archive with different questions and different interests that compel a search for the next discovery.

As Fitzgerald does, Lindblom, Banks, and Quay create a link between current composition pedagogies and those used in nineteenth-century classrooms. In “Writing Instruction at Illinois State Normal School” the authors use letters from student Abbie Reynolds as evidence of the pedagogy of Dr. Albert Stetson. The pedagogy, though progressive, over-emphasized surface correctness, leading to problems for students of lower socio-economic status, such as Reynolds. At the close of the chapter, the authors note that teachers still look for surface correctness, thereby “holding students to discriminating, socially unfair standards” (113). They list other similarities between current composition contexts and nineteenth-century classrooms: standardization, patriotism based upon militarism, and the rise of first-generation college students in the classroom.

As the title of the text suggests, histories of composition must be discovered at the local level—both at the level of the single college or university and at the level of the individual classroom. These histories remain relevant for today’s composition instructors because they trace a myriad of situated pupils, instructors, and learning environments, inviting current instructors to question and analyze their own pedagogical practices and conditions within a historical context.

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You can’t throw a rock at a CCCC convention these days without hitting somebody who thinks—probably rightly—that Rhetoric and Composition is in crisis, that it is at risk of losing its identity as a field devoted exclusively to the teaching of writing on one hand, or to the study of writing in all its manifestations, unfettered by a pedagogical imperative, on the other. It is ultimately to such concerns that Helen Foster articulates *Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process*. Foster, however, mercifully eschews alarmist rhetoric. She is less concerned with saving a dying field than with articulating a theory of writers and writing that can help rhetoric and composition take the best advantage of this unique time in our institutional and cultural history.
Her entry into this discussion comes through the process/post-process debate. Wanting to avoid stifling binaries, Foster looks for a point of stasis between process and post-process that can form the basis for meaningful dialogue and, therefore, effectively move the discipline forward. That point of stasis, she says, is a middle ground between process and post-process, represented by socially- and culturally-cognizant scholarship of the 1980s, in which major constituencies of both groups have a stake. Each of these constituencies, then, is invested in theorizing the subjectivity of the writer and the complex of social and cultural forces at work on her. Foster calls this point of stasis networked process. The full meaning of this term emerges over the next three chapters, as she attempts to synthesize a large body of work in rhetoric and composition with postmodern, poststructural, feminist, and Bakhtinian theories of language and subjectivity. Chapter 1 offers an overview of the two “strands” of post-process—those that are not based on Thomas Kent’s paralogic rhetoric and those that are, but in mitigated form. (Kent is in a class by himself.) Foster then finds a “rebuttal” to post-process in the sheer diversity of process approaches, a sampling of which she surveys as evidence. Chapter 1 concludes by positing the social theory of the 1980’s, and the theory of networked process it ultimately enables, as a point of stasis between the two groups.

Chapter 2 aims to provide a focused look at how the social turn of the 1980’s moved us toward a more complex vision of process. Foster focuses on James Berlin’s “cognitive mappings” of rhetoric and composition, examining in detail five of Berlin’s major works published throughout the 1980’s. According to Foster, Berlin’s mappings and, more importantly, his social epistemic method, afford us a critically important vision of rhetoric and composition’s disciplinary landscape as it existed in a kind of in-between space of process and post-process.

Articulating a theory of the subject who is situated in and enacts networked process, chapters 3 and 4 propose and situate what Foster calls “networked subjectivity.” Chapter 3 surveys a wide range of theories before settling on Bakhtinian dialogism as a grounding theory. Drawing on Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia, horizon, alterity, addressivity, answerability, and authoring, networked subjectivity tries to capture the full range of social, political, and ethical forces that constrain and enable the individual subject as she “authors” herself and the world she, and we, inhabit. Chapter 4 further concretizes networked subjectivity by examining it “in relation to a cultural network” of power-saturated, Foucaultian “discursive relations” (112) that include personal, institutional, and cultural contexts. These contexts, in turn, comprise “discursive formations” with their own truth conditions, or epistemologies, whose likely conflicting nature means that subjects are “characterized by multiple and often conflicting subject positions” (134).
Having laid the groundwork for and fully theorized networked process as the entire complex of individuals’ and others’ perceptions, beliefs, desires, and expectations in contact with the full range of social, cultural, and institutional forces that are brought to bear on all acts of authoring, Foster, in chapter 5, extrapolates from networked process a “heuristic” for examining how disciplinary artifacts like composition textbooks and institutional sites like university writing programs “function in the discursive formation of networked process” (141). The heuristic issues from Foster’s appropriation of Bakhtinian dialogism, asking of the artifacts and sites on which it is brought to bear:

• What notion of audience is advanced, relative to notions of self and alterity?
• What sort of understanding is promoted?
• What notion of language and discourse is tacitly assumed?
• What notion of context obtains relative to the notion of horizon?
• What notion of purpose is suggested, relative to notions of addressivity and answerability? (142-43)

She applies these questions to a reading of Joseph Trimmer’s Writing With a Purpose (artifact) and to the Writing Program at Cal State Chico (institutional site), information about which she ascertains based on her reading of Judith Rodby and Tom Fox’s “Basic Work and Material Acts.”

The concluding chapter is the most forward-looking of the book. Following the leads of such figures as Ellen Cushman and Susan Miller, Foster argues that the discipline should change its name to “rhetoric and writing studies” (191). One of the main advantages of this name, she maintains, is that its broad inclusiveness is reflective of the broadly inclusive ethos of what is now known as rhetoric and composition. But she also notes that, to counter the dissipating effects such inclusiveness tends toward, we need a “delimiting” metaphor. For this role she nominates “networked process,” which not only includes the broad, densely-populated middle section of overlap between process and post-process adherents, but also “represents the complexity of multiple networked process sites and signals both an intellectual and material (re)negotiation of our professional and disciplinary status” (197). Networked process thus offers the discipline a historically cognizant and disciplinarily advantageous way to move forward as we face the unique challenges posed to us in the early 21st Century.

As I read Networked Process, I couldn’t help feeling that Foster has re-invented the wheel. I wondered, that is, whether she couldn’t have borrowed, to greater effect, from the compelling body of largely Bakhtinian, socio-cultural work already being done in writing studies that has inched our understanding of writers and writing processes ever closer to the kind of complexity that Foster calls for, into what Paul Prior has called writers’ “full cultural-historical lifeworlds” (274). Doing so could have helped Foster streamline
her methodological argument, which unfolds over two chapters and relies heavily on summary, often of works whose relevance to her arguments in the last two (and most compelling) chapters seems tangential. This in turn might have given her the space and freedom to explore in greater detail her most interesting and important claims, namely, those in the final chapter about networked process’ implications for disciplinarity. (Chapter 6 is the shortest chapter in the book.)

I also found myself wanting Foster to do more with the heuristic in chapter 5: alongside her critique of Trimmer’s Writing With a Purpose, I would like to have seen what a good composition textbook (or at least a better one in Foster’s eyes than WWP) looks like when read through this lens. And (though I recognize that this restraint has much more to do with time than space) I also had to wonder: What might have been, had Foster not limited her demonstration of the institutional critique this heuristic enables to what she could surmise about Cal State Chico from having read Judith Rodby and Tom Fox’s “Basic Work and Material Acts?” It’s difficult to believe, given Foster’s goal of combining critique of a textbook with critique of the “other situated institutional discursive formations in which the textbook functions, along with the students and teachers imbricated in these relations” (165), that her analysis could approach the thickness this goal calls for without having done her own situated study.

Still, there is much to be gained from a targeted reading of Networked Process. First, and despite my critique of Foster’s tendency toward summary in the early chapters, her discussions of both the process/post-process debate and of Berlin’s work in the 1980’s could be very useful in graduate courses designed to introduce students to conversations, past and present, in the field. Second, the heuristic deployed in chapter 5 could be of considerable interest to anybody involved in assessment of writing programs or individual instructors (others or oneself). It’s certainly easy to see how asking these questions about writing programs, courses, and teachers could yield rich—and useful—results. And, finally, the concluding chapter adds yet another voice to the chorus of those calling for fundamental change in how we conceive of and carry out our disciplinary mission, articulating a broadly inclusive vision of the field as the study of writing in all of its forms and functions. As one who, himself, got his PhD through a unit called the “Center for Writing Studies” (University of Illinois), I can hardly fault her for that.

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Work Cited


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