally a moment of resistance, of violence” (2, 188). That violence works toward a concrete goal: a postcomposition discipline, writing studies.

Dobrin’s career evidences a notable, long-standing preoccupation with the question “What is writing?” In his 1997 review of texts by Chris Davies, Joseph Harris, and James C. Raymond, he writes, “Perhaps the question ‘what do we do?’ is not the question we should be asking; rather, we should ask ‘what is writing?’” (“Review” 698). However, by Dobrin’s account, the discipline of composition has been so transfixed with the student writer (i.e., “the sacrosanct subject”) and writing instruction (following the pedagogical imperative) that it has not attended to writing itself. In contrast, Dobrin affirms “the agency of writing itself, be it identifiable agency of specific texts, the recurring agency of writing in multiple, networked formations, or the intellectual agency of a concept, idea, or theory,” all of which he contrasts with “the agency of the subject or even of the writing-subject” (78). When he employs the term writing itself, he generally connects it to a few key principles: ecologies (50, 56), circulation (58, 78), writing as system (140), viscosity (184), and, in a somewhat surprising (re-)turn, the posthuman agent, whom he conceives of as “indistinguishable from writing itself” (188).

Responding to *Postcomposition*, Bruce Horner strongly critiques Dobrin’s logic, doubting that the violence he calls for is necessary. In Horner’s words, “We might respond to calls to transform composition into writing studies as welcome and unremarkable, on the one hand, and yet also impertinent, asking for work to begin that in fact has long been underway (“Rewriting Composition” 471). In other words, Dobrin has failed to account for—and even to acknowledge—versions of writing studies that have emerged from alternate theoretical frameworks. Rather, per Horner once again, “Dobrin’s references to writing studies ignore large swaths of scholarship that can already lay claim to such a name.” As a result, in his work, “writing studies appears to be only just emerging *ex nihilo* in the work of a handful of theorists: something new and at odds with all that has come before” (“Rewriting” 459). That is, Dobrin pretends that “hefty reams of scholarship” on the subject do not exist and “effectively clears the field of theorizing by deeming (at least some) extant theorizing something else” (459, 460).

For Horner, “far from representing a new identity for composition,” writing studies has “always been part of composition” (471). He has not been alone in making this claim. In “Where Did Composition Studies Come From?” (1993) Martin Nystrand, Stuart Greene, and Jeffrey Wiemelt provide documentary evi-

dence that would support Horner's claim. They figure the "emergence of a composition research community" in the 1970s as coinciding with "the emergence of scholarly thinking and empirical research about writing qua writing"—that is, *writing itself* (271, 272). In other words, for Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt, the modern incarnation of composition studies has never existed apart from writing studies. Of course, their history focuses on texts published in empirical and teaching-focused journals—the kind of scholarship that is anathema to Dobrin. But, the erasure of those texts from Dobrin's history is precisely Horner's point. Whereas Dobrin believes that composition has yet to transcend pedagogical concerns, Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt argue that it only "emerged as a discipline as its focus began to transcend traditional problems of effective pedagogy" and became instead a discipline featuring "coherent research programs . . . marrying empirical methods to theoretical conceptions" (272, 271). In other words, Dobrin sees writing studies emerging after the death of composition (as it is presently conceived: an administrative and pedagogical enterprise); in contrast, Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt suggest that composition itself was born from writing studies.

Ultimately, I am sympathetic toward some elements of Horner's critique. It's true that Dobrin could do more to acknowledge the writing studies research that distantly pre-dates his reformist calls. He might also do more to recognize the theoretical work occurring in that domain, even if it hardly resembles the continental-philosophy-inflected theorizing he prefers. However, a charitable reading might acknowledge that his vision for writing studies looks fairly different from the (sub)discipline that Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt describe: one heavily indebted to linguistics and the social sciences. Thus, Dobrin's proposition isn't as redundant as Horner presumes. In *Postcomposition*, Dobrin does acknowledge prior conceptions of writing studies, citing works by Charles Bazerman, John Trimbur, and Susan Miller. While he finds things to praise in those conceptions, he believes that Bazerman's is too pedagogically oriented, Trimbur's too vague in its methodological aims, Miller's too concerned with *writers* rather than *writing* (25-27). As Dobrin notes, "Ultimately, *Postcomposition* proposes a form of writing studies"—not the only one, but one of several—"one that moves beyond composition studies' subject-distracted view of writing and theorizes about writing" (27).

In this chapter, I want to lay aside Dobrin's scholarship, exemplary though it may be. Instead, I want to demonstrate that postprocess, through the gradual course of implementation in pedagogical form, has already arrived at something also called *writing studies*. Indeed, it seems quite similar to the thing Dobrin has proposed—and it may even be the very same thing. Near the start of their introduction to *Beyond Postprocess*, an edited collection published in the same year as

Postcomposition (2011), Dobrin, J. A. Rice, and Michael Vastola ask a seemingly non-rhetorical, historical question that they never quite answer: has postprocess “ushered in an era of *postpedagogy*? . . . a point within composition studies where new ways of thinking about writing fundamentally refuse any codifiable notion of the relationship between the writing subject and the texts it produces, as well as the ‘practical’ scholarship expected to proceed from that relationship” (3). I want to posit an answer: Yes.

As I will demonstrate, the form of writing studies that has already arisen via postprocess is postpedagogical in the sense that Dobrin, Rice and Vastola had hoped that it might be. As they note, postpedagogy is “not opposed to composition studies pedagogical imperative, but more interested in questions and theories of writing not trapped by disciplinary expectations of the pedagogical” (14). Stated differently: postpedagogy does not eschew teaching altogether; instead, it re-imagines what teaching might look like, if it were guided by the assumption that what we used to call *teaching* is impossible, given that writing isn’t what we used to think it was during the Process era. It also moves the scene of theorizing “outside the classroom or other pedagogic scenes—even nonclassroom-based projects like service learning or community-based writing—in favor of inquiries that are not limited by processes of pedagogy” (17).

To illustrate the genealogy of this form of writing studies, I trace several concurrent and often parallel developments in the history of postprocess: theorizing writing as a form of communicative interaction; defining genres according to their functions, not their formal elements; attempting to teach genres within their relevant activity systems; renouncing the prior goals of generalized or generic composition courses; paying closer attention to *transfer*; and espousing Writing across the Curriculum and/or Writing in the Disciplines and/or Writing about Writing as an antidote to the ills of composition studies. Many, though not all, of these trends exist within an easily identifiable origin point for postprocess, Kent’s *Paralogic Rhetoric*. And, indeed, early readers of that text understood it to be calling for a profound rethinking of institutionalized writing instruction, one in which “students would write public discourse intended to get things done in the world rather than discourse thought of as practice” (Ward, “Review” 186; c.f., Dasenbrock, “Review” 104). Kent did not precisely anticipate Dobrin’s version of a postcomposition writing studies, but he did call for an end to composition instruction as it was then conceptualized.

In what follows, I don’t want to argue that postprocess *created* or *caused* writing studies, or writing in the disciplines, or genre/activity theory, or research on transfer. I want to suggest, instead, that it has always been inextricably bound-up with and connected to these pedagogical methods and scholarly trends—some of which may have propelled *it*. I also want to demonstrate a further historical

claim. If composition is narrowly defined as an academic discipline focused on student writers and institutionalized (first-year) writing instruction—a definition Dobrin seems to espouse (*Postcomposition* 3)—then postprocess emerged outside the bounds of composition at its very outset.

In some sense, postprocess was always already postcomposition, even if it has infrequently been recognized as such. One of the central arguments of this book is that postprocess *has* produced real but heretofore unrecognized effects on the field of writing instruction. To make that case, this chapter analyzes proto-postprocess texts published in non-composition venues, distantly removed from the conversation concerning (quote/unquote) “high postprocess theory” in mainstream composition journals. Some of those texts were authored by Kent. But, several others were authored by his colleagues at Iowa State University or by their graduate students. Like Kent’s proto-postprocess texts, many of his colleagues’ works were also published before the (unhyphenated) term *postprocess* came into existence (in 1994) or very shortly thereafter. Unsurprisingly, then, those texts have seldom been considered to be *postprocess*, even though they bear certain postprocess markers. Thus, the impact of postprocess on non-first-year-composition forms of writing instruction has not been sufficiently appreciated.

The role of Iowa State scholars in the development of postprocess is not necessarily a secret, of course. Four of the fifteen contributors to the 1999 *Post-Process Theory* collection—Nancy Roundy Blyler, Helen Rothschild Ewald, Kent, and David R. Russell—worked there. But, I want to widen the scope of my analysis beyond just that one collection, especially by considering texts published prior to it. While I’ll focus on works by Russell and Blyler, and briefly discuss Ewald here, I also want to draw attention to postprocess postcomposition texts written and/or co-written by Charlotte Thralls, Rebecca E. Burnett, and several Iowa State graduate students, highlighting Clay Spinuzzi, Rue Yuan, and Elizabeth Wardle, in particular. After two contextualizing digressions, I’ll close this chapter by discussing institutional reform proposals and efforts that bear postprocess markers and that march under the banner of writing studies.

Since I’ll focus so closely on texts written by Iowa State scholars, let me explain what I hope to accomplish in doing so—as well as what I am decidedly not attempting to demonstrate. In my Introduction, I affirmed the importance of oscillating between levels of historical scale, from the local to the global and back again. By examining the works of professional communication scholars at Iowa State, I demonstrate that paralogic hermeneutic ideas made noticeable theoretical and practical impacts on one midwestern university campus. In addition, I want to show that postprocess concepts took an unusual migratory pattern. As Blyler has noted, guiding concepts (e.g., the Process approach) often

enter “mainstream” composition scholarship before trickling down to professional and technical writing (“Process-Based Pedagogy”). However, paralogic externalist ideas filtered into professional writing scholarship before composition scholars at other universities ever discussed them. In saying all of this, though, I am not arguing that postprocess theories revolutionized professional communication scholarship and transformed that field once and for all. They did not. Nor do I even intend to show that they revolutionized the scholarly and pedagogical methods of an entire English department. They did not.

Iowa State was not a postprocess oasis. Many of its faculty members were engrossed in professional writing and/or writing in the disciplines research, and the vast majority of them never published works addressing postprocess in any way. Understandably, they had separate interests and investigated different issues. Furthermore, emergent postprocess theories and pedagogies did not immediately extinguish interest in dominant Process approaches. During the mid-1980s, while Kent wrote his proto-postprocess texts, his colleagues Glenn J. Broadhead and Richard C. Freed were demonstrating that professional communication scholars still had “little idea how current theories of composition”—by which they mean Process theories—“apply to writing in the business world” (3). Likewise, Blyler was—entirely rightly—demonstrating that Process models had not yet impacted professional writing scholarship and arguing that they ought to do so (“Process-Based Pedagogy”). Similarly, in 1989 Charles Kostelnick explored “affinities” and connections between the respective Process movements in writing and design (“Process Paradigms”). In other words: even while Kent was making his turn toward postprocess, many of his peers were fully engrained in Process, aiming to extend it into new domains.

When Iowa State scholars endorsed postprocess ideas and/or adjacent concerns in the 1980s and early 1990s, they did not call them *postprocess* because that term did not yet exist. In line with Kent’s practice at the time, the term they used most commonly was *paralogic hermeneutics*, though David Russell would use the simpler term *externalist*. But, another important caveat presents itself: their texts demonstrate substantial disagreements in their approaches and perspectives. In articles published between 1987 and 1992, for example, Kent (“Schema Theory”), Blyler (“Reading Theory and Persuasive Business Communications” and “Shared Meaning and Public Relations Writing”), and their colleague David D. Roberts (“Readers’ Comprehension Responses in Informative Discourse”) would all oppose the traditional distinction between reading and writing and endorse a negotiated concept of meaning—a cornerstone of postprocess. However, whereas Kent would theorize widespread implications for writing instruction, Blyler and Roberts would “limit” the scope of their findings to particular examples. Blyler concludes “Reading Theory and Persuasive

Business Communications” with a simple affirmation: “In this article, reading theory has been used to derive guidelines for the tacit arguments present in persuasive business communications” although she admits not having analyzed “every type of persuasive business communication nor exhausted the possibility for additional reading-based guidelines” (395). Similarly, in line with the norms of social-scientific research, Roberts admits the “limited scope and qualitative focus of [his] study” before suggesting how his results “might suggest studies” that could extend them (146).

I would note one final point here: Kent’s colleagues tended to frame paralogic, externalist (i.e., *postprocess*) approaches as conceptual advances over expressivist, cognitivist, and rhetorical ones, that is, as being preferable to most—but not all—Process approaches. At the same time, some of them placed postprocess concepts on equal footing with social constructionist ideas (see: Blyler, “Theory and Curriculum” 225-37; Burnett and Kastman, “Teaching Composition” 274-78). In the terms I have been employing, then, some Iowa State scholars framed both post-process and postprocess as conceptually superior to Process, but did not see either as inherently preferable to the other.

THEORIZING BEYOND NARROW BOUNDS: THE ORIGINS OF POSTPROCESS IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP

The most famous passage in *Paralogic Rhetoric* may be Kent’s (commonly misunderstood) claim that “writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach” (161). His fundamental point, which the very next sentence explains, is that “certain background skills” (e.g., grammatical constructions, the use of topic sentences, and so forth) “can be taught,” but that even mastery of those skills cannot guarantee successful communication (161). Expanding on this claim elsewhere, Kent distinguishes between composition, which he believes can be taught, and writing, which he believes cannot. To ground this argument, he employs the term *composition* “primarily and narrowly to mean the study of the composing process” and *writing* to indicate “a kind of communicative interaction” (“Paralogic Rhetoric: An Overview” 149). Of course, even when he refers to “the composing process,” Kent means something more than just stages and strategies. From his perspective, composition remains teachable because “we certainly may teach systematically and rigorously subjects dealing with how texts operate, how texts shape understanding, and how texts function within different social contexts,” that is, “issues such as semantics, style, cohesion, genre, and so forth” (“Principled Pedagogy” 432; “Paralogic Rhetoric: An Overview” 149). If composition were

reoriented to teach about how texts work (that is, how readers read—but also, what texts can *do*), rather than how to write (in the Theory-Hope-ful sense of *do this and you will succeed*), then the discipline could be conceptually tenable. As Kent concludes, “Our current and future students will always need to know how texts operate, how texts shape understanding, and how texts function within different social contexts” (“Principled Pedagogy” 433). Translated into contemporary terms: students will always need writing studies courses, even if they cannot “learn to write” in generalized first-year writing courses.

Within his own constrained usage of the terms, Kent claims that writing cannot be taught, but he indicates that it can (indeed must) be learned, over and over again. In focusing on the unteachability of paralogic, hermeneutic writing, however, critics often occlude Kent’s practical assertions about how such learning might come to pass. In *Paralogic Rhetoric*’s final chapter, Kent forwards a more robustly and profoundly collaborative vision of instruction that might take place beyond the conventional bounds of composition studies (164). In this version of (what has conventionally been called) writing instruction, students and teachers would work closely together—even on a one-to-one basis—to construct texts that would respond to and act within “specific communicative situations,” thereby taking part in “communicative interaction with others within and outside the university” (169).

In outlining the conditions in which the ability to write can be learned, Kent imagines a context very different from the traditional, generic, first-year composition classroom. The final section of *Paralogic Rhetoric* urges eliminating “traditional writing and literature courses” and notes that, in an appropriate institutional shift, “faculty in disciplines outside English departments would need to be retrained in order to take responsibility for the written discourse generated in their courses” (169). Or, as Dasenbrock explicated the book at the time: “Kent’s theories move in two directions simultaneously: first, toward a greater integration of reading and writing, and second, towards writing-across-the-curriculum [or, really, what we would now call Writing in the Disciplines], since engineers learn to write like engineers by writing as engineers” (“Forum” 103-04). But, Kent’s arguments in this direction predate *Paralogic Rhetoric*. And, just as crucially, he refined many of his positions beyond the bounds of “mainstream” composition scholarship.

Now, if I were to mention that Kent edited and then co-edited *JAC* for several years in the mid-to-late 1990s, I assume that many readers of this book would register that fact either as (A) already known or (B) not particularly surprising. However, he also edited the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (formerly the *Iowa State Journal of Business and Technical Communication*) from 1990–1994 (“*Remapping*” 12). I imagine that fact is considerably less familiar,

at least to readers of *this book*. I mention Kent's editorship here because it's quite relevant to an argument I'd like to extend: postprocess didn't all-of-a-sudden *start* to press writing instruction beyond composition in the 2010s. Rather, it sprung from other branches of writing instruction (i.e., what was once called "advanced composition") in the first place—more than thirty years ago. Before postprocess theories were applied to composition pedagogy, and even before they were introduced into the scholarly discourse of composition studies, they offered a conceptual interrogation of writing (itself), more generally.

The Kent who published "Paragraph Production and the Given-New Contract" (1984) in *The Journal of Business Communication* is not a postprocess thinker *per se*. Nonetheless, he advances some proto-postprocess arguments. Contra later accusations of postprocess impracticality, he also demonstrates direct concern with the pedagogical implications of his insights. Kent asks in his second paragraph, for instance, "How do we transform important current research into practical teaching tools?" And, in his article's final sentence, he asserts "If current rhetorical theory is going to come alive for *all* our students and not just those in our graduate programs, our work, it seems to me, should be directed as much toward practice as theory" (45, 65). In this instance, he concerns himself principally with the "given-new contract," which he notes, is an "extension of [H. P.] Grice's 'Cooperative Principle,' the dictum that speakers and listeners must cooperate with one another in the quantity, quality, relation, and manner of their communications" (46). Crucially, the given-new contract closely resembles Davidson's emphases on hermeneutic guessing, triangulation, and the principle of charity, which formed the foundation of Kent's paralogic rhetoric. Kent explains the Given-New contract as follows:

[It] is a conventionalized agreement between communicators. Communicators must agree that while communicating they will share a "mental world" where all parties know what is given information and what is new. When communicating through written discourse, the writer assumes the greater share of responsibility for fulfilling the contract, for he shoulders the burden for the alignment of his texts with the reader's linguistic and extra-linguistic context. (46)

Importantly, at this stage of his career, Kent presents himself as developing only "a tentative first step toward a more complete teaching methodology" (45). That statement, of course, raises the question: *was he already imagining paralogic hermeneutic postprocess here?* We are left to wonder. In any case, the Kent of "Paragraph Production" is surprisingly concerned with delineating the nuts-and-bolts of a lesson that would require "three to four meeting periods" (53). Even

more importantly, he presents this approach within the pages of a business communication journal and explains its utility in business-communication terms.

In 1987 Kent published two articles in non-composition venues that would provide a bridge between his earlier thinking on the Given-New contract and his eventual move toward postprocess as such: “Schema Theory and Technical Communication,” published in the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, and “Genre Theory in the Area of Business Writing,” published in *The Technical Writing Teacher*. In both cases, he emphasizes the role of the reader in constructing textual meaning and demonstrates that communicative transactions are not and cannot be rule-governed; he frames effective communication as the result of on-the-spot negotiations, rather than application of pre-existent formulas.

In “Schema Theory,” Kent recites three commonplace dicta for technical writing: to move from “old” information to new; to move from the most “general” information to the most specific; and to employ recognizable formats. The first of these, of course, closely resembles the Given-New contract. In this text, Kent employs Schema Theory to explain why the aforementioned principles *work*. He defines a schema as “a mental representation that helps us to organize information”; for instance, when one thinks of an *office* one imagines desks, computers, etc. (244, 246). Kent then affirms that schemata “mediate between the individual and the external world” (244). However, he also affirms that schemata act as “a kind of dialectic, transactional process that facilitates and promotes meaning production.” Writers need to know about schemata, Kent argues, because they guide readers’ textual interpretations, providing a “common ground between writer and reader,” though not one that could be established through any kind of rule-bound structure or format (248-49). In this light, schemata might be best regarded as “*contracts* or agreements between reader and writer,” inasmuch as they emphasize “the *process* of information transfer” (249). Importantly—and here is where the proto-paralogic-hermeneutic gesture emerges—schemata are not static or rule-bound. Instead, “writers must continually seek out the common ground, the contracts, the cooperative agreements, the mental representations shared between writer and reader” (249). Ultimately, Kent suggests, these schema-theory insights might lead technical communication instructors “toward a more interactive, reader-centered approach to composition” (251).

“Schema Theory” begins with a discussion of the given-new contract (243) and ends with a substitution: by the conclusion, Kent prefers to discuss *genres* as opposed to *schemata*. He writes, for instance,

We should understand that, to a large extent, we teach *genres* in our technical writing courses. . . . When we view these

genres as mental representations that help a reader organize information or, in other words, as schemata, they become strategies and processes that writers employ to help readers process information. Genres are not rule-bound documents. So, from this perspective genres become a process through which writers meet the expectations held by their readers. (249)

“Genre Theory in the Area of Business Writing” seems to pick-up at this point.

At the outset of that text, Kent briefly describes the “traditional” view of genres—“rigid taxonomies composed of synchronic conventions that may be codified into normative rules” (232). But, he soon notes, this conception leads to a serious difficulty for business writing pedagogy: infinite regression. If one attempts to create “production rules” that could apply to every document, one would inevitably need to revise those rules to account for each instance in which the new text deviated from generic norms. “The writer’s work, then, would be perpetual,” Kent argues: “He or she would be forced to memorize periodically a new series of checklists, or would be forced to consult a new catalogue containing updated checklists” (235-36). However, an alternate vision of genre as “hermeneutic structures that help writers and readers make sense of the world of discourse” might provide more useful insights for pedagogy (237). Though he doesn’t employ Davidsonian terms here, Kent seems to indicate that prior theories—even those derived from previous, successful acts of communication—have little guidance to offer for subsequent interactions. One does not proceed in communication by knowing in advance how to proceed, rather one proceeds through interpreting while communicating.

In the latter half of his article, Kent explains three central implications of genre theory: “(1) no text is ever genre-less; (2) no text is ever reader-less; (3) no text is ever culture-less” (237). Readers interpret texts based off of their assumptions about the texts’ genres and, similarly, writers craft texts to conform to genres. As a corollary, he argues, “So, in a pragmatic sense, writer and reader agree to cooperate by employing genres and by responding to them in ways that both writer and reader expect” (238). This cooperation is not governed by “*definitive* and *untemporized* rules,” though, because genres are dynamic and negotiated. This constituent negotiation of genre dovetails with Kent’s second insight—that no text is ever reader-less. Given that readers co-construct genres, instructors should “seek to move beyond production rules for the manufacture of texts.”

Here, without directly acknowledging his purpose, Kent seems to take a forceful jab at Process approaches, which he conceives of as being too monologic

and internalist and which act as though “only the writer’s concerns are important.” A better approach to writing instruction might instead provide “flexible guidelines that help a writer discover the expectations held by her reader” (239). His final assertion, that no text is ever culture-less, moves in an even more externalist direction. Kent argues that “genres change as our reading expectations change,” which its itself a function of “cultural life, our ideology, politics, economic conditions, and so forth”; in this light a genre is “a repository of cultural history” (239). In presenting this argument, it seems to me, Kent applies semantic externalist principles to textual forms, rather than (just) individual words.

Drawing from these insights, Kent presents six elements of a hypothetical business writing textbook. The first and last are especially notable here. “First,” he writes, “our book would contain no generic formulas, no rules, no checklists” (240). After rattling off four more points, he concludes, “Finally, our textbook would show students that writing, like thinking, cannot be reduced to formulas” (241). Whether Kent had intended to repeat himself isn’t clear to me. But, either way, rejecting formulas is both the alpha and the omega of his business writing approach. In closing, he acknowledges that “our imaginary textbook would be a strange book by today’s standards,” but he also expresses some optimism that it might not always seem so strange. As genres tend to do, perhaps business writing textbooks might evolve. Indeed, he contends, “Business writing, I believe, is destined nonetheless to move away from the narrow view of writing as sets of rules, checklists, and formulas and instead, move toward a wider view of writing as a dialogic, dynamic, and social communicative process” (241). The pedagogical arguments that Kent presents here may not be quite as paralogic or externalist as positions he would later endorse, but they’re surprisingly close, and they demonstrate his thought moving in that direction.

In the following years, Kent’s work would turn more directly turn paralogic hermeneutics, and he’d publish those insights primarily in “mainstream” rhetoric and composition journals: *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, *JAC*, and *Rhetoric Review*. He’d return to professional writing scholarship in 1993, though, with “Formalism, Social Construction, and Interpretive Authority,” published in *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*. For what it’s worth, that text is discernibly postprocess, and it echoes many claims from *Paralogic Rhetoric*, which was published that same year. For example, Kent affirms the need to “shift from talking about writing as either a process or a conventional act to talking about writing as a hermeneutic interaction,” and urges instructors to “drop our current process-oriented vocabulary and begin talking about language-in-use” (90). And, in a somewhat surprising (though intellectually consistent) move, he also urges the end of institutionalized professional-communication instruction, just as he had for composition. He states,

“Collaboration might replace teacher-centered instruction. . . . The professional writing teacher would become an adviser or, better yet, a consultant,” and further, “for our institutions, traditional professional writing courses would be eliminated” (90). He even suggests that “this paralogic-hermeneutic instructional method also would create complex problems for the discipline of professional writing” as a whole. In particular, it would force instructors to concede that “writing instruction is a misnomer” because no body of knowledge exists to be taught and, furthermore, “good writing—as a transcendental category—does not exist” because good writing is nothing more than good hermeneutic guessing (91).

In terms of the account I am telling, *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective* presents one other interesting item. That text was edited by Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls, longstanding writing partners and professional communication scholars at Iowa State. The two co-founded what was then called the *Iowa State Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (now *JBTC*) and co-edited it for several years before Kent took over the role in 1990. In their own chapter, “The Social Perspective and Professional Communication: Diversity and Directions in Research,” Blyler and Thralls indicate that the “social perspective” in writing research should not be considered “a monolithic paradigm”; rather, “significant differences exist among socially oriented theorists and researchers.” They therefore differentiate between three primary social forms of writing instruction—the “social constructionist,” the “ideologic,” and the “paralogic hermeneutic”—and show how each addresses four primary concepts: “community, knowledge and consensus, discourse conventions, and collaboration (5-6). Thus, a year before either of the terms was popularized, Blyler and Thralls were distinguishing between what I have called *post-process* and *postprocess* and demonstrating how each differs from social constructionism. To anyone seeking a thorough delineation between those schools of thought, I would strongly recommend that text, or Blyler and Thralls’ follow-up to it, “The Social Perspective and Pedagogy in Technical Communication,” which also considers a fourth social perspective, the “social cognitive.”

IOWA STATE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF PARALOGIC HERMENEUTICS, PART I: DAVID R. RUSSELL

I’d like to turn now to texts authored by Kent’s colleagues at Iowa State University. First up: David R. Russell. Postprocess is best defined as an externalist, paralogic conception of communicative interaction and attendant transformations in writing instruction. Though Russell is most commonly acknowledged as a historian of and leader in the WAC/WID movement, he was certainly aware

of major postprocess tenets, and his work applies them, even when avoiding the term *postprocess*. Dobrin's postcomposition question—*what is writing?*—emerges in Russell's work, as well. Although both focus on what writing *does* after inscription (that is, as it circulates), they arrive at different conclusions. Of course, some conflict is attributable to their theoretical attachments: Dobrin to complexity theory and French post-structuralism; Russell to Russian psychology, genre theory, and activity theory. In any case, I want to turn to two of Russell's most-easily-categorized-as-postprocess works here: "Vygotsky, Dewey, and Externalism" (1993) and "Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction" (1995). In the former, Russell attacks "general-composition courses"; in the latter, he critiques "general writing skills instruction," another name for the same thing. In both instances, he relies on a definition of writing that opposes many Process-era disciplinary conventions. If anything, I find these works to be *more* postprocess than his chapter in *Post-Process Theory*—at least insofar as they authorize readings of Russell's work that might advocate (more disciplinarily radical) postcomposition and externalist positions. In contrast, his *Post-Process Theory* chapter seems to me to be invested in maintaining the discipline's institutional or administrative status quo. There he writes, "The task is not to toss out 'the process approach,' by demarcating a 'post-process' era" and he continues, "the task rather is to extend the activity system of the discipline of composition studies" (91). After discussing those theoretical texts, I'll turn to Russell's large-scale history of the WAC/WID movement, a narrative in which he was himself implicated.

In "Vygotsky, Dewey, and Externalism," Russell notes that "general-composition courses take as their starting point the philosophical premise that the student—his or her intelligence, aptitude, behavior, skill, and so on—can be abstracted from disciplinary content," and thus they have been "oriented toward the *how* of writing, not the *what* (174). In contrast, as Russell carefully delineates, Vygotsky and Dewey opposed such a *what-versus-how* severing. They conceived of the "content of the disciplines . . . not [as] a static repository of universal truth and method . . . but an organized set of social practices and activities" (177). In discarding the "Cartesian epistemological split between Subject and Object, scheme and content," they also discarded the "individual/social dichotomy," demonstrating that the social "give[s] rise to consciousness and cannot be understood without it" (178). Thus, any notion of human development would need to include the social as a fundamental, constituent element. One could not plausibly conceive of development as a simply interior, abstracted process. To develop (in any activity or sphere of action) would mean to develop socially, together with others. In this conception, even "mind is social, historical"—that is, in the terms I have been using, externalist (182).

Notably, these premises would lead Russell toward a very postprocess set of conclusions. He writes,

Because almost all thought and action are socially mediated, rather than biologically or transcendently determined, it is never possible to reduce thought/action to a closed logical system, to predict with certainty the thoughts or actions of a person or group. This means that speech and writing (and their acquisition) are paralogical, to use Thomas Kent's term. (182)

By Russell's account, an externalist conception of mind directly refutes the underlying premises of expressivism. As he reasons, "Learning to write doesn't happen *naturally* through some inner process . . . if only we free students from the oppression of external authority" (184). According to this rationale, "realizing one's human potential" does not require removal from external constraints or restraints, but instead it "comes *through* society, history, culture—and therefore through disciplines—not in spite of them or by transcending them" (185). And, here is the key: in this externalist conception "growth in writing" entails "mov[ing] toward acquiring the genres, the habits of discourse, the voices of social groups involved in organized activities *while* students more and more fully participate in (either directly or vicariously) the activities of those groups and eventually contribute to and transform them—not *before* they participate in them" (186).

In this final turn, we see the distinction between Russell's externalist conception of writing in (the activity systems of) the disciplines, as compared to the Process-era conception of discourse communities. Insofar as the earlier approaches were internalist, they did not (and perhaps could not) refuse the distinctions between form and content, between what the mind is and what the mind knows (i.e., knowledge), or between language and/or communication *as such* and the uses of language and/or communication within particular, situated contexts. They often attempted to teach students the discourse conventions of specific disciplines without immersing or engaging students in the behaviors of those disciplines; thus, students were asked to employ genres—which Russell would conceive as forms of social action—without any sense for the actions they might be employed to conduct or complete. In contrast, Russell calls writing "a matter of learning to participate in some historically-situated human activity," and he argues that "it cannot be learned apart from the problems, the habits, the activities—the subject matter—of some group that found the need to write in that way to solve a problem or carry on its activities" (194). Writing, in this sense, is inseparable from what it does. Functionless writing—the

decontextualized academic essay, for instance—is not *real* writing. For Russell, to be sure, these insights point toward one final conclusion: the need to “drop the abstraction (and perhaps the institution) of general composition courses in higher education” (195). If those courses do not teach writing as it exists in nearly every other instance—as a doing, and an action—then *they* have no useful function.

Russell extends these insights in “Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction,” which appears in Joseph Petraglia’s edited collection *Re-conceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction* (1995)—a group of essays directly confronting the *what is writing?* question. There, while demonstrating that “writing is an immensely protean tool that activity systems are always and everywhere changing to meet their needs,” he draws an argument from the postprocess script: people do not “‘learn to write,’ period.” Instead, he argues, people acquire genres through their use in activity systems; in this sense, “learning to write means learning to write in the ways (genres) those in an activity system write” (56-57).

To illustrate this point, Russell employs a memorable and effective comparison between playing ball-games and writing. This analogy clearly undercuts the idea that skills unproblematically generalize across activity systems. Facility in one form of ball-playing (say, driving a golf ball) does not map onto all other forms of ball-using (e.g., putting a golf ball, let alone bowling, or serving a tennis ball, or playing arcade pinball). Even though baseball games begin with the seemingly generic command to “Play Ball!,” and football and basketball players often describe themselves as *ballers*, no one seriously believes that skill in one sporting arena implies an ability to *play ball* generally. Indeed, many team sports evidence a division of labor with different players specializing in different ball-related tasks (e.g., throwing, versus catching, versus kicking, versus punting a football). In the sporting context, in other words, the impossibility of generating or developing a generalized ball-aptitude is widely accepted. However, the polite fiction of generalized writing skills is the foundation on which traditional composition courses have been built—an unsteady one, indeed.

Writing, Russell demonstrates, has generally been assumed to be a generalized tool, and compositionists have assumed that one who acquires dexterity with that tool might then apply their skill more or less un-problematically whenever and wherever they pleased. As a result, compositionists have attempted to construct courses in “general writing skills instruction” (GWSI). However, just like ball-skills, writing abilities are so context-(i.e., activity system)-dependent that gaining facility with one form says nothing about one’s ability to use another. But, while the most generalized conception of writing is the most problematic, other (somewhat less) generic forms still present problems.

Russell also distances his approach from Process-era, social-epistemic conceptions of “academic” or “universal educated discourse” (UED). When compositionists saw themselves as cultivating academic discourse, they certainly demonstrated greater conceptual complexity than those who believed simply in a generalized but vague notion of “good writing” (usually tied to essayistic or literary style). However, they still did not follow their own arguments far enough. In arguing that academic discourse differs from non-academic discourse, why not further differentiate disciplines from one another? From an activity theory perspective, Russell argues, “There is no distinctive genre, set of genres, linguistic register, or set of conventions that is academic discourse or public discourse *per se*, because ‘academia’ and the ‘public’ are not activity systems in any useful sense for writing instruction” (60). Furthermore, although illusory, those categories (i.e., “academia” and the “public”) produce real—and really detrimental—effects: they “create and preserve the false notion that there can exist ‘good writing’ independent of an activity system that judges the success of a text by its results within that activity system” (60).

For reasons that will become evident later, let me note one final point about Russell’s chapter. After presenting a prolonged argument about the merits of WAC/WID for improving students’ writing in a way that general writing skills instruction cannot, Russell offers a curricular proposal. “Groups of scholars and researchers in a range of disciplines . . . specifically study the role of writing in human activities,” he notes; “It is thus now possible and, I believe, desirable to teach a general introductory course *about* writing.” In such a course, he argues, students wouldn’t necessarily strive to improve their skills as writers—the goal of composition instruction since its American foundation(s). Instead, such a course would teach students “what has been learned about writing in those activity systems that make the role of writing in society the object of their study” (73). For Russell, a move away from traditional conceptions of composition, oriented toward general writing skills instruction and seeking to cultivate universal educated discourse, might imply a move toward Writing Studies or what, through the work of his former Ph.D. advisee Elizabeth Wardle, has come to be called Writing about Writing.

In addition to his theoretical texts, which illuminate the conceptual underpinnings of the WAC/WID movement, Russell also recounted the long history of teaching writing beyond the confines of first-year composition courses—and even outside of English departments—in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870–1990*. What we now think of as Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) was not the first such movement, he demonstrates, only the first to go by that name. It also differed from prior ones in its pedagogical approach: “Instead of examining writing as a single set of generalizable skills and its teaching a set of

generalizable principles and techniques, new lines of investigation have examined writing as a constituent of communities, differentiated by the structure of knowledge and the activities of each community” (299). WAC in the early 1990s could be seen as an extension and/or application of the Process-era notions of social constructionism and discourse communities.

However, as Russell notes in an update for the book’s second edition, something began to change during the 1990s. Scholars in the (sub-)field began to differentiate between WAC, which they characterized as an exercise in *writing to learn* (or “writing *about* the subjects disciplines study”), and Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which they characterized as *learning to write* (or “learning to write *in* the ways disciplines do”). Jonathan Hall parses the distinction clearly, WAC “believes that it is teaching transferable writing skills, and aims for a general academic analytical language, while WID suggests that there is no such thing as a single scholarly language, only the various specific languages indigenous to particular disciplinary communities” (“Toward” 7).

But, the increased prevalence of WAC and WID were not the only notable reforms to 1990s writing curricula. As Russell demonstrates, “The relations between the writing-across-the-curriculum movement and first-year composition (FYC) programs got much more complicated in the 1990s.” In particular, the successes of WAC “lent a certain credence to recent abolitionist calls” to do away with first-year composition courses altogether (313-14). This was not the first period in which abolitionist calls circulated throughout the field, to be sure. However, prior calls for abolition always arose from outside of composition, among those who doubted that writing could be taught at all. In contrast, in the words of Robert Connors, the 1990s “new abolitionists” were a group “trained as compositionists from an early point in their careers” who arrived at “exactly the opposite conclusion: that writing can be taught, and that experts are needed to teach it, but that the required freshman course is not the most effective forum for attaining the ends we seek” (“New Abolitionism” 23). WAC/WID didn’t merely undermine FYC by being successful. The tangible or quantifiable results mattered, of course. But, just as importantly, the principles underlying WID themselves call out for the end of conventionalized composition instruction *as such*. The premises entail the conclusion. Russell hints at this point in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines*, reasoning, “But if one sees writing (and rhetoric) as deeply embedded in the differentiated practices of disciplines, not as a single elementary skill, one must reconceive in profound ways the process of learning to write” (15). And of course, Russell himself subscribed to these perspectives, as did the subjects of my last chapter, Russell Hunt, James Reither, and Douglass Vipond.

From here I’d like to go (at least) two directions at once. But, given the linear nature of print, of course I can’t. I’d like to jump to the work of Joseph Petraglia,

who edited and contributed to the *Reconceiving Writing* collection. I'd also like to connect Russell's articles to the work being done by his peers at Iowa State. Since I can't do both, though, a quick reminder: Russell worked at Iowa State; so did Helen Rothschild Ewald, and Nancy Roundy Blyler, and Charlotte Thralls, and Kent. Many of those scholars were/are, like Russell, more commonly associated with WAC/WID and/or Professional Communication and/or Technical Communication. (The boundaries get blurry in a hurry.) Even so, they were also quite knowledgeable about postprocess in the paralogic, externalist sense, and they brought those insights into their own branches of scholarship and teaching.

A BRIEF DIGRESSION: JOSEPH PETRAGLIA'S REJECTION OF A "REALLY BORING QUESTION"

Let us depart briefly from Ames, Iowa to discuss Petraglia, a somewhat strange figure in the history of post-/postprocess, inasmuch as he (A) earned his Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon, scholarly home of Flower and Hayes; (B) unapologetically called himself "committed to a cognitivist framework for understanding writing" ("Writing" 79); and (C) employed the key terms *post-process* and *postprocess* in a seemingly haphazard fashion (c.f., "Is There Life," especially 49-50). Unsurprisingly, then, other commenters have disagreed about how to categorize his work. Foster calls him someone who "self-identif[ies] as post-process but who do[es] not necessarily partake of Kent's theory," a position I find demonstrably false, inasmuch as Foster never adequately demonstrates that he (or any author in *Reconceiving Writing*, for that matter) self-identifies as post-/postprocess (*Networked Process* 13). That is, she never presents a sentence in which he says, "As a postprocess scholar . . ." or even implicitly indicates an affiliative stance. Elsewhere, John Whicker slots Petraglia beneath the heading of "authors who don't reject process" ("Narratives" 506), a position I also find demonstrably false.

If anything, I would categorize the Petraglia of his published record as someone who *does* reject Process but doesn't self-identify as post-/postprocess—largely because his primary conceptual interests are not those of Kent but much closer to those of, say, Russell or Aviva Freedman, or even more so Michael Cole and Lauren Resnick. The works he seems to like the most don't originate in or speak directly to the context of first-year composition in the United States. As a result, he has a more expansive sense of what writing is and what writing instruction can be.

For Whicker, Petraglia's key admission is that *post-process* "signifies a rejection of the generally formulaic framework for writing that process suggested" but does not dispense with "the fundamental observation that an individual produces text by means of a writing process." Instead, Petraglia considers the

insight-as-“mantra” that “writing is a process” to be the “right answer to a really boring question” (53).

Per the current analysis, I want to pause and ask what I hope will not be a tedious meta-question. Rather, I think it’s legitimately worth asking: if “writing is a process” is the answer to a really boring question, *what is the question?*

One might, for good reason, suggest “What is *writing?*”

I do not want to rule out that possibility. I accept its correctness as more-or-less self-evident. But, I think that Petraglia is trying to lead toward something more interesting (i.e., less “boring”) here. As Sianne Ngai demonstrates in *Our Aesthetic Categories*, interestingness is a function of the circulation of information (defined in Gregory Bateson’s sense of *differences that make a difference*). It’s a measure of novelty within sameness, or of deviation from generic norms. I think Petraglia is suggesting that compositionists have continually raised the question—*what is writing?*—in a way that has supposed its own particular and singular, unchanging answer: *writing is a process*. But, there are, to be sure, endlessly other things that writing is besides a process. It’s a visual and/or physical and/or virtual marking, a tool, a mode of self-expression, something that circulates, and so forth, and so on. One could employ those exact same three words—*what is writing?*—to ask very different kinds of questions and thereby arrive at very different answers. This is one of the other things that writing is: iterable. When Dobrin insists that we have not yet begun to ask the question of what writing is, I think this is what he means, more or less: we have not yet begun to ask other versions of the same question. By continually answering the same way, by turning *writing is a process* into a mantra, we have not let the question iterate, proliferate, take on new life as it circulates, mean other things, enter into new spaces, change *us*.

Petraglia’s own chapter of *Reconceiving Writing* is deeply concerned with the distinction between ill-structured and well-structured problem-solving. For him, how a question is posed matters. Thus, for Petraglia (or so it seems to me, at least), genuinely interesting versions of the *what is writing?* question could be asked. And, he seems (to me) to be quite invested in asking them.

How, then, might he answer a more interesting version of the same old question? Among other things: whatever else it may be, writing is *not* the thing that general writing skills instruction has assumed that it is or could be: “a masterable body of skills that can be formed and practiced irrespective of the formal context of the writing classroom” (“Writing” 80). When he initially outlines GWSI instruction, Petraglia employs a notable set of scare-quotes, displaying his skepticism: “General writing skills instruction sets for itself the objective of teaching students ‘to write,’ to give them skills that transcend any particular content and context” (“Introduction” xii). To explain what writing is, at minimum,

one would have to say that it isn't *that*. However, my purpose here isn't chiefly to outline GWSI but to argue for Petraglia's postcomposition, postprocess-ness.

For Petraglia, I would argue, disavowing the GWSI view of writing instruction *does* seem to be a movement away from Process, if Process is understood to be co-terminous with a historically specific, widely shared, disciplinary approach to teaching *composition* (though not necessarily "basic writing, technical writing, writing-intensive content courses, or creative writing") (xi-xii). While noting that his sketch of GWSI is "highly abbreviated," he still affirms that it is "no strawman." Rather, he argues, "It is a curriculum that an overwhelming majority of writing instructors is paid to teach, that practically every composition textbook is written to support, and the instruction for which English departments are given resources to deliver" (xii). The fiction of general writing skills produces all sorts of real effects and, thus, GWSI is also *real*. Dispensing with the fiction, though difficult and disciplinarily traumatic, would therefore produce all sorts of real effects, too.

For Petraglia, even when it aspires to create "authentic" writing experiences in which students engage less-well-structured problems, composition is still too "school-bounded" ("Writing" 88). In this context, students may learn how to "do school," but the things that they end up doing—"appearing to address an audience, *looking like* you have a purpose, and *pretending* to be knowledgeable"—are too different from real-world, ill-structured writing tasks to avoid what he calls pseudo-transactionality, "the illusion of rhetorical transaction" ("Writing" 89, 92; "Spinning" 19). Although Petraglia is chiefly concerned with opposing GWSI, not Process *per se*, he still makes a handful of characteristic postprocess gestures, both in *Reconceiving Writing* and in his contribution to *Post-Process Theory*. I want to focus on three of them.

First, Petraglia affirms a turn toward the environment or ecology. At the close of "Writing as an Unnatural Act," for example, he states, "If one agrees with the contention that writing, in its fullest sense, cannot really be taught, we might then turn our attention to how we could at least provide the environments in which it naturally occurs" (94). This statement, it seems to me, anticipates his later diagnosis of the postprocess mindset: "In conclusion, we have become much more interested in the ecology in which writing takes place than in the mere fact that writing is the outcome of a variety of steps and stages" ("Is There Life" 62).

Furthermore, in defining the scare-quoted "natural habitat" of the academic writer, Petraglia presents three key propositions. The second of those—"the natural writing assignment derives much of its rhetorical nature from reading" is most pertinent for our present purposes, as it reflects his second characteristically postprocess gesture: blurring the lines between reading and writing. Petraglia

justifies this move in *Reconceiving Writing* (95-96) and in his contribution to *Post-Process Theory*. In the latter case, he advocates for “a reconceptualization of what it means to ‘teach writing,’ and argues that “this reconceptualization requires that the discipline let go of its current pedagogical shape . . . and instead deploy its efforts to inculcate *receptive skills*,” rather than pursue a “generic writing *techné*.” For Petraglia, this receptivity might resemble the “rhetorical sensitivity” models theorized by Roderick Hart and Don Burks, which “direct a student toward the selection of those aspects of his or her self that could, and perhaps should, be rhetorically transformed when confronted with particular social conditions and situations” (“Is There Life” 62).

Finally, Petraglia concludes both chapters with very similar arguments about the end of composition. In *Reconceiving Writing* he argues that “general writing skills instruction—perhaps the very notion of the composition classroom—is an idea whose time has gone” (“Writing” 97). But, this fact shouldn’t lead to despair for instructors nor to “disaster for the rhetoric and writing field” (98). Different, important work remains to be done, but—as Petraglia’s final verbal omission indicates—it will be work for *rhetoric* and *writing*; it won’t be work for *composition*. In *Post-Process Theory* he remains dubious about “the ability and willingness of writing professionals to evolve not only post-process, but post-composition.” Even so, he acknowledges that another field, writing studies, might already “be growing up alongside and within composition” and that it might “one day be in a position to challenge the status of composition as the main site of professional identity” (63).

IOWA STATE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF PARALOGIC HERMENEUTICS, PART II: A GROUP EFFORT

Before taking our recent (de-)tour into Petraglia’s work, I mentioned that Russell’s texts could lead toward a different hyper-textual jump: to a discussion of the scholars working at Iowa State University during the 1980s and 1990s. Among enthusiasts of (theoretical, narrowly construed) postprocess, Kent and Russell are likely the most well-known of this group. However, to demonstrate that postprocess postcomposition had a broad(er than generally recognized) impact, I want to look at that Iowa State coterie, including the works that some of their doctoral students produced while in Ames. I’ll also focus on one prominent alumna of their graduate program: Elizabeth Wardle.

I mentioned earlier that four Iowa State faculty members published chapters in *Post-Process Theory*: Blyler, Ewald, Kent, and Russell. Other than Kent, Ewald most directly engaged with postprocess tenets, especially externalism, by way of Bakhtin. Her “Waiting for Answerability,” for instance, provides an exemplary

treatment of Bakhtin's work at the hands of social constructionists and externalists. By her account, Bakhtin himself was not an externalist, but some of his ideas moved in that direction, and he provided conceptual equipment for those who would move the field from social constructionism to externalism (340, 336). However, inasmuch as I want to focus on the existence of postprocess theory beyond the bounds of (first-year) composition, I must depart from Ewald here. Although she published professional communication scholarship consistently throughout the 1980s, occasionally in the 1990s, and again in the 2000s, those texts do not typically engage postprocess concepts. Ewald did coordinate Iowa State's doctoral program in Rhetoric and Professional Communication in the 1990s ("Waiting" 331), and a published syllabus from her graduate-level *Theory and Research in Professional Communication* course includes several postprocess texts (Ewald, "Iowa State" 49-50). So, I assume that she still impacted some professional communication scholars' viewpoints on the subject.

Let us turn, then, to Blyler. In the early 1990s, she (solo-)authored one article that I would characterize as proto-postprocess, "Reading Theory and Persuasive Business Communications," and two that would introduce paralogic hermeneutic principles into professional communication scholarship: "Shared Meaning and Public Relations Writing" and "Theory and Curriculum: Reexamining the Curricular Separation of Business and Technical Communication." Those articles don't necessarily *endorse* postprocess, and I don't mean to over-state the importance (which is minimal) of paralogic hermeneutics to her overall arguments. Even so, in both articles, Blyler presents paralogic hermeneutics as a rejection of positivism, "the belief that the mind, as a windowpane, mirrors reality and that discourse simply records what the mind has apprehended" ("Theory" 226). In "Shared Meaning" she "investigate[s] the rhetorical means by which meaning is shared" between readers and writers (304) and explains how paralogic hermeneutics explores "the interaction of communicants as they share *theories* or interpretations of discourse" (303). In "Theory and Curriculum," she categorizes paralogic hermeneutics as a "social view of discourse," alongside social construction. She presents its difference clearly, though:

Paralogic hermeneutics addresses the issue of socially mediated meaning by positing that meaning is negotiated directly by communicants as they interact, rather than being determined in advance of an interaction by any factor, including the community membership and internalizing communal views that social construction appears to require. (230)

In an uncodifiable and open-ended process, communicants guess at each other's meanings and re-adjust their interpretations accordingly, she notes, but

“these guesses and expectations . . . only ‘more or less’ coincide” and any “agreement reached about meaning is always imperfect (230-31). This final point is notable because, that same year, Blyler would also publish “Teaching Persuasion as Consensus in Business Communication,” a text that would implicitly disavow many of paralogic hermeneutics’ key claims about the impossibility of perfect interpretive alignment.

The faculty at Iowa State were at the forefront of postprocess in its initial stages, and their graduate students would eventually carry forth the banner, both in articles written during their ISU years and as they went forth into their professorial careers. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch’s 2002 “Post-Process ‘Pedagogy’” may be the most-well known text in this regard, though I will not discuss it here because it was published in a “mainstream” composition journal. For similar reasons, I’ll lay aside Iowa State graduate student Lee Libby’s “Passing Theory in Practice” (1997), an early application of paralogic hermeneutics to hypertext theory. Instead, I’d like to discuss two professional-communication-related texts: Clay Spinuzzi’s 1996 “Pseudo-Transactionality, Activity Theory, and Professional Writing Instruction” and Rue Yuan’s 1997 “Yin/Yang Principle and the Relevance of Externalism and Paralogic Rhetoric to Intercultural Communication.” Those articles lay-out their primary foci in their titles, but a few additional comments may be merited.

Spinuzzi connects Petraglia’s insights on pseudo-transactionality, Vygotskian activity systems, externalist hermeneutic guessing, and professional writing. He concludes that students need not learn professional writing exclusively within professional activity networks (or “ANs”) but that, at the same time, “teaching students generalized communication strategies without reference to localized ANs will not help much either”; instead, “students should join other ANs and use the professional writing classroom as a forum for discussing them and as an opportunity to examine their practices” (304).

Yuan’s article draws from the postprocess contention that no shared language is necessary for communication to take place: communication depends on aligning passing theories, not on sharing prior theories. Yuan demonstrates that Process-approaches, especially those endorsing discourse community models, “assume that culture is generalizable” and thus engage in negative and/or harmful stereotyping by “ignor[ing] or suppress[ing] the heterogeneous elements of a society” (300, 301). In contrast, a paralogic externalist approach would lead “intercultural communicators [to] treat each person and each interaction as different and, in so doing, [help] them avoid cultural stereotyping” (316).

I’d also like to argue that Iowa State alumna Elizabeth Wardle, whose work is most commonly associated with the writing about writing approach to first-year composition, and who is commonly figured as an advocate for writing studies,

has carried forth the postprocess torch. But, before we can go forward in that direction, we may need to go sideways and backwards: to earlier works in writing studies.

THE END OF COMPOSITION: AN IN-DENIAL POSTPROCESS TEXT . . . ?

I began this chapter by addressing Dobrin's *Postcomposition*, particularly its call to move the field of composition toward (a form of) writing studies, which might finally ask the question of *what writing is*, and which would not (feel the need to) tether all theories of writing to the pedagogical scene of collegiate writing instruction. However, I also presented Bruce Horner's critique of *Postcomposition*: that it dismisses or ignores quite a lot of scholarship in a branch of composition also called writing studies that has already done the sort of work it requests. Here, I'd like to turn to a text that Dobrin does quote, David Smit's *The End of Composition Studies*.

At the outset of his book, Smit identifies "the teaching of writing" as composition's "primary reason for being," or, within the punning parlance of his title, its *end* (*End* 2, 1). Framing composition as a teaching subject is, of course, the exact sort of gesture that would irritate Dobrin—a point Smit understood. In his only citation of Dobrin, Smit rightly characterizes him as "argu[ing] that the field ought to devote itself to theory in the abstract, and that the relevance of theory to practice should not be a major concern of the profession" (*End* 7). I don't think Smit is correct on this point; as I read him, Dobrin does not advocate for a wholly theoretical discipline but one that might clear a large, dedicated space for theorizing. Even so, Dobrin does consistently express displeasure with the application of theory as pedagogy. Thus, when he assesses Smit's efforts to move the discipline beyond composition as "applaudable" but still far too concerned with pedagogy, the gesture is hardly surprising (*Postcomposition* 10).

In Dobrin's estimation, *The End of Composition* "in fact, argues that writing as phenomena cannot be studied independent of the local contexts in which it is taught and learned (10)." Or, stated differently: for Smit, according to Dobrin, the only way to study writing is to study writing instruction. This is not a precise description of Smit's work, though. While he is certainly more concerned with teaching and learning (i.e., pedagogy) than Dobrin, Smit says nothing of the sort on the page Dobrin cites. The closest he comes is arguing that "writing may not be a global and unified phenomenon," that "writing ability may be very context-dependent," and that "writing teachers"—who, for Smit, are importantly *not compositionists*—need to "participate in" and "know about the workings of" the discourse communities into which they would enculturate students (166). If

I understand Smit correctly, he does not claim that writing can only be studied where it is taught and learned, as Dobrin claims of him. Instead, he argues that writing can only be learned within particular activity systems, and thus it should only be taught by those who themselves write within those particular activity systems. This is an importantly different claim.

Notably, in the same text where he denounces Dobrin, Horner spends quite some time comparing *The End of Composition Studies* to *Postcomposition*, ultimately to conclude that both suffer from a lack of imagination. Smit's work, to be sure, is easier to attack on these grounds. He opens his book with a startlingly pessimistic claim: "For all practical purposes, the major concepts, paradigms, and models we have to work with" in analyzing what writing is, whether it can be learned, and how one would need to teach it "are already known and widely accepted, that there is little hope we can reconceptualize writing in startling new ways." Smit even asserts, "Indeed, it strikes me that viable alternatives to current concepts, paradigms, and models are inconceivable" (*End* 2). But, despite their differences—Smit refusing to believe in the possibility of *the new*, Dobrin consistently fetishizing it—the two share a fundamental similarity. In Horner's estimation, the two texts "declar[e] the field to be at an end," instead of "pursuing ways of thinking that field differently" (Horner, "Rewriting" 464). Ultimately, Smit proposes "little that is different from WID curricula already on the books, inflected with dominant free market ideology." For what it's worth, Bethany Davila launches a similar critique of *The End*, arguing that Smit "situates himself within the writing across the curriculum (WAC) camp" and therefore the book "reads as a continuation of Joseph Petraglia's *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, a pivotal book on composition studies and WAC." Smit wants to position himself outside of this tradition, but I don't think he succeeds.

Although Smit has few nice things to say about postprocess, his vision of a renewed composition sounds *extremely similar* to the postprocess postcomposition I have been documenting in this chapter, all the same. He claims to present an argument outside or beyond it, but his premises accord very closely with its central claims. Indeed, the phrase *post-process* only occurs once in *The End*. On page 8, Smit writes,

Whether or not "process" teaching was ever very widespread, books and journals are starting to appear touting such phrases as "post-process" and "after theory" with no indication of what the discipline should teach other than "process" or what it should study "after theory." Theorists as different as Thomas Kent, Aviva Freedman, and Joseph Petraglia offer substantial arguments from language philosophy, empirical studies

and classroom observation that writing cannot be taught. What then should writing teachers *do* in the classroom? The answers vary.

Smit's tone seems to imply that this lack of a unified disciplinary direction, this variation is a problem. Indeed, when he argues that composition has reached its conceptual (dead?) end, he notes that all subsequent accounts will be quote/unquote "postmodern," that is, "historicized, contextualized, and contingent," and thus "limited" (2). He laments, as well, the trouble that compositionists will therefore face in "reaching any kind of consensus about the teaching of writing," noting that, "in that direction I see our only hope for significantly improving the teaching of writing in this country" (12).

These gestures strike me as odd, or at least inconsistent with his earlier scholarship. Smit had once criticized another scholar, Daniel Royer, for believing that "important philosophy should be 'systematic' and 'coherent' and 'speculative.'" In contrast, he had noted, "I think such a philosophy is impossible" ("Reply to Royer" 380). That is, in his earlier works, Smit seemed to endorse a postmodern, non-systematic, incoherent vision for writing instruction, one that might attend to individual students and localized practices.

But, in his swift dismissal and subsequent omission of post-/postprocess from *The End of Composition Studies*, I don't believe that Smit meant to criticize Kent or Freedman or Petraglia, really. Instead, his criticism seems more an exercise in ground-clearing, of making his own argument seem different enough to be worth saying at all. On the very next page, he effectively endorses their ideas—that language is heteroglossic, that "meaning is a matter of interpretation," and that "the way we understand one another through language is primarily interpretive, a matter of hermeneutics"—even citing Kent to do so (9). He then claims that "composition studies as a field has only tentatively begun to take the implications of these tenets seriously." That is, "the field continues to talk about writing, to think about writing, and to teach writing, as if it were a global or universal ability" and therefore "the field continues to foster writing in generic 'writing' courses" (10). His own work, I would argue, attempts to counter-act those tendencies in more-or-less postprocess ways. So far as I can tell, then, there's no reason for Smit to swipe at postprocess except to avoid having to work *through* it, rather than alongside it. So, he swipes at it, then he ignores it.

In fairness to Smit, his primary contention is an important one: compositionists know what does and does not work in writing instruction, but that knowledge has not brought forth changes to pedagogical conduct. In this light, learning more about writing or even writing instruction may not provide "the solution to the crisis in composition studies." And, indeed, that solution might

instead need to arrive by way of “political action,” a point to which I suspect Horner might begrudgingly assent. Or, if not that, then, “perhaps more fancifully, a spiritual reawakening” (12). It’s on his next statement that I want to pause, though. He writes,

To improve writing instruction we will have to radically restructure the way writing is offered in the undergraduate curriculum. If writing is indeed greatly constrained by context, if we learn to write certain genres by immersing ourselves in the discourse of a community and by using writing to participate in that community, then it makes sense that writing as a subject at the post-secondary level should be taught in those academic units most closely associated with the knowledge and genres students need or want to learn. As a result, I believe that writing instruction should be not be [sic] the primary responsibility of English departments and writing programs; rather, writing instruction should be the responsibility of all the various disciplines of the university. In other words, we must put an “end” to the hegemony of writing instruction by composition studies as a field. (12)

Here, in essence, Smit argues for writing in the disciplines. He even follows it up by opposing (what I will later call) the Realpolitik objection to postprocess: that it may be good in theory, but its practical implications will lead to writing instructors losing their jobs. Contesting that conclusion, Smit states, “Of course, this does not mean that professionals in composition studies will find their work coming to an end” (12).

To be fair, Smit’s proposal does add something new to the mix: that composition instructors be trained directly and explicitly in the discourse of some non-composition academic field, as well. But, otherwise, it’s all very familiar: the version of Writing in the Disciplines that comports with a postprocess perspective or attitude. Since no generalized form of writing exists, students would not be enrolled in generic writing courses or encounter generic writing teachers (159, 162). In this model, students would enter into particular discourse communities and study with tutors or mentors who engage in the activities of those discourse communities (141, 155). To actualize such reforms, students would need more than just the typical sorts of required writing courses; they’d need to be taught writing in the various academic and professional disciplines by professionals in those fields. Of course, by the end of the book, Smit concedes that his “program may not be as revolutionary as it sounds; that it may indeed be fundamentally evolutionary because over the past twenty years, individual institutions have been

gradually implementing programs that go in the direction that I recommend” (183). He also admits, “Obviously, the most effective way to accomplish this sort of cooperation has already been modeled by writing-across-the-curriculum and writing-across-the-disciplines programs” (193). But, one wonders here: why start out so controversial only to fall back onto something so broadly accepted?

I cannot answer that question.

Instead, I want to latch onto one final point.

The previous section of this chapter concerned graduate students at Iowa State who had taken postprocess beyond its commonly acknowledged (narrow, First-Year Composition) bounds. I ended by asserting a desire to discuss the work of Elizabeth Wardle. But, I needed to contextualize her work. We are now prepared to turn to it.

ELIZABETH WARDLE, WRITING ABOUT WRITING, AND POSTPROCESS WRITING STUDIES

Wardle’s work dove-tails with Smit’s in two ways: by considering what Smit calls “disciplinary knowledge” and contemplating how writing skills transfer from one context to the next. Six pages into a chapter called “What Does It Mean to Be a Writing Teacher,” Smit announces his purpose clearly, writing, “The large issue I am raising here is whether there is something we might call *disciplinary knowledge*, which all writing teachers ought to share by the very fact that they are writing teachers” (*The End* 65-66). After suggesting that several theorists have attempted to “professionalize” the field by offering a view of writing as a “global and unified phenomenon,” Smit notes that “obviously, the entire point of [his] analysis” is to prove the contrary. For Smit, there is no such thing as disciplinary knowledge because nothing systematic or fully generalizable can be known about writing. From this point, he presents his stipulations for what a writing teacher should look like (166) and then summarizes those points: “The model here is of teacher-practitioners, who know how to write particular kinds of discourse themselves, and are self-consciously reflective about their own writing and how that writing participates in the workings of the larger discourse community, and are capable of sharing their knowledge and insights with others” (167). For Smit, because all knowledge-that-counts-as-knowledge about writing is contextual and contingent (i.e., in his terms “post-modern”), nothing is sufficiently known about writing that could make *it* the subject of such a course. Thus, compositionists ought to become educated in the discourse conventions of some other, knowledge-producing fields, so that they might then teach students to write within them. Wardle, it seems to me, accepts many of the fundamental arguments that Smit presents but arrives at a very different policy proposal.

As I'll primarily discuss Wardle's work from the late 2000s, it's worth mentioning her resistance at that time to being called a post-process scholar. Although, judging from the textual record, I hope (and believe) that she might agree with my categorizing her work as postprocess, though in a rather constrained way. In a July 26, 2007 response to one of Alexander Reid's blog entries, Wardle states,

Maybe I am resisting a label but comfortable with the tenets, though, frankly, I haven't ever found any clear tenets of post-process theory. If it's that any description of processes, however complex, don't (as you say) "describe the material events by which texts are produced," well, I would agree. But I don't think the process researchers would *disagree.* If it's more along the lines of Kent, that writing is not teachable, I don't completely buy it. But I guess if I take everything I do believe we have learned from genre theory, activity theory, and the whole social turn, we have to seriously question what it is that *can* be taught. I don't believe that nothing can be taught, however. ("Comment on 'What Should'")

In a subsequent blog entry, Reid would present an extended response to Wardle. There and elsewhere (e.g., *The Two Virtuals* 5, 23), he defines *post-process* in line with Trimbur's definition, as "an attempt to capture the various ways that rhet/comp scholars have moved beyond, built upon, and/or rejected the dominant writing process school of thought" and "a recognition of the social and cultural dimensions of writing" (Reid, [Post-] Post-Process Composition"). To that entry, Wardle presents a request for Reid to "help [her] out a little more" by answering a question: "does post-process necessarily entail cultural studies or an emphasis on liberatory pedagogy . . . ?" And, in light of this question, she reasons,

If we are talking about post-process as recognition of the social and cultural dimensions of writing, then activity theorists, genre theorists, etc. would be post process, and so would I. But if one must adopt a cultural studies approach in the writing classroom or a Freirean liberatory pedagogy in the classroom, then genre theorists and activity theorists are not (necessarily) post-process, and neither am I. ("Comment on '(Post) Post-Process Composition,'" 26 July)

In this instance, I cannot help but note that Wardle distinguishes between two forms of post-process—the first of which roughly resembles what I have been calling *postprocess* and the second of which sounds quite a lot like (in my

terms) *post-process*. While she accepts the first label for herself, she rejects the second. Eventually, in a subsequent reply, Wardle offers a self-identificatory concession: “It would be far more meaningful for people to classify us (and others) in a more specific way—as genre theorists, as activity theorists, even as Joseph Petraglia groupies. But just saying we are ‘post process’ could mean things that we do espouse as well as things that we definitely do *not* espouse” (“Comment on ‘(Post)-Post-Process Composition,” 27 July). Given the semantic confusion(s) of postprocess and post-process, I certainly understand her reluctance to be considered a post-/postprocess scholar. More precise categorizations of her work exist, including ones that might not distort understandings of what she does and does not believe. Even so, given that Wardle willingly self-identifies as a genre theorist, I would remind the reader of an important fact: before the term postprocess existed, Kent himself was a genre theorist, as well. His first book was entitled *Interpretation and Genre*, Chapter Six of *Paralogic Rhetoric* is entitled “Paralogic Genres,” and, as this chapter has demonstrated, his earliest texts on (professional communication) writing instruction apply genre theory to it. In a very real way, there is no postprocess theory without genre theory. And, as an additional side-note, Anis Bawarshi has analyzed postprocess across the grain of genre theory on a few occasions (“Beyond Dichotomy”; “Writing Post-Process”).

To understand how Wardle’s work stands within the tradition I am constructing here, let us turn now to her published scholarship. To initiate their 2007 “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions,” Wardle and her co-author Douglas Downs recite a series of claims that feel ripped-from-the-pages of Smit’s *The End of Composition*—until they don’t. They note that first-year composition is typically asked to prepare students to write a form of generalized academic writing that simply does not exist and to provide those students with writing skills that would transfer unproblematically from one site to the next. But, of course, the question of transfer is considerably more complicated. Furthermore, the field—which they call “writing studies”—has “largely ignored the implications” of “more than twenty years of research and theory” and has “continued to assure its publics (faculty, administrators, parents, industry) that FYC can do what nonspecialists have always assumed it can,” that is, create or produce “good writers” in one or two semesters of generalized writing instruction (553, 552). Downs and Wardle frame the negative impact of these “unsupportable assurances” in a different light than Smit does, though. If we continue to recite these proclamations and teach these courses, all the while knowing that they cannot work, then “we silently support the misconceptions that writing is not a real subject, that writing courses do not require expert instructors, and that rhetoric and composition are not genuine research areas or legitimate intellectual pursuits.” They therefore argue for a reimagining of composition, one that

would teach “*about writing* . . . as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced,” instead of simply aiming to teach students “how to write in college” (553).

This is, of course, a solution to a problem that has haunted postprocess from its earliest stages. If the logical extension of postprocess is that writing should be taught with small-scale (i.e., as close to one-to-one as possible) mentorship relationships by knowledgeable practitioners who produce the genres in question and circulate them within the relevant activity systems, then what do you do with the fact that most composition instructors seem to have an obsolete knowledge base?

You could, as Kent suggests, try to create more writing intensive courses within the disciplines (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 169-70).

Or, you could, as Smit suggests, attempt to train compositionists in some other knowledge base (214, 220-23).

Or you could, as many universities have done, establish cross-disciplinary collaborations or “learning communities,” in which first-year composition courses are “linked” to courses in other academic disciplines. However, as Wardle elsewhere demonstrates, students in such learning communities often import the subject matter of other disciplines into their composition essays without meaningfully engaging the genres or activity systems of the disciplines in question. Thus, she expresses doubt that such composition courses can prepare students to write *in* those disciplines any better than generic or non-themed courses could (“Cross-Disciplinary Links” 10, 13).

As a final alternative, as Downs and Wardle suggest, you could recognize that a field of scholars has been at work learning things about writing—what it is, what it does or can do, how people learn to do it to the degree that they *can*, and so forth—for quite a long time. You might, therefore, ask those scholars to teach their students what they themselves know about writing and help to cultivate those students’ writing skills within a writing studies discourse community. You might, in other words, take the postprocess directive to replace first-year composition courses with writing in the disciplines ones to its logical extension—and teach first-year composition *as though it were itself a writing in the disciplines course*. As Wardle notes elsewhere, many composition assignments “mimic genres that mediate activities in other activity systems,” but their “purposes and audiences are vague or even contradictory” within the FYC context (“Mutt Genres” 774). By asking students to write about writing studies knowledge within a writing studies course, instructors could avoid these “mutt genres.” Instead, a more theoretically defensible approach would ask students to create “boundary objects,” which might “actively function as bridges to the varied disciplinary genres students will encounter” (782).

Teaching students to write by teaching them about writing would not, however, entail a one-size-fits-all model for writing about writing; as Downs and Wardle admit in a 2013 retrospective: “Not even Downs and Wardle have a Downs and Wardle approach” (“Reflecting Back”). If one wanted to avoid Downs’ and Wardle’s “empirical” method of writing about writing, one could follow Deb Dew in exercising a “largely rhetorical” approach, or Barbara Bird’s “rhetorical and philosophical way,” or Shannon Carter’s “ethnographic focus on literacy” or Betsy Sargent’s “somewhat epistemological approach” (Wardle, “Continuing the Dialogue” 176). To the extent that writing about writing implies anything stable, it would be “the underlying set of principles: engage students with the research and ideas of the field, using any means necessary and productive, in order to shift students’ conceptions of writing, building declarative and procedural knowledge of writing with an eye toward transfer” (“Reflecting Back”).

And here we arrive at the other way in which Wardle’s thinking and theorizing dovetails with Smit’s: the question of transfer. To my mind, the scholarly fascination with transfer seems decidedly postprocess to the extent that it refuses definitions of universal or stable “writing ability” and dismisses the existence of a unified genre called “academic writing” as an illusion. At the same time, I must admit, the reasons that transfer scholars provide for these refutations generally have little to do with paralogy or externalism. In addition, the underlying assumptions of “transfer” discourse add some complexity—worth puzzling over and working through—to Kent’s (in)famous argument that each act of writing is so radically singular that nothing learned in one instance can guarantee communicative success in any other and thus, at most, one can become a “better guesser.” Transfer holds open the possibility that some stable core (or cores) of knowledge or ability *can* prove useful from instance to instance, even if there are (still) no guarantees.

For present purposes, I want to turn to Wardle’s 2007 “Understanding ‘Transfer’ from FYC,” which begins with a nod to Smit. There she acknowledges that *The End of Composition Studies* “summarizes what we know as a field about the transfer of writing-related skills from first-year composition to other courses and contexts.” At the time, she admits, that collective knowledge base amounted to “very little.” By 2007 only “a few theoretical discussions of writing transfer and FYC, writing centers, and advanced writing courses” had been published, and none of the three case studies that had investigated transfer was “initially or primarily interested in transfer.” The vast majority of transfer-related research in existence concerned the transfer of writing abilities from academic to professional contexts (65).

A large portion of “Understanding ‘Transfer’” documents Wardle’s efforts to study generalization—her preferred conception of transfer—by applying a writing

about writing approach at the University of Dayton in 2004 (70-81). Drawing from that research, Wardle affirms “the importance of context and activity to generalization.” In particular, she argues, “Students needed context-specific support from their teachers and peers to successfully complete new writing tasks.” As she would herself acknowledge, the context-dependence of pedagogical intervention might seem to make FYC unnecessary. Even so, Wardle identifies “*meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies*” as perhaps “the most important ability our courses can cultivate” (81-82). And so, in a departure from both Kent and Smit, she presents FYC as a workable site for such intervention; it can, she argues, “help students think about writing in the university, the varied conventions of different disciplines, and their own writing strategies” (82). Even with this optimism, though, she ends her article with a cautionary note: even a revised FYC would fail to have measurable impacts on student success beyond the first year, unless WAC and WID programs continue to grow and writing studies scholars continue to learn more about writing in other disciplines (82).

Wardle’s theorizing about writing does not foreground externalism or paralogy, the two benchmarks of what I have been calling *postprocess* theories. Even so, it seems to merit *post*-prefixes in its relation to Process and to composition in another sense: insofar as it inverts the hierarchy of Process-era approaches to collegiate writing instruction. First-year composition has long been considered the foundation for improvement in student writing ability, the course upon which all others would need to build and from which other courses might extend their insights. Other courses could be added or subtracted from the curriculum, but FYC would always remain. Indeed, Wardle blames this odd institutional arrangement for the failures of writing instruction:

FYC as preparation for writing in the academy has, after all, been our cornerstone enterprise, the course from which our discipline emerged. But therein lies the crux of the problem. In most cases, courses emerge from disciplines, not the other way around. . . . FYC began before the discipline and has long defied shaping by our disciplinary knowledge. (“Mutt Genres” 784)

According to conventionalized logic, advanced composition and WAC and WID courses might assist students throughout their collegiate careers, but they were never imagined to be *more important than* and certainly not *essential to the successful functioning of* first-year composition. In contrast, Wardle argues that first-year composition should only continue to exist to the extent that it becomes attentive and subservient to those other writing courses. Because any meaningful insights one might offer in FYC would need to be tailored toward

their eventual extension elsewhere—that is, to student transfer—FYC has no place in a curriculum that lacks WAC and WID courses.

Furthermore, Wardle (and Downs, for that matter) is perfectly happy to reject the conventionalized goal of composition instruction, and she seems willing to eschew the term *composition*. In this sense, as well, she advocates for a postcomposition form of postprocess writing instruction. Sounding quite a lot like Kent, she urges instructors to “actively and vocally give up ‘teaching to write’ as a goal for FYC,” for example, and she makes her reasoning clear: “There is no evidence that FYC has taught students to write for the university and none to suggest it will start to do so as soon as we discover the next best teaching method” (“Mutt Genres” 784). Although her revised curriculum might fill the institutional slot (in students’ advisement forms) typically belonging to FYC, Wardle indicates that she prefer it be “called something like Writing about Writing” (784).

Likewise, although Downs and Wardle pitched their Writing about Writing course as an “FYC pedagogy” in their 2007 *College Composition and Communication* article, they also reliably employ the term *writing studies* to describe the larger scholarly field to which they belong, even attributing to it a forty-year history of investigating writing (“Teaching about Writing” 553, 555). In her generally affirmative and encouraging response to their work, Barbara Bird also makes the tactical choice to categorize their course as an example of FYC while identifying its “writing studies approach,” which “goes beyond teaching writing processes and deeply engages students with the issues and concepts of writing” (169). She, of course, has not been alone in applying this writing-studies categorization. *Writing Studies* has become a much more common term within disciplinary conversations since Downs and Wardle “(Re)Envision[ed] ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies’” in 2007.

As it relates to the place from which this chapter began, one final point is worth mentioning here. *Writing Studies*, as Wardle and Downs and Bird (and Russell, and Dobrin, and many, many others) employ the term typically denotes scholarly investigations into writing that need not apply directly to first-year composition. That is, it refers to scholarship that, whether implicitly or explicitly, rejects the pedagogical imperative. This is, of course, what Dobrin had hoped to call forth into being in his 2011 *Postcomposition*.

CODA: . . .BUT, IS IT POSTPROCESS OR (PARÉ’S) POST-PROCESS?

In a 2007 online interchange with Alexander Reid, Elizabeth Wardle distinguishes between two forms of post-process: one strongly reminiscent of what

I have been calling *post-process*, the other recognizable as a form of *postprocess*. Though she rejects an association with cultural-studies inflected and/or Freirean post-process pedagogies, she reluctantly admits that her work might be considered post-process, “if we are talking about post-process as recognition of the social and cultural dimensions of writing.” As she notes, under such a conception, “activity theorists, genre theorists, etc. would be post process, and so would I.” Those two conceptions are, of course, the dominant conceptions of post-/postprocess circulating in the scholarly discourse of U. S. composition and/or writing studies. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4, a third conception of post-process exists—a specifically Canadian one outlined by Anthony Paré in a 1994 article, which focuses primarily on the pedagogical methods of Russell Hunt, James Reither, and Douglas Vipond.

As I hope should now be clear, Kent and those three Canadian scholars shared an interactive or transactive vision of textual meaning. They all sought classroom methods that might foreground the role of the reader in constructing meaning. And they arrived at a similar conclusion regarding the viability of first-year writing courses: they ought to be abolished or *very* significantly reimaged. Kent, who taught professional and technical communication courses, could see the merits of WAC and WID courses, and he urged U.S. writing instructors to shift their pedagogical efforts beyond the bounds of first-year composition. The professors from Saint Thomas University did not need to be convinced to do so; their institution did not require—or even offer—generic composition courses.

Even so, the post-process pedagogy formulated by Hunt, Reither, and Vipond differs considerably from Kent’s postprocess, paralogic hermeneutic approach. The former three sought to make writing the vehicle for conveying information among all course participants, students and faculty alike—and thus transforming the whole classroom into a discipline-specific-research activity system. In contrast, Kent’s model would, in effect, have students ignore one another so as to engage very closely with the instructor in a one-to-one mentorship model.

But, as should now be clear, the post-process pedagogical methods proposed by Hunt, Reither, and Vipond *do* resemble those proposed by other scholars associated with Iowa State, namely David R. Russell and Elizabeth Wardle. In this chapter, I have argued that Russell’s and Wardle’s approaches might be considered both postprocess and postcomposition, and that they seem to resemble Sidney Dobrin’s desire for a postpedagogical writing studies discipline. Here, I want to demonstrate that Wardle’s work represents the point of convergence of U. S. postprocess postcomposition and Canadian post-process.

Now, in a limited and obvious sense, the works variously written by Hunt, Reither, and Vipond easily fit into a/the genealogy of postcomposition. Their ideas emerged outside the bounds of composition because composition, nar-

rowly defined as generic, first-year academic writing instruction, did not exist in their Canadian context.

Instead, they oriented their insights about writing instruction toward instructing students in “subject matter” classes. Thus, compared to U. S.-based composition scholars, their attempts to theorize writing were not as constrained by pedagogical and administrative imperatives. Hunt, Reither, and Vipond were, in effect, teaching Writing in the Disciplines courses, or what Hunt preferred to call Writing under the Curriculum courses: “constructing situations for student writers which offer them immersion in the social situations which occasion and use writing . . . and subordinate explicit instruction to the situations where the apprentice writer can best profit from it” (“Afterword” 380).

By Reither’s account, for writing courses to succeed, instructors “need to find ways to immerse writing students in academic knowledge/discourse communities so they can write from within those communities,” and he notes that WAC, “when it’s done well, seems to have a chance of doing that.” Within the terms of his argument, doing WAC well entails what we might now call a WID approach: allowing students to “indwell an actual academic knowledge/discourse community, to learn, from the inside, its major questions, its governing assumptions, its language, its research methods, its evidential contexts, its forms, its discourse conventions, its major authors and its major texts—that is, its knowledge and its modes of knowing.” Reither affirms that the name of this course wouldn’t particularly matter and that “it need not be a writing course” (“Writing and Knowing” 624). Instead, the only real key is that the course involve collaborative investigation (625). So, yes, like Hunt’s and Vipond’s, as well, Reither’s theorizing is not territorialized on or even around first-year composition and, in that relatively trivial sense it is postprocess but also postcomposition.

But, “Writing and Knowing,” along with the other texts by Hunt, Reither, and Vipond that I’ve surveyed, also fits into my genealogy of postcomposition in other ways: citationally, as core texts within a public. Though, of course, alternate genealogies could exist—and I hope that others will eventually write them—I have elected to conclude this chapter’s genealogy of postprocess postcomposition with the works of Elizabeth Wardle. The influence of Hunt, Reither, and Vipond and their Inkshed associates sometimes appears in Wardle’s (and Downs’) research in subtle ways. Although it includes no references to the triumvirate from Saint Thomas, Wardle’s “Mutt Genres” article, cites a host of former inkshedders: Patrick Dias, Graham Smart, Andrea Lunsford, and even Paré. When discussing the “Challenges and Critiques” of their pedagogical approach, Downs and Wardle note that “*Few appropriate resources exist for first-year students*”—an issue they later attempted to solve with their own textbook, *Writing about Writing* (“Teaching” 574). However, in a footnote, they acknowl-

edge that “the new book *Conversations about Writing* by Elizabeth Sargent and Cornelia Paraskevas” represents a “partial exception” (579). That text’s subtitle is *Eavesdropping, Inkshedding, and Joining In*, and it includes an overview of inkshedding as an instructional method, written by Hunt.

At other times, though, the influence of the Inkshed collective is front-and-center. In their 2007 article introducing a writing about writing approach to first-year composition, Wardle and Downs define writing as “inseparable from content,” citing Reither (“Teaching” 555). Then, when they begin to explain the “grounding principles and goals” of their Intro to Writing Studies course, they state, “The first of our shared beliefs corresponds with James Reither’s assertion that writing cannot be taught independent of content. It follows that the more an instructor can say about a writing’s content, the more she can say about the writing itself; this is another way of saying that writing instructors should be expert readers” (559). Now, this is not merely a reference to Reither, it is a rather direct re-statement of one of his key take-aways: “Academic writing, reading, and inquiry are inseparably linked; and all three are learned not by doing any one alone, but by doing them all at the same time. To ‘teach writing’ is thus necessarily to ground writing in reading and inquiry” (“Writing and Knowing” 625). Later, after explaining the readings they tend to assign, Downs and Wardle echo Reither once more: “If writing cannot be separated from content, then scholarly writing cannot be separated from reading”—or, Reither might add, from engaging in the (inquiry) activities of the discipline. Indeed, when Downs and Wardle describe the “tightly scaffolded” research assignments their students pursue, they sound quite similar to the collaborative investigation theorized by Hunt, Reither, and Vipond (562-64). Thus, it’s somewhat unsurprising when they conclude, “In fact, throughout the course, as students exchange research tales, data, and questions, it is clear that the writing studies pedagogy answers Reither’s and Kleine’s calls for communities of inquiry” (564).