

Book Review *Reimagining Process: Online Writing Archives and the Future of Writing Studies*, by Kyle Jensen

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In *Reimagining Process: Online Writing Archives and the Future of Writing Studies*, Kyle Jensen seeks to complicate key disciplinary attachments in Composition and Rhetoric by rethinking pedagogical strategies for process-oriented research, theory, and practice. Jensen offers an important alternative to teaching and studying writing through two main arguments: First, Jensen identifies how-centered approaches to process currently dominating composition pedagogy, which he claims ineffectively rely on student empowerment. Second, after underscoring the danger of maintaining such a how-centered approach, he outlines how moving to what-centered approaches by way of online writing archives can expose what writing is and what its processes actually look like across disciplinary contexts. The pivotal distinction between the two approaches rests in the goals and objectives for instructing process. How-centered approaches to process, he argues, teach students to “gain control over their literate development,” which hones in on the process of producing, drafting, revising, and reflecting on student compositional practices (2). Because “writing unfolds as a process whether or not instructors teach writing as a process,” what-centered approaches turn away from a focus on processing our compositional habits and towards processing writing as a cultural, social, material, and historical movement (7). Thus, Jensen avers that what-centered approaches ask what writing in its object form *is* by studying “writing as a historical, theoretical, and material phenomenon” (6). Jensen compellingly argues that the field has come to a stalemate with how we understand process, and recasting process within this materialist perspective offers a key contribution to how we teach and study writing.

Although Jensen’s work sits squarely in the sub-fields of composition theory and pedagogy, his work also provides important implications for digital and literacy studies—specifically those interested in how agency, posthumanism, materiality, and archives can be used to expand conceptions of how we study writing. What-centered approaches, Jensen submits, help examine what the principle characteristics of a writing process actually are, how these processes unfold, and how we as scholars and teachers might help students engage with the materiality of writing. John Trimbur called upon scholars to treat writing in its noun form—something that moves throughout society and even acts upon us—and scholars more recently have answered that call by providing ways to help students grapple with mediated approaches to writing (e.g. Shipka; Sirc; DeJoy; Prior; and Foster). Jensen falls in line with such scholars; however, Jensen’s use of online writing archives pushes back against the goal of empowering students to assume control over their own literate development, which he proposes is an impractical task.

The first two chapters outline Jensen’s theoretical intervention by addressing the normative hierarchical structures supported by how-centered approaches. While interrogating the field’s

penchant for empowerment, Jensen suggests that such a notion fails to speak to writing's reality and rests on a rhetorical (and futile) project dedicated to pedagogical care. Through an analysis of Žižek's concept of interpassivity, Jensen underscores how teachers are made responsible for the student's beliefs about writing, where students are unable to get at the political goal of challenging hierarchical structures. He contends this how-centered approach that appeals to empowerment enacts a feminine positionality. Jensen sharply addresses how such an "arrangement repeatedly enacts violence against women and other feminized subjects, not only because it positions them as symbolically inferior to masculine subjects but also because it creates opportunities for physical and emotional violence" (35). Thus, the valorized feminine teacher subversively recasts the male dominated structure. After underscoring the gendered appeals to empowerment and pedagogical care, Jensen presents his strongest analysis by moving to consider how the portfolio structure serves to fulfill Foucault's notions of power. By outlining how process is often predicated on reflection, Jensen delicately unveils how students are caught up with mirroring the goals and objectives laid out in the syllabus. In other words, the portfolio serves the purpose of the panopticon, which enacts "surveillance that improves rather than subverts the operations of higher education" (49). Jensen carefully and impressively argues that within portfolio reflection, students often fulfill the desires of their instructor, where the traditional portfolio structure converts students into disciplined writing bodies. Drawing from Foucault's terms, Jensen analyzes how space, time, normalization and hierarchy, and surveillance all operate under the terms of how-centered approaches. To escape portfolio surveillance, Jensen suggests that instead we treat portfolios as archives that may better theorize the irruptive movements that occur in our actualized writing process.

After walking through his theoretical intervention, Jensen then turns to the online writing archives themselves to explore how what-centered approaches might provide students a better way to grapple with the material, historical, and theoretical dimensions of writing. By treating the notion of writing as a "ghostly possession" (84) that we never fully control, Jensen cleverly underscores the "uncanny space where writing unfolds in surprising ways" (83) by displaying two case studies—his own writing process alongside a student's—that unveil the complexity behind processing writing. In this latter half of the book, Jensen productively moves away from teaching writing process as empowerment and towards treating writing (and the writer) as a direct object of study. At this point, "careful curiosity" becomes Jensen's pivoting point away from "pedagogical care," which he argues "expose[s] one's limits as a knowing subject" (115). Jensen notably expands the angles through which we see writing, and by foregrounding a pedagogical approach that assumes the messiness of writing, his what-centered approach helps build "literate dexterity" that arguably can transfer outside of the composition classroom to a number of different sites (131).

Jensen's argument unfolds first through a conceptual articulation of how the terms process, power, care, portfolios, and reflection have been taken up in writing studies. The latter half of the book then turns to two case studies—Jensen's own online writing archive alongside a student example—to demonstrate how a what-centered approach invites reinvigorated understandings of these concepts. By suggesting a turn to what-centered approaches to process, Jensen does not advocate that we move away from the use of process in the writing classroom; however, he calls for an approach that is not

married to reflection and empowerment. The way process is currently understood, Jensen suggests, leaves teachers to the “maternal management of student emotion” (4). Jensen boldly claims that this how-centered approach does “pedagogical violence” by relying and reaffirming the heteronormative structures that this field desires to break down (5). Online writing archives, on the other hand, move the teaching of writing into a territory that treats writing in its object form by acknowledging its disembodied, abstracted, and material capabilities. Turning away from pedagogical care and towards an ethos of careful curiosity, this book strives to acknowledge writing’s ghostly capacities that will serve a student’s ability to transfer skills beyond the writing classroom into different disciplinary contexts.

Jensen’s work speaks directly to teachers and researchers of writing, whether in first year writing classrooms or graduate seminars. This work provides an important commentary on how the field risks resting in a stale stasis of empowerment where the limits of a writing subject are left unquestioned. The book offers convincing value in looking at writing as an object, and Jensen’s move to suggest online writing archives expands how we understand writing as a dynamic impacted by our material, theoretical, and historical surroundings. While this materialist perspective provides an important contribution, I’m weary of the gendered implications that may arise by attacking pedagogical care through the lens of mothering and a feminine subjectivity. Additionally, I would have liked to hear more about the student’s experience negotiating the methodological messiness encouraged by the online writing archive when Jensen turned to the archives themselves. Overall, this book helps bridge the audience of composition to that of literacy studies by treating writing and writers in their object form. By reclaiming how the field understands process, Jensen opens up the field’s understanding of how materiality must be made visible for what writing is and does.

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