J A E P L

At Risk:

Teaching and Writing outside

the Safety Zone

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Executive Board

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The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas on the subject; to participate in programs and projects on it; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, JAEPL,* meets this need. It provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to: aesthetic, emotional, and moral intelligence; archetypes; body wisdom; care in education; creativity; felt sense theory; healing; holistic learning; humanistic and transpersonal psychology; imaging; intuition; kinesthetic knowledge; meditation; narration as knowledge; reflective teaching; silence; spirituality; and visualization.

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At Risk: Teaching and Writing outside the Safety Zone

I n 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its damning indictment of American education. In the opening sentence of the report, the authors announce: "Our Nation is at risk." National prosperity, security, and civility are being "eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity" resulting from the failures of our schools and colleges.

Within this context "risk," defined by Webster's as "the possibility of suffering loss," is something to be avoided, or, if that is not possible, something to be managed. Thus, children struggling for success in school for whatever reason are categorized "at risk"; readers and writers who come to the classroom with an array of language habits divergent from those practiced in middle-class circles are placed in "at risk" programs. The urge is to mitigate risk, to reduce the possibility of any loss of prosperity, security, and civility.

Every afternoon during my sixth grade year, between 2:15 and 2:45, I strapped on my cross belt decorated with my badge of authority, loaded up my flag, and joined the Safety Patrol. With my partner, Bobbi Jo Lee, I stood at the curb on Jenny Street, a lazy two-lane side street, outside the double doors of Neff Elementary School, protecting the younger students as they walked home. After crossing our flags to herd the students at the curb, Bobbi Jo and I would step into the street, stand precisely on the parallel white lines marching across Jenny Street, and stop traffic. With our bodies, our flags, and our badges, Bobbi Jo and I created a safety zone—a risk free zone— for noisy, exuberant children to dance from one side of Jenny Street to the other. At the end of the year, I reluctantly turned in my cross belt and my flag. Now, years later, I wonder if I have carried that flag and badge with me, extending parallel white lines until I live and teach only within that safety zone.

As well as the possibility of suffering loss, risk also carries with it a sense of the possibility of great gain. For instance, Gregory Bateson tells us that no learning occurs without an element of risk, for the learner must experience the rain of the random. We cannot grow, transform, or blossom without undergoing the threat of chaos because new order evolves out of chaos. Therefore, risk is an opportunity, one we should court. By avoiding risk—by correcting it, fighting it, or managing it— we erode opportunities to learn.

During the summer of 1965, my friends and I, thumbs outstretched, would stand at the entrance to the Belt Parkway on Fourth Avenue and Sixty-fifth Street waiting for some passing motorist to slow down and offer us a ride. We'd usually have two or three girls out front, and, when a car would stop, a couple of the boys would come forward. We'd work to convince drivers that we were safe kids, good kids, no problem at all. If they'd take a girl and two boys, we had truly lucked out. More often,

> *they'd leave us flat or maybe take two girls with one boy. This*
> *is how we got to Riis Park Beach when I was an eighth grader.*
> *There wasn't a subway to get there, and the buses just took too*
> *long. If we drew a total blank, we'd take the subway to Brighton*
> *Beach, but that was our last resort. We wanted the clean beach*
> *with the rough waves; Riis Park was our spot. Standing at the*
> *entrance to the highway, keeping out a weather eye for wild*
> *drivers, we judged the rewards well worth the risks.*

The importance and positive value of risk is the unifying theme of our tenth volume of *JAEPL*, "At Risk: Teaching and Writing outside the Safety Zone." More specifically, the essays in this issue focus on the necessity of risk in teaching and writing, for without that risk we cannot teach; we merely replicate conventional and many times limited ways of knowing. If we protect ourselves, if we teach only within a narrow safety zone, we cannot invite our students to invest in their learning, to risk who they are and what they know. Instead, we must step outside of that safety zone. The essays in this issue trail blaze that risky path for us by offering myriad perspectives on and examples of risk taking in teaching and writing.

Lynn Z. Bloom in "The Seven Deadly Virtues" enacts that risk and urges us to do the same. In a personal record of her journey as a writer, Bloom highlights the importance of risking ourselves in and through our writing. She points to the seven deadly virtues of "good" writers, safe writers—duty, rationality, conformity, conventionality, efficiency, economy, and order—and suggests instead the importance to writers of the lively sins of innovation: a "risky, messy, passionate, and uncertain process, accommodating the disorder and inefficiency of randomness and the necessary time out for reflection and revision."

In "Shallow Literacy, Timid Teaching, and Cultural Impotence," David L. Wallace shifts the site of risk to the classroom, arguing for the kind of pedagogy that involves "both personal and professional risk." Recounting a moment in his teaching in which he shared an intensely personal narrative, Wallace argues for the necessity of such risks if we wish to challenge the dominant view of literacy that continues to marginalize too many of our students and imprison our thinking.

Roben Torosyan in "Listening: Beyond Telling to Being What We Want To Teach" offers readers a strategy for trust-building—group empathy—that helps students develop multifaceted perspectives and tolerance. However, this strategy is most effective, Torosyan explains, when teachers take the risk of self-disclosing, of discussing mistakes, missteps, and misconceptions. Teachers have to "actually embody or 'be' precisely the kind of self-examining listeners" that they want their students to become. Without such risk, no trust building is possible. This "confessional consciousness," while sometimes painful, models the kind of thinking that students need for life-long learning. As Torosyan points out, "the more I dare to slip up. . . the more they gain the courage to do likewise."

Changing the venue and the arena of risk, Patricia Webb and Zach Waggoner in "Analyzing the Dominant Cultural Narratives of Religious Pluralism: A Study of Oprah.com," reveal the threat to spiritual pluralism in the age of the Internet through a meticulous analysis of the shifts in Oprah Winfrey's website, from the 2002 to the 2004 website design. The authors argue that Oprah.com morphed from a daring, unconventional venue for religious pluralism in 2002 to a far more conservative and narrowly construed venue advocating an implicit traditional

Christian orientation in 2004. The early website took necessary risks, creating opportunities for the growth of religious pluralism. Without such risk taking, however, the more conservative 2004 website undermines that pluralism, restricting spirituality to a single, narrow perspective.

Matthew I. Feinberg in "Critical Geography and the Real World in First-Year Writing Classrooms" explores the risky connection between mind and body, mind and place. "We are bodies that teach and learn in physical spaces," he reminds us, and without a more direct acknowledgement of that, "the work of the classroom will continue to be the fiction within the lives of our students." He advocates an approach to teaching that requires teacher and student to grapple with the "spatial and tangible components of ideology and culture" by studying the varied physical environments within which students live and learn. By taking this risk, by turning around on our taken-for-granted ontological realities, we hold the hope of moving university classroom and real world into a closer, embodied alignment.

Hildy Miller in "Image into Word: Glimpses of Mental Images in Writers Writing" shifts us from the outer world of Feinberg's critical geography to the inner world of students' mental imagery. Contesting traditional language centered approaches to writing and researching writing, Miller asks what role imagery might play in the composing of her students. She explores that question by collecting from her students "thought sample" questionnaires as they produced text, deducing from these questionnaires and the students' essays the presence and function of mental imagery in expository writing. Results of this study suggest the need to risk our accepted pedagogical and assessment practices so that we might better honor the "pervasivenss and importance" of mental imagery in writing.

Finally, Ed Comber in "Critical Thinking Skills and Emotional-Response Discourse: Merging the Affective and Cognitive in Student-Authored Texts through Taxonomy Usage" describes a strategy that helps students identify discourse markers that indicate the presence of interfering emotions. Rather than eradicate emotion, teachers need to risk focusing students' attention directly on what Comber calls their "emotive-response discourse," a move that enables students to work through those emotions.

Andrew Marvell in "To My Coy Mistress," that amusing turn on seduction, urges his recalcitrant mistress to defy convention, to cease to play it safe and preserve a virtue that ultimately will be defiled by worms. Rather, with time rushing them to death, he urges her to risk everything:

Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:

To savor life, the two need to stop playing it safe. They need to take a risk. The essays in this volume of *JAEPL* show us ways that we, too, can roll up our strength and sweetness to make and seize opportunities in our teaching and our writing.

"Let's do something a little different with Richards," I
announce abruptly with a flutter beneath my breastbone. The
nine faces of my graduate students turn to me warily. For the

last long painful 40 minutes, we have been trying to discuss I.
A. Richards's Philosophy of Rhetoric. It is not pretty.
Desperately searching for the "right" answer, my students are
afraid to risk any answer.

"I want you to draw me a map, a treasure map, the kind
that we used to create in second grade, or, at least, the kind
that I created. The treasure in this map is Richards's idea of
metaphor. That's where X marks the spot. So how do we get
there? Start with context and figure out where Proper Meaning
Superstition, Club Spirit, and other obstacles get between you
and the treasure."

It was a risky move for them and for me, putting all of us outside the safety
zone, beyond the flags, well on our way, thumb in the air, to Riis Park Beach.

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The Seven Deadly Virtues

Lynn Z. Bloom

Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them. There's many a bestseller that could have been prevented by a good teacher.
—Flannery O'Connor

Cry Me a River: Academic Virtue in Action

I t is my first quarter of doctoral work at Ohio State, and as a Michigan snob I am taking the hardest courses on the books from professors known as the denizens of Murderers' Row. These are truly killer courses. The seminars meet every day, five unremitting days a week for two hours, and every night each course (I am taking two) requires three to five hours' preparation. It is also my first quarter of teaching. The only advice proffered in 1958 on how to teach freshman composition is "Have the students"—there are twenty-five in each of my two sections—"write something every class period." What they write, I have to comment on. Accustomed to the more generous rhythm of the semester system, afraid of flunking out, I struggle to keep on schedule. One misstep and I will fall into the abyss of no return.

And then, halfway through the ten-week quarter, I realize I have an unworkable term paper topic in one course and have to begin anew. In the other seminar we have a critical paper due every week; I can stay on keel if I have a one-day extension on one of these. "More time," I plead with the instructor, a savant who publishes a book a year, on our way to class, "just this once?" "No!" he says, elaborating emphatically, "Punctiliousness is a virtue, and in graduate school you must turn your work in on time. No exceptions." We enter the seminar room, the professor, seven male students, and myself, seated in my usual spot to the professor's left. Tears start to slide out from under my eyelids, whether from rage, fear, or frustration I do not know. I try to squeeze my eyes shut to hold them in, but to no avail. Splotches begin to appear on my notebook as I take notes.

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Soon the page buckles. I use up all my Kleenex, then the handkerchief a classmate smuggles me, but I cannot stop. I cry for the entire two hours; the instructor never looks at me. I turn in his paper on time, get an extension on the other one, and that night the lender of the handkerchief takes me for a long walk around campus and teaches me an entire lexicon of swear words I have never heard before, many of them anatomical impossibilities.

The Emperor of Ice Cream: The Primrose Path v the Straight and Narrow

Flannery O'Connor was more right than she realized. The university stifles most creative writers except the most intrepid—even reckless—the good along with the bad, in the process of teaching them to write according to the conventions of the academy in general and their specific disciplines in particular. That is the thesis of this essay. The more advanced the degree (except for the small percentage of English majors who land in graduate creative writing programs), the more firmly embedded does the student become in the literary conventions of the discipline of the major, anchored by the seven deadly virtues of academic life. These are, as I will explain below, duty, rationality, conformity/conventionality, efficiency, order, economy. And, oh yes, punctuality. In fact, the academy, like any other bureaucracy or large organizational system, can't run without these virtues. All are hallmarks of the conventional degrees in English literature that concentrate on literary criticism—the only game in town when I was in grad school.

But these very characteristics that make one a good academic (or a good bureaucrat or a good citizen) promise to stifle the creativity necessary to write novels, poetry, drama, and creative nonfiction of quality, the primary texts that give critics something to write about. To produce a critical article or book chapter, literary criticism generally proceeds by logical, rational means (allowing for the occasional but necessary Aha! insight) to produce a fairly prescriptive argumentative format. Whereas the critic starts with the subject text at hand (often buttressed by other theoretical and critical texts), the creative writer starts with the blank sheet of paper, which John Updike sees "as radiant, the sun rising in the morning," moving by fits and starts through experimental combinations of mind and heart, insight and association, sound and rhythm and sense to produce writing that is both novel and valuable (qtd. in Flaherty B6-7). Innovation is a risky, messy, passionate, and uncertain process, accommodating the disorder and inefficiency of randomness and the necessary time out for reflection and revision. Though we could call these antitheses to the deadly virtues the "seven lively sins," the count would be inexact.

It should be clear that for most people literary criticism is intellectually much easier than creative writing. Whereas creative writing sprawls over space and time, literary criticism is more compact, its process less variable, its outcome more predictable. Thus, as a more efficient, more manageable enterprise, criticism becomes the default choice of all but the boldest, most independent students. Indeed, if students are as timid as I was, even in graduate school (I finished my doctorate in English at Michigan, after the year's exile at Ohio State, and I always turned my papers in on time, no extensions, no incompletes) and long afterward, they will be brainwashed to collaborate with the very suppressors of their attempts at creative risk taking. They can't help it.

I use myself as a case in point, representative of all students who majored in

English because they loved to write, aspired to become Famous Authors, and who wimped out, and ended up instead as English professors. We have met these people as caricatures in Garrison Keillor's Professional Organization of English Majors, the overly polite, grammatically correct nerds who write vapid couplets and jejune stories and end up isolated and impecunious, working at McDonald's and hoping in vain for a publisher, any publisher, to recognize their uncertain talent. Like many, I had hopes of publishing novels or poetry, though what I was actually writing would today have been called creative nonfiction, at the time, a genre without a name, despite the work of distinguished essayists such as E.B. White, James Baldwin, and Virginia Woolf. Like Moliere's Bourgeois Gentleman, who was surprised to learn that he'd been speaking prose all his life, a label would have helped to legitimate what I considered a suspect, if not outlaw, activity.

I went to college to become a Great Writer. Of course there were other reasons; I wanted to get away from home and a boring boyfriend, in particular. I had the tools, a brand new Smith Corona portable typewriter and a dictionary. I had the will, for I had wanted to be a writer ever since I laid eyes on Dr. Seuss at the age of six. And I had the affirmation, for throughout twelve years of New Hampshire public schooling, there was plenty of corroboration that I was a good writer — teachers' accolades, editorship of the school literary magazine and paper (*The School Spirit*, what else?) and a plethora of writing prizes. I fully expected to emerge in four years with a B.A., well on my way to greatness, even though I didn't know what that meant or how to get there. That was what college would teach me.

So I took a creative writing course every semester — fiction, essays, drama — all from senior faculty with distinguished reputations, though they never read us what they wrote, as I have since begun to do with my own students, in judicious snatches. I expected them to be the hardest courses I was taking (eschewing slogans and gimmicks, I soon dropped the Advertising course as too easy and insubstantial), and they were indeed tough and exhilarating. There were no rules, formulas, or formats, just the messy process of experimentation — does it sound better this way? Or that? Is this character convincing? Does the setting suit the subject? Even more important, is it a good story? If so, why? Or why not? Toughest of all, why would readers care about this? So what?

In creative writing courses, and only in these courses and in philosophy of ethics, was my understanding of the world as I was coming to know it validated — through writing written (and read) as much from the heart as from the head. For creative writing courses honored the expressions of feeling, intuition, imagination, experimentation, the associative leaps and bounds. All other courses, irrespective of their discipline — English, history, biology, geology, statistics, economics, political science — proceeded by "logos, linearity, conjunction, formulation" (see Root 18), thereby offering a rational understanding even of the essence of an irrational universe. Understanding the logic was easy. So was translating it into the conventional, usually argumentative, academic paper in which I deliberately took issue with the conventional wisdom (including the teacher's), marching through Georgia with the thesis up front followed by several major points, each buttressed by evidence that led inevitably to a conclusion, reasonable, appropriate, and certain. It was a lot more fun to follow the meandering path of creative writing, and exhilarating to do the hard work of listening at the "deep heart's core" that reading Yeats was helping me to understand.

As we read our Works-in-Progress (how grand that sounded) in class, I was also paying careful, elaborately casual, attention to the other students. Was their writing better than mine? Worse? Those with distinctive and unusual talent—Marge Piercy and Anne Stevenson frightened me—were so good and so original, and I knew I was neither. Dressed in black turtlenecks and long flowing skirts, in contrast to my preppy plaids and Peter Pan collars, they looked like real writers. They behaved like real writers, too, I suspected, taking lovers instead of dating boys. They must have lived on cigarettes and black coffee. Their very presence kept the class on knife edge for fear of comparisons that would wither inept manuscripts to ash. That I wrote better than the rest of our ultimately forgettable classmates didn't matter; I was looking at world class.

I was also looking for hints from my professors. Could I make it as a writer? I never dared to ask outright. Although I earned As in every course, the only faculty member who explicitly urged me as an undergraduate to become a writer was my violin teacher—and he had never seen a syllable I wrote. Only my freshman English teacher encouraged me to enter the Hopwood contest, Michigan's prestigious writing competition endowed by the author of the Broadway smash hit of 1921, *Getting Gertie's Garter*, and open to students at all levels. Some sophisticates enrolled in the master's program just so they could compete for the thousands of dollars in Hopwood prizes, but, having lost at the freshman level with a sophomoric satire on my hometown, I never dared to submit any other work. The acerbic voice of my Inner Critic continually overrode the External Critics' esteem. For a number of those A grades were actually A pluses. The teachers' pencilled comments, "publish this," implied that I knew how to go about doing so. But in fact I hadn't a clue.

Moreover, in my junior year I won cash prizes in the *Mademoiselle* College Board Contest for both fiction and nonfiction—the only double prizewinner in this prestigious national contest immortalized by Sylvia Plath (a double prizewinner two years earlier) in delicious sendup in *The Bell Jar*. I paid more attention, however, to the fact that despite these awards I and I alone among the prizewinners was not invited to go to New York to serve as a guest editor. Gail Greene, another student in my fiction class, whose name morphed that semester to Gayle and then quickly to Gael, went instead, thereby filling what I surmised was Michigan's quota. As a stringer for the *Detroit Free Press,* she was surely more sophisticated than I, though I did not believe she was a better writer. Still smarting from the news of her win and my loss that had arrived in a cute pink envelope the hour before our class met, I offered congratulations, hoping she wouldn't notice the catch in my throat. "Yeah," she replied, looking out the window where the sun rose and set in the direction of the Hudson River rather than the Huron, "Well, thanks," the only three words she cast in my direction during the entire semester. My opinion notwithstanding, Greene clearly had the right stuff, serving thirty-four years as *New York Magazine*'s restaurant critic, her celebrity abetted by the titillating *Blue Skies, No Candy*. Would a stint as *Mademoiselle* guest editor have provided the validation I sought as a writer and changed my life, as it may have done for Greene? It's impossible to know.

Ode to Duty: Academic Writing and the Seven Deadly Virtues

When I close my eyes, I can see the Steinberg cartoon in vivid colors, a sprightly little girl speaking in bright lines, arabesques, and curlicues that form

flowers and butterflies floating over her head. The bulky, bulbous man to whom she sends these expressions of joy replies, straight black lines slashing through the dancing colors. That man could be my father, Oswald Theodore Wilhelm Zimmerman (nickname of "Odd"), ever and always reminding me to do my duty: "If there is a conflict between what you want to do and what you ought to do, you *must* do what you ought to do!" When as a sophomore I first encountered Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty"—beginning "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!"— I automatically substituted "Odd" for the deity, immediately recognizing that it was my father who would apply "the rod/To check the erring, and reprove," just as he had always done, in sarcasm and in scorn.

So here I will do my duty to my readers, just as I promised, and anatomize the characteristics of the seven deadly virtues and their influence on writers in the academy. Make no mistake. In bureaucratic contexts these qualities are genuine virtues, necessary to the efficient and economical running of the academy or any other budget or calendar-driven organization—and what establishment (including the family) is immune to these concerns? Nevertheless, these seven deadly virtues can combine to derail, if not to kill off entirely, the uncertain or duty-bound writer's creativity, especially when confronted with the juggernaut of academic writing coming down and always coming down the track.

Duty

Duty is the umbrella deadly virtue, for it encompasses a moral obligation to practice several other deadly virtues in the course of meeting one's responsibilities and the deadlines signaled by *Punctuality*. Among these significant aspects of *Duty* are the exercise of *Rationalit*y; *Conformity* to middle class morality; and *Conventionality*, adherence to the norms of one's academic discipline, the latter two characteristics intertwined in academic writing. I am surprised to note, in *The American Heritage Dictionary* definition of duty, meanings 6a, "The work performed by a machine under specified conditions," and 6b, "A measure of efficiency expressed as the amount of work done per unit of energy used." In fact, if one construes the writer as a word-producing machine, the definition fits very well, and *Efficiency*, along with *Economy*, its corollary, may be regarded as other *Duties* of the writer.

Rationality

The academy purports to be nothing if not rational. The writer is supposed to sound rational, not emotional, and maintain professional distance from the subject, not allowing love, hate, enthusiasm, or other emotional reactions to the topic to bleed into the discussion. Thus the dutiful academic writer, whether student or faculty researcher, is constrained to write rationally—the work usually construed as argumentative writing, critical or otherwise, that is organized according to a logical plan and proceeds by a series of logical steps to a logical conclusion. As a consequence, even when talking about others' creative writing, it is rare for the critic to incorporate creative segments—say narrative, dialogue, or poetry—in a critical piece, let alone to write the entire piece in a creative mode. To do so might—*quelle horreur*—signal the operation of a host of non-rational elements, including imagination, passion, and play instead of the dead seriousness that dominates academic discourse—even when to use these elements would indicate that the writer understands the work at hand from an insider's perspective.

Some editorial policies expressly forbid creative writing in critical

dissertations or journals; others discourage it. A few journals, such as *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*, in the past decade have on rare occasions allowed authors (such as Nancy Sommers, the late Wendy Bishop, and—dare I say—myself) to tell true stories or to write hybrids of creative nonfiction and analytic writing. As a formal acknowledgment that there are valid ways beyond the rational of making, understanding, and transmitting knowledge, a decade ago *JAEPL*, the *Journal for the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, was established to provide a forum that—through encouraging explorations of "aesthetic, emotional, and moral intelligence; archetypes; body wisdom . . . silence; spirituality; and visualization"—would extend "the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and methodologies" based on rationality and order (ii). This journal, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, manifests a number of the values and ideals validated by current research in positive psychology and discussed in recent issues (January 2000; March 2001) of the *American Psychologist* devoted to "happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning" (theme of 55.1).

This is not to say that creative writing is neither rational nor analytic, or that the creative writer lacks intellectual seriousness, severity, rigor, or commitment to the subject at hand. I am only arguing (yes!) that these qualities are cloaked in the freedom of invention and form and suppleness of voice that characterize creative writing. William H. Gass contends that critical writing is far less rational than it purports to be, that it is in fact a "veritable Michelin of misdirection; for the article pretends that everything is clear, that its argument is unassailable, that there are no soggy patches, no illicit inferences, no illegitimate connections; it furnishes seals of approval and underwriters' guarantees" (25). But to pursue this line of thought is, alas, beyond the scope of this essay.

Conformity, conventionality

and their consequent predictability—though anathema to creative works except the most formulaic westerns, detective stories, or bodice rippers—are the necessary hallmarks of respectable academic writing. Academic readers expect academic writing to exhibit decorum and propriety appropriate to their discipline. When they are reading for substance, they cannot afford to be distracted by departures from conventional form and style, what my agriculture colleagues object to as "flowery writing." To violate the conventions of the discipline in which one is writing is to mark the writer as either highly naive[1] or very unprofessional. Or so the academy believes. Arabesques and pirouettes, however graceful, are not encouraged.

Nor is the author's individual, human voice generally welcome, particularly in papers written by teams of authors, as in the hard sciences. Gass observes that such writing must appear voiceless, faceless, "complete and straightforward and

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[1] An example must suffice, though in true essayistic spirit I apologize for using a footnote and the necessary citations as well. Now for the peroration. In general, to claim in a critical paper on Shakespeare that "Shakespeare was a great writer," though true, is considered a mark of critical naiveté, for everyone (however that is determined) knows this. Nevertheless, if a noted critic, say Stanley Fish, were to make that claim, the cognoscenti would attribute this to extreme sophistication—since he couldn't possibly be that naive—and try to puzzle out what arcane meaning he intended by making such an obvious statement.

footnoted and useful and certain" even when it is not, its polish "like that of the scrubbed step" (25). This suppression of the self, that might otherwise be manifested in the individual writer's voice and distinctive features of syntax and vocabulary, has the effect of making a given piece of academic writing sound like every other piece in the same field. For a single writer's voice to speak out would be to speak out of turn, and thus be regarded as intemperate, immoderate—calling attention to the speaker rather than where it properly belongs, on the subject.

Again, the same journals that allow for affective presentations also allow their contributors, instead of writing exclusively in critical jargon, to speak in their own, identifiable voices, for which such authors as Peter Elbow in composition studies and Nancy K. Miller in autobiography criticism have become recognized. In general, the author's untenured status dictates conformity to disciplinary conventions. Although the safety of tenure might encourage authors to come out as human beings, the decade or more of forced compliance—in graduate school and on the job—is much more likely to instill future adherence to the rules than to encourage romantic rebellion, especially when other academic rewards depend on continuing to play by those very conventions. My colleague, geologist Bob Thorson, explains that his award-winning *Stone by Stone*: *The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls*, though 287 pages including notes and bibliography, "counts as much as one article" in merit raise calculations because it's written for a general audience rather than specialist peers.

Efficiency, Economy

Prudent academic writers squander neither time ("time is money") nor words. "*Omit needless words*," emphasize Strunk and White, in the enduring *Elements of Style*: "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences" (23). In *A Writer's Companion*, Richard Marius reiterates, "Professional writers are efficient. They use as few words as possible to say what they want to say. They use short words rather than long ones when the short words express their meaning just as well. They get to the point quickly" (663). This advice appears geared more to a svelte body of Word Watchers in, say, advertising or the sciences, than to the more zaftig corpus of creative writers who must flesh out their skeletal texts in order to please themselves—and attract readers.

By this criterion, the writer's ideal composing process would be equally efficient. I question how often the ideal is actually met, for it is antithetical to the unruly, wasteful, disorderly means by which creation usually occurs.[2] Thus, although Connors and Lunsford in *The St. Martin's Handbook*, for example, accurately explain that writing process is "repetitive, erratic," recursive, "and often messy," rather than proceeding "in nice, neat steps," they hold out the hope that "writing can be a little like riding a bicycle: with practice the process becomes more and more automatic" (3-4). To the extent that process follows format, this

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[2] Neurologist Anne Flaherty's research reveals the consensus "that drive is surprisingly more important than talent in producing creative work." As Thomas Edison noted, "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration," but the 1 percent "sliver that separates the workaholic genius from the merely workaholic" is crucial. "Generating reams of text without some talent is not enough. As Eyler Coates put it, 'We've all heard that a million monkeys banging on a million typewriters will eventually produce a masterpiece. Now, thanks to the Internet, we know this is not true'" (B7).

may be true. It may be possible to write on automatic pilot if writers are working
with predetermined forms of academic and professional writing, such as research
reports, business memos, literature reviews, lab reports, and writing against
deadlines where time is truly money.

But, as any poet would attest, there is nothing automatic about either the
practice or the process of writing within the conventional forms of poetry.
Couplets, sonnets, villanelles, odes do not come trippingly off the pen any more
easily than the less circumscribed genres of essays and novels. Even allowing for
the occasional product of divine inspiration that arrives full blown from the head
of Zeus, to insist on—or to expect—efficiency in the creation of poetry or any
other creative work would be to substitute a deadly virtue for a lively art.

Order

Order itself can be a deadly sin or a lively virtue. It's a sin if it interferes
with the act of creation itself. Creation is an inefficient process in part because it
is disorderly, proceeding often by free association, randomness, or what one critic
has called "the deep well of unconscious cerebration." If writers try too early in
the work's gestation to impose order on thoughts-in-process, this attempt may
cut them off prematurely. PowerPoint presentations caricature the deadly version
of order, arrangement made explicit in a series of short sentences or sentence
fragments, limited, limiting. Five paragraph themes likewise become their own
caricature. In fact, any written construction where the organizational scaffolding
obscures or interferes with either the substance or the style becomes victim to
the very mechanism intended to sustain it.

Yet writing that looks disorganized is as disreputable as disorderly conduct
in the realms of both the academy and belles lettres, for disorder implies mental
laxity and shows disrespect for one's readers. Order here is a virtue, and a lively
one. In the best of all writing, what looks casual, as if it were the product of
chance and circumstance, simply is not. Even the appearance of disorder, the
stray curl escaping from the tight bun of hair, must be carefully calculated and
aesthetically justified. Strunk and White acknowledge this in their realistic
analysis that accommodates both the necessity of good design and the vagaries
of the procedures by which it may be attained: "A basic structural design underlies
every kind of writing. Writers will in part follow this design, in part deviate from
it, according to their skills, their needs, and *the unexpected events that accompany
the act of composition*" (15, italics mine). Writing, they say, "to be effective,
must follow closely the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily the order in
which those thoughts occur. This calls for a scheme of procedure" (15). However,
they add, "In some cases, the best design is no design, as with a love letter, which
is simply an outpouring" (not so, I contend, among great letter writers, who leave
nothing they can control to chance, including Cupid), "or with a casual essay,
which is a ramble" (15). This is disingenuous of White, America's supreme
essayist, who leaves a most careful path of footprints in returning "Once More to
the Lake."

Punctuality,

like Order**,** is another virtue that can be deadly or lively. As my Ohio State
professor made, perhaps, too clear, the academic and business worlds must run
like clockwork in order to function well. If the writing produced against their
deadlines is simply good enough to do the job but no better, that's all right for
most people, most institutions, most of the time. When the Muse must report for

duty on time, at least the work gets written. Only selected creative writers and major thinkers—Proust and James Joyce come to mind—are expected to meet Matthew Arnold's criterion of "the best that has been known and thought in the world," and allowed by the workaday world (to which they are sublimely indifferent) to take their sweet time about attaining this standard of excellence— and even then, not at all times or under all circumstances. What is premature closure on a work in progress must be decided by individual authors (perhaps nudged by editors with deadlines of their own) on a case by case basis, a balance between production and procrastination. If a deadline weren't looming on this piece, I'd demonstrate on the basis of textual and biographical evidence the deterioration in quality that too often occurs when authors are rushed into producing hasty sequels to their earlier works written with world enough and time.

Ain't Misbehavin': The Virtue-Laden Personality

Even if I hadn't been the dutiful daughter, I'd have flunked the *Mademoiselle* College Board anyway. I lacked the personality of the hardboiled journalist embodied in Dashiell Hammett; my good cheer and habitual courtesy negated a possible seat at the Algonquin Roundtable, even if I'd written well enough to warrant one. I have been persevering but not pushy, intellectually innovative but not reckless—though as my position has become more secure I have been taking bigger and bigger risks, in subject, style, and technique. From my student days to this, my writing has proceeded deliberately. I've never been able to write fast, or against daily deadlines, or first drafts (some portions of what you are reading are in their fourteenth, fifteenth, no, eighteenth incarnations). In short, I have been by temperament—and ultimately by training—far better suited for life in the academy than in the newsroom or a garret. I have wanted to live a life of the mind, but—until my recent, more reckless incarnation—not to die for my art.

Whether or not I possessed the talent, I lacked the ego. If all artists regard their work as painter John Currin does his own, "I always thought I was the best, even when I wasn't the best. Every artist worth his salt thinks he is the best" (qtd. in Solomon 44), then I was not a true artist, for I always thought the canonical writers were the best. So I had been taught throughout college, and so I believed in the talent of at least the Major Writers, those who had two powerful names, like Virginia Woolf and Ernest Hemingway and Robert Frost, and reputations to match. Novice creative writers in search of exemplary models learn to compare their efforts not with the formative works of writers they admire, but with their mature, benchmark writings. Novices seldom study major authors' Works-in-Progress, Emily Dickinson's fly, perhaps, stretching its wings rather than buzzing; Thoreau's underbrush that only over time spruced up into Walden's immortal woods. As a rule they dissect, only and always, the finished, polished writings from which the detritus of the creative process has been swept clean. Beginners can't match these, or even come close. Only the strongest—or the most naive— egos, perhaps coupled with awards and early publication, can sustain aspiring authors at this stage.

The rest, always judging their work against the Masters (who are invariably "better than me"), can never measure up. Such judgments are always self-defeating and ultimately drive many—the moderately talented (and those very talented who

irrationally consider themselves mediocre), the unsure, as well as those who need the assurance of regular paychecks — to take the more conservative route.[3] Until the job crises of the past fifteen years, teaching appeared to be the path of greater professional certainty, and this dictated a degree in English rather than in creative writing. Today neither alternative is certain; jobs listed in hope on the MLA's fall Job List melt like snow in spring, particularly those in creative writing. By not taking the Big Risk, I like most of my peers sealed my fate, heading full tilt down the critical track buttressed by the seven deadly virtues, particularly after I entered graduate school where the union card was a doctorate, which had to be in literary criticism or philology or linguistics; there was no creative writing alternative at the time.

Although I believed at the outset of my doctoral study, and continue to believe, that criticism is a parasitic activity, for even those who proudly proclaim the death of the author sustain their own reputations on other people's creative works, I nevertheless spent seven intensive graduate years learning how to do just that. Having chosen an academic career, professional survival meant that I had to publish early, often — and in academic journals, and to turn out clean, well-lighted papers that followed their conventions[4] — this was oddly satisfying. (I thought of comparing the pleasure at seeing the stack of resulting publications to the joy of encountering a pile of crisp starched and ironed shirts, but since ironing ranks second only to washing floors on my scale of detested household tasks, I eschew that simile.) Little did I realize how inimical duty and its somber handmaidens would be to the creativity I also craved. Nor could I have known that it would take a quarter century to shake off their stultifying influence. However, this devotion to duty did earn me tenure at each of the four institutions involved in the major professional moves of a peripatetic dual-career marriage.

And All That Jazz: One Foot on the Tightrope, the Other in Midair . . .

Tenure, for the timid, cannot be overrated. This safety net offers the security to venture out on the tightrope of creativity; of risk; of labor-intensive innovative

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[3] Sylvia Plath was an accomplished and well-rewarded writer of 26, married to poet Ted Hughes, when she addressed these issues in her *Journal*, "What if our work isn't good enough? We get rejections. Isn't this the world's telling us we shouldn't bother to be writers? How can we *know* if we work hard now and develop ourselves we will be more than mediocre? Isn't this the world's revenge on us for sticking our neck out? We can never know until we've worked, written. We have no guarantee we'll get a Writer's Degree. Weren't the mothers and businessmen right after all? Shouldn't we have avoided these disquieting questions and taken steady jobs and secured a good future for the kiddies?" Whereas the more faint of heart would have taken the steady job, this determined poet asserts the creed of courage and commitment that even the most talented writers need, "Not unless we want to be bitter all our lives. Not unless we want to feel wistfully: What a writer I might have been, if only. If only I'd had the guts to try and work and shoulder the insecurity all that trial and work implied" (270). Plath's sense of insecurity is justified, even though at the time she wrote she had been publishing her poetry regularly and in respected places.

[4] Oops, another footnote. Although I walked the walk, I have always refused to talk the talk, eschewing academic jargon in favor of more engaging but no less precise language, as I hope this essay has illustrated. In the spirit of judicious restraint, here I also eschew a five page peroration on the subject.

projects short or long term with the assurance that if all else fails, if no one loves the new work as its proud creator does, the job will still be there. Even after I am safely tenured and understand this intellectually, I don't feel it in my writer's heart, and continue to crank out the conventional academic papers–partly as a way to demonstarte to my colleagues (I am department chair for a while and have to set an example) that composition studies is a serious, tough minded discipline, and not for intellectual wimps. Then, in 1987, an existential crisis impels me to take the dangerous step of coming out as a human being in my writing. Terror makes me reckless.

My husband, Martin, a professor of social work, cheerfully healthy for the three decades of our marriage, has begun waking up with headaches that within a short time keep him (and soon me) up throughout the night. Their escalation takes him from the dentist to the internist to the local ENT specialist and finally, as his vision dims, to an ophthalmological surgeon at the state's major medical center. By this time I am chauffeuring him everywhere he needs to go, for he cannot see well enough to drive, though with blind faith he continues to teach. On the long journeys to and from the hospital, to another far distant hospital where the emergency CAT scan is performed, and back again, we are listening to *Barchester Towers* on tape. I cannot now remember anything about the plot, or even the characters, but I remember hanging onto every syllable of every sentence, sensuous and sinuous and spellbinding, as if our lives depend on not missing a thing. We even rewind the tape to recapture the glory of the best lines again and again. And I know when we see the films of the scan, the clenched-fist white spot under Martin's right eye, bigger than a golf ball, pressing against his brain and diagnosed as a malignant brain tumor, that I have to write about what means most to me at this moment and to write in the vertical pronoun so skinny that there's no place to hide. Weighed in the balance of life and death, there is little to lose if this new work, fully human but incorporating just as precisely controlled support and sense as any of my formal academic writing, doesn't get published. But it does, all of it, and in better and better places. I complicate the intellectual and aesthetic demands of every task at hand, cutting back and forth between narrative and analysis, illustration and argument, just for the delight of being out there on the tightrope. In the grave act of writing I defy gravity, ever experimenting. I forget about the safety net; I just need to cling to the sounds and the sentences.

Oh, I still write academic documents, keeping the arabesques and pirouettes, the jokes and puns and perorations out of the innumerable reports, memos, reviews, grant applications, letters of recommendation necessary to make the academic wheels go round. These days it sounds to me as if I am ventriloquizing these works, trying to subdue (though never to suppress) my human voice that might distract the readers from the necessary work at hand. A little razzle, but no dazzle.

But creative nonfiction, free form essays, on academic topics and well beyond, are where my heart is now. Why did it take fifty years to start to play, to work so hard, to have so much fun? This is a rhetorical question, answered by the piece you are reading now. Yet aspiring writers, in as well as out of academia, should not feel obliged to wait half a lifetime to write their heart's desire. They should not need the compulsion of a major crisis, or perhaps even the security of tenure, to lay their lives on that taut line. Chill the devotion to academic Duty, and, if the writing is good enough, the rest will follow.

"If the writing is good enough." There's the rub, exacerbated by the salt-in-

the-wound of George Bernard Shaw's sage observation, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." We who teach fear that we "cannot." Yet if creative writing is important to us—and it is, or we wouldn't be English teachers—we should at least give ourselves the chance to write in the genres that attracted us to the profession in the first place. This means getting in touch with our Inner Writer, turning off the nay-saying voices (at least for awhile), and allowing enough high quality time to develop our work. In a life full of demands and distractions—and whose isn't?—we may have to carve out the time in half-hour or hour long chunks, no excuses, no postponements, when we can be isolated, alert, productive. If we keep this appointment with our writing even three times a week, over time the writing will add up, a collection of manuscripts born to be read—and validated— by competent, critical readers. Easy to say, hard to do, exhilarating to have done. Without persistence the work will not be written, and without rigor the writing will not be revised and re-revised until it is polished to professional luster. This compressed discussion makes the process sound too easy, the results too inevitable, though the qualities identified here—commitment, concentration, perseverance, and rigor—could readily be construed as the virtuous foundation of a productive life of any sort.

Some authors find sustenance, support, and solace for this long, often solitary process in writing groups, such as the celebrated one formed at Duke by Cathy Davidson, Jane Tompkins, Alice Kaplan, and Marianna Torgovnick. An informal jury of one's peers, these meet on a regular basis and thus provide deadlines as well as critical feedback, at whatever stages of the process the writer desires. I personally have found comparable groups either too argumentative or too soft, so I write alone and wait for a critique until the penultimate draft of any piece is done (commentary too soon, before I'm sure where I'm going, could derail the project). At that stage, with trepidation that has diminished only marginally over the years, I count on my husband, a prolific author and journal editor, and a couple of other reliable readers to read with meticulous acuity and stringent suggestions for improvement. Then I rework the piece again, perhaps several times, with more critical readings, still too easy a description.

Then it's time to submit the work, and wait. Our initial attempts, whether creative or critical, run a high risk of rejection. Acculturated to the demands of the seven deadly virtues, we are likely to interpret the rejections (even of our juvenilia) as proof that we lack talent, that our "writing is bad, conventional, sloppy, dull, dumb, offensive"—the first reason for rejection offered by Dave Smith, co-editor of *The Southern Review* (21). Indeed, Smith estimates that in an average year the journal receives "in excess of twenty thousand poems," of which he publishes the works of some forty-eight poets, many of which he has solicited from frequent contributors. (If Smith's co-editor, James Olney, publishes a comparable number, the odds of rejection are 200:1—not auspicious.) Yet that rejection may actually mean a number of possibilities other than bad writing, which Smith also identifies: "Writing is average; we have no time to teach improvement"; acceptable writing, wrong subject; "writing is good but spotty: subject undiscovered, unfocused, incomplete"; good writing, but wrong genre or wrong timing or too long; or—what we might fear most if we but knew it—"Writing is good but John Updike's, already in consideration, is better" (14-17).

Even if we were told any or all of these reasons, and they made us feel better, what should we do when the tenure clock is running? Should we continue to send

our work to literary magazines or turn to academic writing in hopes of better odds for publication? These are individual judgments, gambles. As we all know, there is an abundance of little magazines far less selective than *The Southern Review*, just as there are second, third, fourth tier academic journals whose acceptance rates are published annually in *MLA's Directory of Periodicals*. We can continue to write, continue to submit our work to the most hospitable publications if we choose not to start at the top and work down, keep a lot in circulation, persevere, and hope for the best. Unless we have been tone-deafened by deconstructionist or other critical jargon, if we write with intelligence, enjoyment, and rigor for, as Gertrude Stein says, "myself and strangers," it is likely that our work will be published. I am tempted to add the real-world reminder, "even if we have to do it ourselves," but of course that doesn't count.

Upon publication of one's creative writing, the writer gains stature, authority, a certain cachet. A new audience will appear, strangers drawn to become friends. These days, in addition to citations, I get fan mail—which I always answer. See for yourself, just write me at Lynn.Bloom@UConn.edu. In engaging my readers, I am never disengaged. I care about this writing as much as, well, life itself. This writing is so exhilarating, I would die if I could not do it.

Readers also want to tell me their stories, and to know about my life. Did this really happen? (Whatever it is, you bet it did.) And what happened then? Who would ever ask about the life of the writer behind a strictly academic essay? Who would care? So, did my husband survive? If you've read this far, you already know. Martin's just fine, thank you. The surgery removed the tumor, and the biopsy revealed it to be the most rare, and the most benign, of possibilities. With his new life, he has enabled mine as well, replete with a superabundance of lively sins. ⬠

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Shallow Literacy, Timid Teaching, and Cultural Impotence

David L. Wallace

As a discipline, we have known at least since we started reading translations of Bakhtin in the 80s that acts of literacy depend on much more than a set of linguistic decoding and encoding skills. Instead, speakers and listeners, readers and writers are in dialogue with other individuals, with their discursive histories, and with cultural values and institutions. In 1983, Shirley Brice Heath's seminal *Ways with Words* invited us to consider that literacy is always historically, socially, and culturally situated and that the dominant discourse practices in American schools can misinterpret and fail to engage the discourse practices of those who learn to speak in economically or racially marginalized communities such as Trackton and Roadville. A decade earlier, linguists such as William Labov and Geneva Smitherman helped us begin to see that low-prestige dialects of English such as Black English Vernacular had sophisticated grammars and were informed by a complex set of cultural values.

Yet in 1996 Lynn Z. Bloom could still write in a leading NCTE journal: "Yes, freshman composition is an unbashedly middle class enterprise" that rewards such values as self-reliance, responsibility, respectability, decorum, moderation and temperance, thrift, efficiency, order, cleanliness, punctuality, delayed gratification, and critical thinking (655). Yet as a profession we require our students to spend millions of dollars every year on prescriptive grammar and usage handbooks that rarely bother to nod to the complexities of language use in their rush to encourage students to write as if they are all aspiring *New Yorker* essayists. And, yet, as a discipline, we still embrace—in practice if not in theory—the Shaughnessy party-line that the best we can do is be culturally sensitive to students' diverse literacy backgrounds as we assimilate them to our understandings of academic and professional discourse.

Despite decades of scholarship that invite us to move beyond an understanding of literacy as more than a neutral set of basic skills, the discipline of rhetoric and composition remains largely impotent to challenge the dominant view of literacy because our teaching is timid, because in our composition programs, in our rhetoric classes, and in our disciplinary practice we fail to embrace the basic understanding of literacy as situated in our lives, in our students' lives, and in culture-at-large. Why are we so tentative? We know that privileged forms of discourse—including the academic discourse practices that give us status in our schools and our society—have contributed to the marginalization of women, people of color, working class people, people living in poverty, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and those physically and mentally abled in other than the

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expected ways. Yet we seem to be of two minds: prying open the rhetorical canon to include the previously ignored and silenced and yet also clinging to the forms of traditional argument and to handbook versions of standard usage as our guarantee to society-at-large that we have the right and the expertise to decide what constitutes acceptable discourse in the academy and which students have demonstrated sufficient fluency to be admitted to the ranks of professionals. I believe that we adhere to this almost schizophrenic duality because we are afraid to do otherwise and that—even though there are several reasons why this fear is rational—we must find ways to move beyond it.

One reason we have been slow to develop and embrace alternative forms of discourse is that we understand all too well that there are consequences to giving up our status as the purveyors of a single, definable privileged language because the academy and society-at-large expect us to provide this. Indeed, too many of our colleagues across our institutions see guaranteeing a minimum level of linguistic competence as our primary (if not our only) reason for existence. The situation we face is akin to that faced by postmodern feminists such as Chris Weedon, who argues that although getting beyond the notion of the objective, Cartesian self is critical for women, it is also dangerous because it involves giving up the possibility of a privileged position that most women have never achieved. Another reason we fear embracing alternative discourses is because it requires us to engage our students in a view of language that, in most cases, runs against their previous assumptions and educational experiences. As Laurie Grobman explains, creating a "postpositivist realism" in our classrooms involves helping our students move beyond "the paralysis of relativism" as well as "an uncritical understanding of multiculturalism" and toward "a more reflective and complex awareness of ethical issues and multiculturalism itself" (208). This is no easy task; it requires major changes in our pedagogy, giving up tried and true methods and moving into unfamiliar ground. Finally, a third fear is that engaging in such a journey will pull us too deeply in the personal. Our fear of a return to a naïve, romantic expressivism as well as our fear of getting drawn into endless counseling sessions during our office hours have kept us from embracing—in practice—our new view of rhetoric as situated, as embodied.

Put most simply, my points in this article are two: first, the personal is unavoidable in rhetoric and composition and, second, we have not seriously considered the ways in which we serve as a cultural force that preserves the status quo rather than challenging it. In the pages that follow, I develop these points by examining what I will refer to as *shallow literacy, timid teaching,* and *cultural impotence*. However, before I go any further, I must acknowledge three things. First, engaging in the kind of pedagogy I advocate in this piece is far from safe; it involves both personal and professional risk. Second, fomenting cultural change through pedagogy is a tricky business that must always be carried out in dialogue with the culture-at-large and within the specific constraints of the institutions that employ us. Indeed, getting beyond timid teaching requires continual articulation of what it means to teach and learn literacy; it means existing in the constantly shifting ground between serving simply as facilitators of the status quo and pushing the pedagogical envelope so far that we fail to offer our students the chance to develop culturally relevant discourse abilities. Third, as a tall, thin, white, male, middle-class, Ph.D.-holding, tenured professor, I am shielded from much (although not all) of the risk of engaging in bold teaching. Therefore, in

this article, I offer not only my version of traditional academic argument but also incidents from my teaching and from my life that illustrate what it means for me to engage in the pedagogical struggle that I recommend to others.

Shallow Literacy

As a discipline, we've identified a number of problems in our conception and practice of literacy. Jane E. Hindman argues "our professional discourse and practice are 'masculinist' and therefore confining" (98). Glynda Hull has documented how a view of literacy as simply the "texts that workers read and write" rather than as "the social relationships and activities that guide and influence the use of texts in a work environment" can lead to assumptions about immigrant workers that underestimate their abilities and the complexities of their work networks and can also result in production problems (382). Similarly, Resa Crane Bizzaro has documented the obstacles that teacher-scholars of color in composition have had in overcoming negative expectations about them during their schooling. Lisa M. Gonsalves has reported, "The Black male students I spoke with tended to describe faculty members as not caring at best and racist at worst" (436). Mark Mossman explores the complex ways that visible physical disability denies disabled people normality in college classrooms "through exclusion and othering" (655). And Linda Brodkey proclaims, "Composition courses are middle-class holding pens populated by students from all classes who for one reason or another do not produce fluent, thesis-driven essays of around five hundred words in response to either prompts designed for standardized tests or assignments developed by classroom teachers" (135).

Although some of these issues have only recently been raised (heterosexism and ableism), others (gender, race, and class) have been surfacing in the pages of our journals for decades. The question, then, is why have we been slow to develop alternative rhetorics and pedagogies? As I've already noted, composition teachers and writing program administrators (WPAs) do not have magic wands that can sweep away institutional constraints or instantly transform standard curricula. Indeed, a few hours of reading the WPA listserv makes it clear that composition specialists are engaged in active and, at times, contentious discourse with those who enforce institutional constraints at our teaching institutions. Yet beyond declaring that students have a right to their own language, we've made little progress transforming our discipline and its curriculum. I believe that one important reason for this failure is in our own investment in the status quo.

Some of us were born to linguistic privilege, growing up in houses where books abounded, NPR played on the radio, and parents led discussions of current events at the dinner table. Some of us were born to literacies of the working classes, of ethnic enclaves, or of immigrant bilingualisms, and we've worked hard to gain our linguistic privilege. Shouldn't others work as hard as we have? Some of us are men who got called on by our teachers more than our sisters did and who got called "honey" only by doting aunts bringing us plates of Toll House cookies with tall glasses of milk. Some of us have skin and hair and eyes whose colors and textures have never marked us a potential threat or as dismissable to strangers who have never even heard us speak. Some of us grew up watching movies in which we were invited to cheer as pale-faced cowboys and infantry men slaughtered savage Ind-yuns. Some of us have never been truly hungry or

spent a cold night without adequate shelter. Some of us are straight and have never had to translate the pronouns in the latest pop love song to make it relevant or sit at the receptions of siblings' weddings and fend off the inevitable when-will-we-be-attending-your-wedding questions from relatives who should know better but don't. Some of us bound up stairs two at a time and let our glance linger a millisecond too long on a curved spine or the blanket covering the atrophied legs of the person in the wheel chair passing us in the mall before we turn our heads.

Some of us are tenured professors who step away from our reading and writing to teach overcrowded first-year composition courses only when the calls of smaller sections of graduate students, upper-division English majors, or honors students leave us an awkward hole in our teaching schedules. Some of us are writing program administrators who must pretend that we can achieve a curricular consistency which guarantees that all students will meet some minimum set of requirements despite the fact that most of our teaching staffs are under-paid and turn over every couple of years. Some of us are temporary-adjunct-visiting-lecturer-instructors or brand-spanking-new teaching assistants who are crammed into trailer offices on the far side of campus and carry home bags bulging with student papers.

Although we are very different people who engage in literacy instruction under divergent circumstances, we are all invested in a culture and in an educational system that marks our language use with enough privilege that we are paid to pass on our understanding of language to others. We are invested with the right to judge others' literacy abilities and to grant or withhold the cultural capital of grades and course credit. Any attempt to move to a deeper notion of literacy in our theory and pedagogy must—among other things—involve us facing our own self interest and expecting disruption not only in the inequities that are too often invisible in dominant culture but also in our practice of rhetoric and pedagogy: disruption in our own classrooms, departments, and universities.

I'm more tired than usual as I walk through the rows of computers and students sliding back and forth on wheeled chairs to look at e-mails and drafts. I'm tired because I don't sleep well with Paul any more, tired because I got up early with him, followed him across town to his work exit and then drove on as the pale pre-dawn light grew bright on miles of recently emptied fields to the quiet street and my little house where I showered and ate cinnamon rolls and scribbled in my journal before heading off to meet my students.

"Before we start the workshop today, I want to read you something I wrote at breakfast this morning." I walk up and down the aisle, folding back the stiff cover of my journal as the students settle in.

"We can't have sex."

"Don't worry; it's not going to happen."

"No," I put my hand on the smooth skin of his cheek and turned it gently toward me, "I mean, if we had sex it would be forever."

But it's not forever; I knew this morning when I woke beside Paul's long body that it was over, that I wasn't in love with him any more, that I could finally let go. I need more; I need someone who will not hold back, who will trust himself to me.

The mists laid heavy on the fields this morning, cold fog dampening the wheels of hay parked on the stubbled ground. The sun hung low in the haze, pale purple,

streaked with gray cirrus, rising to ruby red, tangerine, and orange. My love is gone and yet I still feel his kiss, wet hungry lips, tongue pressed in and down and then softer, tender touch that won't risk lingering.

The room is quiet now. "Despite all the things I've shared with you this semester, reading you this journal entry is risky. It makes a part of my life that I'm just now figuring out concrete in ways that probably makes some of you uncomfortable. My hands are shaking a bit. The next starting point that I'm going to give you asks you to take a risk, to get out of your comfort zone. Excuse my French, but fuck the grade. Write your body. As always, you don't have to write on this starting point, but, if you do, consider writing about something you haven't dared to say before."

Timid Teaching

If we begin to understand that literacy learning always entails negotiation of identity in culture (even when that negotiation remains largely invisible to the participants), then we may finally have a real basis for moving beyond our timid teaching. By *timid teaching* I mean the kinds of pedagogical practice that treat language learning as if it can and should be divorced from who and what we are as teachers and students and where skills and heuristics are treated as if they will automatically lead to socio-cultural and economic empowerment. If we are to move beyond this status quo, we must immediately give up the idea that we know in any absolute sense what is best for our students. This is not to say that we have nothing of value to offer our students; rather, as Richard E. Miller has argued, "It is of paramount importance, I believe, to begin where students are, rather than where one thinks they should be" (402).

As my coauthor, Helen Rothschild Ewald, and I have argued elsewhere, true mutuality in learning occurs at the intersections of students' knowledges and experiences and teachers' representations of disciplinary knowledges and of their own experiences. However, accepting students where they are cannot be a grudging admittance of practicality (where else is there to start if one really cares about learning?). Rather, we must embrace not only these variable starting points but also variable end goals. That is, we cannot simply sigh heavily in recognition that we have a wide range of students to try and turn into the objective, detached, dispassionate authors that many of us were schooled to be. Instead, we must be ready to support our students' attempts to go places that we cannot yet conceive of, and we may need to admit to our students, to our colleagues, and to ourselves that, in some cases, we don't even know exactly how we will help our students get to these new ends.

So then how do we do things differently? How do we escape the phallocentrism that has been entwined with rhetoric for 2500 years? One way that the scholars and teachers who I've been reading lately frame this problem is in reconsidering the goals for rhetoric and composition courses. For example, Susan Wells has explored what it means to train students to speak and write in the "public sphere." She borrows this term from Habermas, arguing that public discourse "is a complex array of discursive practices, including forms and writing, speech, and media performances" and argues further, "[S]peakers and writers come to the public with a weight of personal and social experience" (328). For Wells the ultimate goal of a composition course is not to prepare students to take up the

roles that dominant culture has set up for them, nor is it limited to the kinds of critical awareness often proposed as the ultimate good in cultural studies approaches. Rather, she argues that composition pedagogy must address the issue of "how students can speak in their own skins to a broad audience, with some hope of effectiveness" (334). She argues that we must move beyond the binary of assimilation or resistance to a place that helps students develop voices that are authentic in the sense that those voices are explicitly connected to who the students are and reflect their unique social, cultural, and historical backgrounds as well as being cognizant of the values and constraints of public spheres in which students speak and write.

Translating the desire for pedagogy that helps students resist assimilation and develop voices that are connected in concrete ways to their unique backgrounds involves risks at various levels. First, as I have already noted, such pedagogical goals may run contrary to institutional expectations for composition courses and programs. Second, engaging in pedagogy that explores alternatives to traditional academic and professional discourse also involves risk for our students. As Russell K. Durst argues, many of our students come to composition courses with a "pragmatic orientation," wishing "to learn a form of literacy that will both make their lives easier and help them to become more successful in their careers" (3). Thus, many students may not see the relevance of examining the underlying power relations in culture and language or of developing alternative discourse strategies and hybrid voices that address those new understandings. Third, if we are to get beyond timid teaching and into the difficult business of developing and teaching alternative forms of discourse, we must also recognize that we are intervening in ways that will expose our own and some of our students' participation in systems of privilege that are inherently unfair. Such pedagogy will not always feel safe.

Two days after I read my journal entry to the class, I pick up a journal response from Timothy in which he tells me that sex is not an appropriate topic for class discussion and that he was disappointed in himself for not walking out of class in protest to my journal. I'm not surprised because Timothy has been challenging me all semester arguing that I must admit that Truth exists even if I believe that the only truth is that there is no truth and that I should accept his re-examination of Bible verses about homosexuality as looking at more than one side of an issue. I'm angry, and I want to write back to Timothy, telling him that he's missed the point—that he's misreading me through the inaccurate stereotype of gay men as promiscuous sluts who deserve to get AIDS. Instead, I write in the margin, "But, Timothy, the point of the piece was that we didn't have sex." The rest of the journals are better, most of the students understood, even appreciated, the risk I took, but Timothy's response stays with me. I wonder what he will write on the course evaluation that my department chair will eventually read. I wonder if I've gone too far this time, shared too much, been too self-indulgent.

I'm through the journals now and begin the thicker stack of essays from the class. Beth writes in her self evaluation: "As soon as I was given the invitation to 'fuck the grade,' this popped into my head almost instantaneously—I knew I had to go out on a limb and write this." In her paper, she writes:

> *I'm eighteen now. Eighteen and eight months to be exact, and I've finally resigned myself to the fact that my breasts will never grow. This does not, by any stretch of the truth, mean that I*

now regard my extremely small chest with even moderate acceptance….

Most people do not want to hear a 110-pound girl say she dislikes her body. Most people would be thanking the powers that be if they could eat like I do and never gain weight. But most people do not find themselves standing in front of a full-length mirror with a pile of rejected shirts scattered on the floor around them, running late and in tears because they hate the way their chest looks in each and every one….

I place the brunt of the responsibility for my self-revulsion on my own thin shoulders, but I do not deny that the culture in which I live contributes as well….

My big brother lifts all the time and has developed massive pecs: "I've got bigger boobs than you," he jokes. I feign laughter….

In my most rational moments, I try to convince myself that the size of my chest does not devalue me as a person, but it is near impossible to step back from this body I am in to think objectively. I run stand sleep dance eat listen think feel live breathe in this body; it is more than just a shell encasing the person inside, and my insecurity about it has become an integral part of who I am.

I sit staring at Beth's paper, stunned by her honesty, flattered at her trust, shocked that such doubts live in the bright young woman I could always count on to challenge the straight, white, middle-class, dripping-with-privilege guys in the class when they spout off about how everyone can succeed if they just try hard enough. I read back through Beth's paper, gratified to see her using some of the techniques we've worked on in her previous papers but also recognizing that my biggest contribution to this paper was simply to open the door and get out of the way. I give Beth an outstanding evaluation—the first one I've ever given without asking for at least some revision.

Beyond Cultural Impotence

Shallow literacy, timid teaching, and cultural impotence are of a piece in our discipline. They are bound together in our views of who we are as people, as teachers, and as theorists that allow us to hide in our professionalism and in our surety that our liberal politics and our marginalized position in the academy means that we cannot possibly be participating in systems of domination. In one sense, we can hardly avoid some participation in systems of oppression because we are caught up in a culture in which higher education serves a gatekeeping function, and I don't mean to underemphasize the difficult work of challenging the institutional constraints that we must engage to create real change. However, I contend that rhetoric and composition (and perhaps English Studies and liberal pedagogy as well) has remained largely impotent in its attempts to address the inequities in culture-at-large because we have failed to engage fully in a new understanding of our educational mission that entails a substantive reexamination of the inherent colonialism in the Greco-Roman, Western European tradition of rhetoric that we hold so dear and because we refuse to embrace a pedagogy of the personal, a pedagogy of risk.

Creating a more inclusive understanding of rhetoric is a difficult business that will not be accomplished overnight. Fortunately, the (relatively) recent work of feminist rhetoricians, queer rhetoricians, and rhetoricians of color have provided a number of important starting points for such work. I'm thinking here (among others) of Virginia Woolf's calls for women to kill the angel of the house, of Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of sex and gender, and of Scott Lyons's argument that the accounts of experiences of American Indians in boarding schools illustrate the problematic relationship that American Indians have had to English literacy. Lyons argues for "rhetorical sovereignty" as a new goal for literacy instruction, which he defines as "the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and language of public discourse" (449-50). Lyons's notion of rhetorical sovereignty suggests that one important and immediately useful starting point for exposing the imperialism inherent in our disciplinary practice and pedagogy of rhetoric is to acknowledge our continuing participation in systems of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism. In the terms I'm using in this article, Lyons calls us to examine how our rhetorical practice is shallow because it is one-dimensional, monocultural, and, as a result, our timid pedagogy may serve as an impediment to our students' development of rhetorical sovereignty, leaving them unprepared to engage in the difficult business of contributing to cultural transformation.

One important way that we can begin to break this pattern of white, straight, male, middle-class, Western dominance of rhetoric is to recognize that being fluent in the prestige dialects of English and commanding the usual literacy practices of the academy and professions will not be enough to meet the demands of teaching deeper literacies. Many of us need to retool, to learn to speak and write in dialects and discourse practices that are new to us. In addition, we will also need to change our graduate curricula. Most notably, we must recognize that the Western tradition of rhetoric—which we have revered as much for its rigor and longevity as for the disciplinary status we gained by reclaiming it—serves as a powerful remnant of colonialism. We must not only deconstruct this tradition to reveal its misogyny, its complicity with Christianity in silencing other expressions of spirituality, and its embrace of enlightenment notions of knowledge to the exclusion of other ways of knowing, but we must also change our courses. We must see that we have multiple heritages: as Gloria Anzaldúa counsels, "Let's all stop importing Greek myths and Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent" (1593). Opening the canon of rhetoric means hard work and hard choices. We cannot fall back on our familiar courses and on the theorists covered in our comps whose books already sit on our shelves. Including Ida B. Wells means less time for George Campbell; opening ourselves and our courses means loss of things familiar and loved.

Moving beyond timid teaching and cultural impotence means being in continual dialogue about the substance of our curricula at the institutional level with administrators who will likely need help in getting beyond shallow notions of literacy, at the disciplinary level with our colleagues whose help each of us needs in broadening our limited understandings of literacy, and at the classroom level with our students, many of whom will not immediately see the need for literacy beyond traditional academic and workplace practices. Of course, there are many kinds of rhetorical and pedagogical strategies that can be used in such

dialogues, but my focus in this article is on the use of the personal. Indeed, I included Timothy's and Beth's responses to my journal entry because I wanted to put the most controversial instance of my use of the personal in my classes in recent years on the table for disciplinary discussion. Therefore, in the few pages I have remaining, I turn from discussing the need for curricular change at the disciplinary level to the need for each of us to develop a pedagogy of the personal, a pedagogy of risk in our own classrooms.

First, I want to make it clear that I am not counseling that everyone should make the kinds of personal revelations that I did in Timothy and Beth's class. Engaging in a pedagogy of the personal will mean different things for different people. There is no simple answer to the question of which teachers should take which kind of risks, but recently I have been able to articulate three questions that anyone who wants to move beyond timid teaching should consider.

Question #1: *To what extent do you see the need for alternative rhetorics, for hybrid discourse practices?*

I considered this question directly for the first time when I read Sidney Dobrin's chapter in a recent collection about alternative discourse (see Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell). In the chapter, Dobrin wonders about the usefulness of designating some discourses as alternative or hybrid when, from a theoretical stance, "we must understand that all discourse is hybrid" (46). I saw Dobrin's point immediately: each of us constructs our own versions of discourse based on our unique set of interactions with culture. Yet Dobrin's point angered me, too, because it seemed to me that he was reducing alternative rhetoric to such considerations as whether or not he should submit his chapter "with the Works Cited page on the first page" because when he served as editor of JAC "the first thing I would read was the Works Cited page to see what the author was working with—an alternative way of reading" (54-55). Dobrin's argument bothered me because he seemed to be treating alternative patterns of discourse as the flavor of the month, as something that he could take or leave, something that he didn't need. As I examined my response to Dobrin's chapter, I realized that for me writing and teaching hybrid genres was more than just a practical means of expanding my own and my students' writing repertoires. Instead, I was teaching myself and trying to teach my students to take up a new kind of authorship that called us to narrate ourselves against the cultural forces that had formed us. This realization led me to a further question.

Question #2: *What is your experience with systemic difference?*

Dobrin's chapter also angered me because it failed to account for that fact that some of us have been systematically silenced because of our race, class, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, age, religion, lack of traditional physical abledness, or mental/emotional struggles. Perhaps he would understand the need for alternative discourses better if he had been called a "fag" in a high school locker room as I was or if one of his composition students had written that while just about everyone belongs in his circle of humanity, the first people who do not are homosexuals because of their "sick and perverted acts." After my anger passed, I realized two things that are relevant here. First, if it is true that Dobrin has not personally experienced systemic marginalization (and I realize that it is dangerous to assume he has not based on what he reveals in this one chapter), then he may indeed not see the pressing need for alternative discourses that is crystal clear to me every time I watch a movie in which men only kiss women or hear a benefits counselor refer to "spousal benefits." Second, my willingness to share oral and

written instances of marginalization with my classes serves as an important tool for helping them see what it means to speak back to a cultural narrative that defines one in problematic ways, and Dobrin may not have such a tool to use.

The underlying issue that this example speaks to is who can or should engage in pedagogy that uses personal risk to help students see the need for alternative discourses and models the process of finding voices that can speak back to patterns of cultural inequity. For pragmatic reasons, I am sorely tempted to propose that only those who've experienced systemic oppression by culture in some form and who can stand back from those experiences and analyze them with some insight should attempt such pedagogy. If teachers have not lived through experiences of oppression, I worry that some might use their classes as therapy sessions without considering the benefit to students, without connecting the experiences they share to systems of oppression in substantive ways. Worse, I worry that some people might use their experience to unintentionally reinforce sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and the like. And so a part of me says, "don't do it unless you know what you're doing."

But another part of me says "ignorance is no excuse." This other part of me remembers my own stumbling first attempts to understand how to make my struggles with oppression through language relevant to my students. It also remembers the work it took for me to begin understanding the struggles faced by students of color on predominantly white campuses (see Wallace and Bell) and the many hours I spent reading feminist theory and talking to my women colleagues, students, and friends to begin understanding gender issues. This part of me doesn't want to let anyone off the hook because language cannot be other than socially, culturally, and historically situated and because the broad social issues of race, class, gender, sexual identity, and physical and mental abledness are embodied by our students and ourselves in our classrooms even if we are not aware of them. This other part of me hears Jacqueline Jones Royster explaining that if we hope "to dismantle the mythology of rightful stronghold and invading hordes," then we must see literacy instruction as "a people-driven enterprise" which means that we must "pay attention to who people are in the arena, to their personal, social, institutional, and public locations; to students as subjects in the classrooms, not objects" (26). This other part of me recognizes that none of us has arrived and that engaging in the struggle to understand more is the heart of responsible pedagogy.

Question #3: *What are your motives for sharing the personal?*

To be honest, this is the hardest question for me to answer. Sharing my writing and myself with my students has become such a natural part of my pedagogy that, as I was drafting this article, I didn't even pose the question of whether or not teachers should do so until the responses of friends and journal reviewers raised the issue of whether I had gone too far in sharing my journal entry with Timothy and Beth's class. One anonymous reviewer for a journal that rejected an earlier version of this article cited my pedagogical decision as a clear "abuse" of power, arguing that I was unfairly using my students as a captive audience for a review of my life. Another reviewer suggested that this article performed an important therapeutic function for me and that he or she would be interested in reading my next article, the one I would presumably be able to write now that I'd worked through these emotions. A third, more supportive reviewer reasoned that because my students "were forced to hear, in public" my journal entry about Paul,

reading it to them crossed a line and became "incestuous and aggressive, seductive."

These responses genuinely surprised me because—even though I knew my choice to read that journal entry to the class was risky—I presumed that it would be read by my colleagues in the field as an act of bravery. The week before that morning in class, I had been reading Hélène Cixous, and I saw myself as following her advice to women (and men) to write their (our) bodies—I felt like the woman who Cixous describes as gaining a public voice by throwing "her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true" (1528). It should have been no surprise to me that others read my recounting of that pedagogical moment differently than I did, that they resisted my neat and self-congratulatory reading, but it surprised me nonetheless.

I realize now that part of my surprise at these negative responses is because I presumed that it was natural for writing to have a therapeutic effect for both teachers and students and that the alternative to timid teaching is a pedagogy of risk. I am not arguing here that we should try risky things in our classrooms just for the purpose of being outrageous or entertaining or that we should force our students to listen to accounts of our personal lives on a daily basis. Because of the institutional power that we have to make our students into captive audiences, there is a real danger of abuse and, as Timothy's response illustrates, of misinterpretation. Given these dangers, wouldn't it be more prudent to remain detached, neutral, and objective? My answer is an emphatic no because literacy is not neutral and safe and because teachers cannot ask students to engage in a pedagogy of risk unless they do so themselves. Of course, pedagogical risk should be taken thoughtfully. For example, I share as many as half a dozen of my pieces with my students in the course of a semester. Before I use one of my own pieces, I ask the same questions that I ask about the many professionally published and student writings that I use in class: what does this piece show about writing techniques and what does it show about what it meant for this person to take authorship? However, at some point, usually past the midpoint of the semester, I make it a point to share something new with my students, often something that no one else has read yet and always something that I'm unsure of. My purpose in using such pieces in my classes is to allow my students to see that I am a writer who knows firsthand what it means to take risks and to create a cultural space in my classroom where they can do likewise.

I sit at a table in my favorite lunch place on a Saturday afternoon alternating spoonfuls of broccoli/cheddar soup with bites of my cinnamon crunch bagel. I'm drawn into the draft of the masters thesis I'm reading. The author, Jill Dopf, relates the story she's been told of her mother—pregnant with Jill—happily opening presents at her baby shower until she notes the funny gait of her mother-in-law's walk and the slight curve of her spine as she leans to pick up a plate. I read on. Jill's mother is telling her that her father won't be able to pull Jill on her sled any more and that she shouldn't ask why. Jill goes to cheerleading camp where she learns that she can't straighten her arms out the way the other girls do.

My stomach rumbles and I spoon up now cold soup as I read of Jill watching her younger sister develop the full breasts and hips that she will never have. I'm standing with Jill in front of a full-length mirror in a department store as she

holds up prom dresses against her tiny frame when a loud laugh distracts me. Annoyed to have my concentration interrupted, I turn toward the source of the noise and see a pale, white-haired boy with thick glasses and facial features that seem too mature for his tiny frame. "Not an albino," I think as I notice his blue eyes. He shuffles across the floor, smiling widely and holding his mother's hand. "He doesn't have the heavy Mongoloid features; no braces, so it's not muscular dystro—" I looked down at Jill's text and blush, ashamed at the thoughts that ran through my head too quickly to verbalize, at my glance that lingered too long.

Jill writes of her nervousness as she drives hundreds of miles to meet the woman she has been exchanging e-mail messages with for weeks—the only other person she knows with the same rare form of muscular dystrophy that Jill inherited from her father and grandmother. I see her through Jill's eyes as a woman adored by her husband, as the mother of a beautiful child, as the center of a set of family and friends who no longer see her as diseased and different. She is older than Jill and less physically able, dependent on a pacemaker to keep her heart beating, and she knows that she will never see her daughter graduate from high school. And Jill makes me see her beauty.

Another loud laugh pulls me up from the text. The little boy and his family sit two booths away. The grown-ups are finishing the last bites of their sandwiches, and the boy is standing on the seat of the booth, leaning out in the aisle, calling out to the people standing in line. He, too, is beautiful, straining against the wood wall, delighted by the occasional returned smile, unaware of the frowns that move from him to his parents when his attention has moved elsewhere. Suddenly I want to put my body between the boy and the line, to warn him: "Don't let us change your beauty; don't let us pathologize you with our abled stares." I want to tell him that he is beautiful, but my guilt is too fresh and so I sit ignorant and impotent but resolved to face my complicity in ableism, to retrain my gaze, to find ways to identify and address ableism as I have sexism, classism, racism, and homophobia in my classes, in my life.

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Listening: Beyond Telling to "Being" What We Want To Teach

Roben Torosyan

We must be the change we wish to see.
—(Gandhi Institute scr. 1)

I want to offer readers what I have found to be the single most powerful classroom practice for encouraging deep listening and understanding and a way to explore misunderstandings as they occur "live" while teaching. In our culture of sensational sound bites and polarized arguments in the popular media, we see few actions and behaviors that aim at self-reflection and open-minded communication. Given this, I was pleasantly surprised in the weeks after 9/11 when I noticed fellow New Yorkers shoving each other less in the subway. People generally treated each other more gently than usual. Some friends even discussed international affairs more than before. Eventually, however, there was a change, captured by a wry *New Yorker* cartoon that November: one woman says to another, "It's hard, but slowly I'm getting back to hating everyone" (Kaplan). Such a return to normalcy reflects not only "our difficulty keeping our minds fixed on the sufferings of people who live on the other side of the world" (Nussbaum 12), but a lack of practice in empathy generally, even close to home.

When people disagree, few know how to empathize with or understand, authentically and humbly, beliefs they strongly oppose. Students in particular come to college naturally preoccupied with their own opinions, having had little practice or facility in imagining ones that counter their own (Baxter Magolda). They also come thinking dualistically, in terms of right and wrong answers, seeing issues in black and white, with little nuance and much gross simplification of the complexity of life, almost as a necessity of where they are "at" in their development (Perry). Hence, students exhibit a lack of awareness of their own preconceptions and of multiple points of view. At best, they learn "reflective judgment," the skill of "holding and defending firm points of view without exhibiting intolerance of other points of view" (King and Kitchener 254). Even such student development rhetoric, however, can privilege arguing over "listening," and mere "tolerance" of views over actively connecting with the other end of any communication.

Despite these glaring issues in education and society at large, composition and communication curricula and pedagogy traditionally focus on reading and writing more than on the act of empathic reflection. The ability to listen to and fully understand another is rarely taught in classroom discussions, as "the

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dominant trend in our field has been to follow the lead of popular culture and naturalize listening—to assume it is something that everyone does but no one need study" (Ratcliffe 196). Advancing thinking requires that people work regularly to understand genuinely—more than simply assume they understand or, worse, simply not address—others' ways of framing issues.

The question for me has been how to provide practice, concretely and demonstrably, in such acknowledging of others' views. Beyond listening, I find that learning and understanding require trust building in which people self-disclose to a degree—discuss mistakes, admit what they don't know, reflect on their thinking—in order to create a culture that emphasizes learning from experience (Torosyan, "Motivating"). In my, albeit limited, experience in six years of college teaching, I have found such trust-building most effective when the instructor also self-discloses, modeling a kind of "confessional consciousness" that an assiduous learner needs for life. As teachers of communication, we can get beyond merely telling people to listen better and instead actually embody or "be" precisely the kind of self-examining listeners we want our learners to become.

In answer, I propose using the process of "Group Empathy," which has participants practice active listening with opposing views as they arise spontaneously during discussion. Akin to "sayback" (Elbow and Belanoff), the idea is not necessarily to sympathize, but to empathize, which in Carl Rogers' definition means "to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition" (3). The exercise splits a class into two groups, Pros and Cons, on an issue. Each group expresses its views, but unlike in most "debates," listeners must paraphrase or say back the other's points to the other's satisfaction as follows (for a 90-minute session):

1. **Find a Controversial Topic.** (10-15 mins.) Ask "how many are for" and "how many against" issues like: abortion, death penalty, invading Iraq, gay and lesbian marriage, polygamy, legalizing marijuana, assisted suicide, parental spanking of children, affirmative action, etc. Neutral or undecided participants serve as "observers" of the process, reporting what they notice afterwards. (I usually press for topics until we find one where at least a third is "pro," another third "con," and the size is roughly equal.)

2. **Caucus.** (7 mins.) Break people out into groups to hear their members' reasons (no spokesperson). Observers listen in. (I keep this brief, reminding all that the important part is the process yet to come.)

3. **Share.** (7 mins.) Regroup. Ask all Pros to express their reasons one person at a time.

4. **Listen and Acknowledge.** (10 mins.) Ask Cons to listen and only afterwards "say back" what they heard in their own words (as necessary, I remind people not to contradict, challenge, or interrogate—only acknowledge and ask questions for clarification). Pros correct misunderstandings, and Cons "acknowledge" what they missed until the Pros say they feel heard out and understood.

5. **Pause to Reflect.** (15 mins.) All share a) how they felt during the process, b) what made acknowledging difficult, c) what they noticed, thought, or learned. (I focus reflections on the process as opposed to topic content and call especially on observers.)

6. **Repeat Steps 3 and 4.** (17 mins.) Cons share opinions; Pros listen and acknowledge.

7. **Reflect and Sum Up.** (20 mins.) Finally, all note other emotional reactions, methods used to listen to and understand opposing views, and any other insights.

While similar to "structured controversy" (Johnson and Johnson) and "constructive controversy" (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith), this process does not make participants reverse roles and argue the other side's points. Instead, the focus is on testing whether one has understood someone to the other's satisfaction, a test that is all too often missing from most communicative contexts where debate usually runs roughshod over dialogue.[1]

Letting Our Mistakes Be the Lesson

Often the exercise seems most effective if I am willing to shift my own teaching plan as events unfold "live" during discussion, sometimes admitting my own struggles as they arise. I learned this the hard way when I reviewed a video recording of a Group Empathy session that I taught.[2] One student (pseudonym John) opposed the whole exercise, complaining, "I feel the whole thing with this-this empathy is-is very *unnatural* and causes more stress than it—it relieves." The tape revealed that I had not fully attended to his protests, prompting him to object repeatedly.

> At the time, students chuckled at John's outburst. Frustrated, he responded:
>> Why is everyone laughing at me? I'm trying to be serious and make a serious point. Because when you're sitting there and we have to suppress our feelings in order to, like, sit there and logically evaluate what they said . . . we, like, we *know* what they said. Like, we both speak English here.

I later realized that because many students share John's concern that paraphrasing feels too mechanical, I should have explored his point rather than press my own. Instead, I only replied, "You've got some responses from people" and moved on quickly to other students' comments, possibly because I felt the student's protest threatened my teaching objectives. John then repeatedly raised his hand in protest. My own refusal to deal with a difference of opinion, during a discussion about dealing with difference, distorted the communication even further.

On this issue, Joseph Harris presents Min-Zhan Lu's case in the following way: "to begin to understand the other we must also question how our own positions in the culture filter what we can see and hear" (167). My position influenced me to selectively direct attention to other comments than John's resistant one. Only after the fact did I realize I missed an opportunity to use my erring self to illustrate the lesson. As Gandhi observed, "We but mirror the world" (241). When I see things wrong in students, things I want to fix perhaps by

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[1] I learned the particular method from my late mentor, Rachel Lauer; once Chief Psychologist of the New York City schools, Lauer used her work in the group dynamics movement to later develop an interdisciplinary educational framework, pedagogy, and curriculum aimed at human development (see also Torosyan, "Applying").

[2] All of the quotations of student statements in this essay are transcribed from classroom videotapes.

teaching, I might stop and look at myself first, to see in what ways I may be doing something similarly ill-advised. Gandhi entreats, "As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. . . . We need not wait to see what others do" (241).[3] To truly influence change, I may need to demonstrate that I am willing to change.

Returning to John's protest, had I noticed myself ignoring and deferring John's assertion, I might have admitted it and said:

> Wait, notice how even *I* had difficulty acknowledging John's
> point—because it was against something *I* cared about deeply.
> I wanted you to value empathy, so I worried that acknowledg-
> ing the point that this suppresses feelings might somehow ruin
> my position. What a challenge: how can we acknowledge an
> opposing view *without* necessarily losing our own?

Used this way, John's comment would not threaten my teaching objectives, but instead only invite critique of my point (thus enhancing students' critical thinking), and let me put my suggestion into practice (thus modeling empathy during real disagreement). As the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu instructs, "If you want to lead the people,/you must learn how to follow them" (ch. 66). To me this implies that, ultimately, the more I as a teacher can go with contrary or critical comments, trust my students, dare to slip up and be both learner and authority, the more they may gain courage to do likewise (Torosyan, "Motivating"). Diana Hacker has similarly invited us to embrace Taoist principles, whether we practice nonaction in conferencing with students, watch the timing for teachable moments, or settle for small victories in teaching. To begin, teachers can—as Devon Cook has shown—use their *own* "successful blunders" to get students to take more responsibility for their knowledge construction.

To truly examine my own practice along with my learners means treating learning not as "information" but as "transformation" (Mezirow). In particular, for me to learn from objections to my planned direction, I must teach with an "action orientation" in the spirit of feminist research that values "use of the situation-at-hand" (Fonow and Cook 2). Yet to run class "thinking on your feet" like this can be demanding, at least at first. "The most difficult challenge for the teacher in the open-ended seminar derives from the unpredictability of spontaneous human conversation," as Donald Finkel describes eloquently in his slim book *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* (41). In answer, the author recommends that professors tolerate unpredictability; use open-ended, probing questions; and all the while stay with their own sense of surprise and learning anew.

Teaching with such an open mind prompts the challenge, "how might teachers and students grasp what students want without the teacher prescribing what students 'really' want or should want?" (Lu and Horner 266). I struggle to push what I think is good for my students. Yet I can tell they are learning precisely when they "dis-identify" from pushing agendas themselves. In the classroom discussion, after another student, Jamie, gave her opinion, Zabeina realized:

> I didn't even *think* about that, and [after the process] I really
> *valued* what you said and it made me go back to the table and
> restructure my thinking on the whole situation . . . I was like

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[3] This is the original text from which this paper's epigram was later adapted and passed down by his family to the Gandhi Institute, according to Michelle Naef at the Institute.

"Oh, well lemme go back and think more, and think about it."

So you, your point, really got across.

Over time, Zabeina in fact grew gradually clearer in her informal expression and formal composition, possibly thanks in part to this focus on the other's counterpoint.

The structured imposition of "acknowledging" thus avoids the chaos into which "free debate" usually devolves. People eventually learn to *assume miscommunication* as the norm, to presume they have not understood another until the other actually says so. For instance, students often are surprised at how abbreviated the acknowledger's recollections are; they notice what bores or distracts others, as well as when brevity is needed. The speakers or writers then have no choice but to be more direct and pointed if they want their points acknowledged as intended. As they withhold judgment, even if only temporarily, they move from mere arguing and conflict to sharing and negotiating. They also get better at using repeated feedback to improve their clarity of expression. The more students listen to themselves as reflected back by an acknowledger, the more they know, too, what they are themselves trying to say, thus becoming better first editors of their own messages.

Frequently, students create a straw man representation of an opposing view, making it easier to tear down. But, after Group Empathy, they may summarize opposing arguments more effectively, not solely according to preconceptions, but as intended by the opposition. At one point in the classroom discussion, after Zabeina said how helpful it was to rethink her own view, Jamie argued heatedly, "I don't think it helped *me*, because I'm the type where I just wanted to get my point straight *across*, at the time." Zabeina implored, "But wouldn't you rather have your point *valued* and help the other person as opposed to just throw it out there?" This gave pause to Jamie, who eventually replied, "Being that you said it was valued more now, I can take that into consideration, and it could help me in the future. I won't interject so quickly. I learned a lesson." Because Zabeina first showed *she* was willing to reconsider, Jamie was more ready to reconsider in kind.

Over time, empathy can help ease people out of monological dogmatism towards greater attention to otherness and caring for fellow human beings as ends in their own right, more than mere means to win an argument or establish a power relation. I therefore find this activity can build trust most effectively if timed sometime after the course's initial sessions, but within the first third of the semester. Just the act of hearing someone else acknowledge one with care tends to instill mutual respect, as it did between Zabeina and Jamie. Especially when others disagree with one's view, a relationship can grow if both parties demonstrate willingness to put aside their judgments long enough to understand how the other sees things. Thus, if time is devoted especially to the "Pause to Reflect" and "Sum Up" steps, people can better deal with intense feelings they may experience in hearing views that offend them or with which they vehemently disagree.

Of course the paradox is that the exercise also arguably forces otherness to become assimilated. If an "other" is to be respected in its uniqueness, it should not be "relegated to a clearly understood place," but rather, "it must be faced and questioned—to the degree that the person or text maintains its otherness" (Haney 39). The more students actually acknowledge what they are hearing, the more they risk missing anything that cannot be reduced to an acknowledgment or

paraphrase. Before they can grasp this, however, students often experience frustration at losing their argumentative impulse due to the process. At another point in the discussion, students seconded John's complaints. As Jamie said, "Because it was so structured, I had to wait and by the time I waited, it felt like my argument wasn't *worth* saying because she had already proven what she wanted to prove." In effect, Jamie was being required to focus on the other more than on blurting out her point when it hit her. Understandably, however, she regretted the delay in reaction that the procedure forced, as it meant she might lose her nerve. At the time, another student was about to disagree in turn with Jamie, but I asked her to acknowledge Jamie's point. It might have been more productive had I said, "Yes, it's frustrating not to be able to counter the other person; it makes you forget or lose the force of your own point. Can you remember your original response while *restraining* it in order to first understand the other?" One goal of such an intervention would be to expand students' thinking to more than the either/ or reduction of "This is either a good or a bad practice." Eventually, they might even realize the inherent philosophical limit of the exercise: when you restate, you always obliterate something of the otherness you are acknowledging (or assuming to "know"). We should resist the tantalizing certainty of a final, "Ah, that's it, *that's* their point" and instead respect what may be ultimately irreducible about the other's meaning.

From Exercise to Live Disagreement among Faculty

Interestingly, faculty participants had a similarly dichotomous disagreement after they tried out the exercise at a conference. I had shortened and adapted the design to fit a forty-five-minute time slot. I simply asked participants to pair up, find an issue on which they genuinely disagree, and then acknowledge each other to their partner's satisfaction—with an observer watching each pair's process. People were very well behaved throughout, acknowledging the other before sharing their own views. After a time, I interrupted their mini-dialogues and brought us back together to examine what happened. Our discussion, however, began to feel to me all too safe and secure. People behaved very professionally and skillfully, suggesting many had possibly already used the method in their own instruction— especially likely given the popularity of sayback.

At one point, however, the discussion dynamic changed radically. It began when one professor noted, "I have my students do this too, and I try and have them do it without writing down what the other person is saying. That way they pay closer attention to the person." Her partner in the exercise disagreed, "Actually, I understand there's research that shows that people who doodle or write while they're listening often pick up *more* than those who don't." Shaking her head in disagreement with him, the first professor said she wants the students to practice being engaged in the moment, to indicate that they are listening. The man countered again, saying that just because they're writing doesn't mean they've disengaged—in fact, they might be more engaged than those who maintain eye contact.

It was perfect. We had a "live" disagreement—only all signs indicated the pair would simply repeat their own points of view "at" each other, or move on without teasing out each other's meaning. So I took a risk and asked, "Could I ask you to acknowledge each other's view here, now, in front of us? I know this

is difficult the way I'm putting you on the spot." Fortunately, miraculously, generously, the two participants agreed to do so.

Peter Elbow was himself a participant in the session, interjecting at this critical point: "This is a fascinating process that's going on right now." To me, what was so fascinating was examining a live dynamic as it evolved in front of us, beyond merely talking about empathy in principle. I wasn't sure asking the two participants to allow us to observe would even be productive, as they might feel like they were putting themselves on the line in an invasive way, or they might easily acknowledge each other's view without yielding anything interesting. I wondered, would they expose a real, if small, conflict in front of us? I hoped so, for, as Dewey claims, "no thought, no idea, can possibly be conveyed as an idea from one person to another. When it is told, it is, to the one to whom it is told, another given fact, not an idea" (159). It would help if I weren't simply "telling" my idea of empathy, and instead they would practice it in front of us. I speculated, also, whether they might find that behind their apparent quarrel of opinion might lay a deeper misunderstanding of what each meant in the first place and that their two points might not be mutually exclusive.

As they proceeded, the man tried to acknowledge the woman's point about the value of not writing while listening, but the woman indicated that her original point had not fully been heard. Likewise, the woman then tried to acknowledge the man's differing view in favor of writing while listening, but the man indicated that his view was not being fully understood by her either. We were witnessing at least two complex events: a) two people struggling to understand each other, and doing so in front of a group, but also b) a more admirable degree of actual *engagement* than often occurs between individuals in disagreement. Each may have been hindered, initially, by what Gadamer points to in meaning making: "If a person is trying to understand something, he will not be able to rely from the start on his own chance previous ideas" (238). Thus, our pair's first impulse may have been to assume meanings based on their own prior conceptions of each other's views, while true understanding would require them to be open to learning something new—to be "sensitive" to the "quality of newness" in the thing they are considering (238).

I find it so rare for faculty members like me to actually clarify whether we've understood one another, let alone our students. The very act for many would feel unnatural, until practiced to a point of fluency. It can also make one look unaware or vulnerable, affecting power dynamics adversely for the inquirer. Yet, if we as teachers do not model such inquiry ourselves, how effective can we be at eliciting insight, creating knowledge and meaning, and achieving greater depth and awareness?

Implications: Inevitable Bias, Ambiguity, and Democracy

Without truly empathizing with people day to day, outside of structured exercises, we may not reach our deepest objectives, be they in the classroom or in any communicative context. As Gadamer argues, "The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias" and to let whatever one is trying to understand "assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (238). Rather than immediately subject what I hear to my own judgment or assert my view in the foreground, I should be more receptive; I should at least sit with a new understanding and allow

it to work "against" my own view in my mind.

As a teacher, I want to practice what I preach, to be effective in evoking the change I want so dearly to see. I would like to teach less by words and more by lived example. This leads me to ask whether I can accept my inherent *inability* to escape my own bias or even simply to understand certain perspectives. This would require maintaining enough respect to know that, as Vygotsky found, "Direct communication between minds is impossible. . . . Communication can be achieved only in a roundabout way" (150). Despite my best efforts to understand, I must tolerate a core ambiguity in attempting to grasp any other view. Such awareness becomes crucial when dealing with "identity conflicts" where the very attempt to understand another entails a challenge to one's ethnicity, nationality, or other personal source of identification (Rothman), often creating an impasse that cannot be settled without extensive cycles of missteps and mediation.

Yet my deepest interest in empathy is, in fact, less in its impact exclusively on teaching any subject per se than on a far wider agenda, namely that of creating little democracies in every classroom (Lauer), and, beyond teaching, providing people with skill-building in the dying practice of respect worldwide (Sennett). The problem of listening and understanding is, as Vygotsky observed, not restricted to students: "It is not only the deaf who cannot understand one another but any two people who give a different meaning to the same word or who hold divergent views" (141). One wonders what impact a deep kind of empathy could have at the level of world leadership. If the global potential of such understanding was truly recognized, in conjunction with discoveries from game theory, such as the Prisoner's Dilemma (Wright) and other win/win, trust-building problem scenarios (Fisher, Ury, and Patton), possibilities for political progress might be unlimited, even in the face of inevitable power dynamics.

Finally, after observing many miscommunications in academe, I wonder whether a new way of "being" as teachers is needed on a grand scale. If the ultimate aim of education is improved self-reflection, understanding, and meaning-making, then we need to move well beyond constructed experiences that merely simulate or model what we want students to learn. As Dewey wisely diagnosed nearly a century ago:

> That education is not an affair of "telling" and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory. Is not this deplorable situation due to the fact that the doctrine is *itself merely told*? It is preached; it is lectured; it is written about. (38, my emphasis)

Rather than do more telling, we arguably need to try "being" differently (Duffy). In this spirit, I hope that others will increasingly use the live goings-on that occur constantly in our classrooms, when people are in a learning mode, particularly when there is genuine disagreement between participants. Such times are arguably the most teachable moments, when learners are keyed in and most engaged with what is going on and, therefore, most ready to consider other ways of thinking and being. 🖎

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Analyzing Dominant Cultural Narratives
of Religious Pluralism:
A Study of Oprah.com

Patricia Webb and Zach Waggoner

The cover of the January 8, 2001, issue of *Newsweek* features Oprah Winfrey, a woman in a dynamic red shirt on a spiritual mission. The text on the cover situates her as a "Woman of the New Century," and the corresponding article presents her as a trailblazer who is influencing television talk shows, our reading habits, and our views of religion in an electronic age. At the time, it seemed as if Oprah was tapping into our culture's growing desire for religious diversity. Her website, television show, and magazine seemed to call for dialogue between various religious communities in an effort to invite them to participate in larger cultural conversations. In the first part of the millennium, Oprah was clearly trying to start conversations about religious diversity through Oprah.com and other uses of media.

When looking at her current website, however, significant changes have occurred over the last two years. Instead of religious discussions centered on communal and global growth, Oprah now highlights topics such as a guidance counselor who posed for X-rated photos, an Oscar extravaganza show, and an Oprah 50th birthday bash. While her website still contains links to such areas as "Spirit and Self" and "Mind and Body," these sections seem less visible than the newer "Oprah Boutique" which offers Oprah-logo clothing and "About Oprah" which claims that Oprah "entertains, enlightens, and empowers millions of viewers around the world." Once focusing on fostering community and participation in diverse forms of religion, Oprah.com now seems to focus on the importance of the individual over community and a singular, assumed view of spirituality drawn from traditional definitions of Christianity. Rather than dialogically exploring ways to better the communities within which the individual lives, the main focus of the site is now the lone individual on a heroic quest to better her/himself for the sake of that individual.

What happened? Why did this shift occur? What insight does this shift give us into larger cultural discussions about religious diversity and pluralism? By comparing the 2002 website to the 2004 website, we see ways in which the idea

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of spiritual pluralism can be subsumed into a singular, almost invisible Christianity that assumes everyone shares the same definition of spirituality. Studying Oprah.com shows that while religious pluralism may seem to be advocated in our culture, a limiting religious unity can still be the underlying, dominant ideology driving the larger framework of society, including Oprah's website.

Religious Traditions in the United States

Although many definitions of religion have been offered, we base ours on Christian theologian William B. Williamson's from his influential *Encyclopedias of Religion: One Hundred Religious Groups Speak for Themselves:*

> Religion is the acceptance of a belief or set of beliefs that exceed mundane manners and concerns; the commitment to a morality or the involvement in a lifestyle resulting from these beliefs; and the psychological conviction which motivates the relation of belief and morality in everyday living and consistent behavior. ("Definitions of Religion")

We rely on it because this definition can apply to a variety of types of religion and highlights that religion involves multiple arenas: beliefs, morality, lifestyles, and psychology.

Although the definition of religion we adopted allows for religious pluralism, whether or not American culture encourages religious pluralism is up for debate. One set of scholars argues that America has always been defined by its free spiritedness and resistance to religious persecution. In *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*, Robert Fuller, a religious studies professor at Bradley University, argues that America's acceptance of alternative religious practices dates back to the first European settlers in America. Fuller paints a picture of colonialist Americans who attended a formal church to take care of their souls after death and yet practiced witchcraft to attend to their daily, earthly needs. Diana Eck, professor of comparative literature at the Harvard Divinity School, contends that the founding fathers embraced religious diversity: "Working from their own religious principles, the founders had sense enough to see that religious freedom was part and parcel of who we are as human beings, created to be free" (383). As a result, Eck argues, the state remained "religiously neutral" (336) while still providing "the guidelines for a multireligious nation, the likes of which the world has rarely seen" (384). Citing the growing number of Americans who are practicing Muslims and Buddhists, Eck, like Fuller, asserts that this history of religious pluralism is seeing a resurgence in the current moment as well.

However, religious historian William Hutchison contends that religious pluralism in the United States has not always lived up to the claims we have made about it. Hutchison points out that while we may discount "blistering indictments of the American mainstream's seeming inability, under any definition, to live up to its stated pluralist ideas," he suggests that "it seems in order to ask why early Americans, in particular, did not do a better job of responding to diversity" (7). Expressing a concern for unity and coherence among Americans, many colonialists resisted—both actively and passively—other religions besides Protestantism: "As embodied, especially, in America's unofficial Protestant

establishment, this unitive ideology responded to diversity with less direct forms of resistance, with some genuine concessions, and with promises to 'outsiders' that were conditioned on successful assimilation" (8). In a similar fashion, J. Christopher Soper, professor of political science at Pepperdine University, insists that the Constitution was not religiously neutral, as Eck suggests; rather, it was directly influenced by religious theories of Reformed Protestantism which furthered the belief that "Christians have a duty to use the political order to reflect God's glory. . . . The Christian must make every effort to transform aspects of culture that are not consistent with God's intentions in this world" (15). Interpreting the writing of the Constitution in this way, Soper clearly links politics and religion in ways that made political activism "a natural and faithful response for the redeemed when pushed into the world of politics" (15). These theorists challenge the actuality of religious pluralism and political neutrality in regards to religion.

An added factor in the debates about religious pluralism or religious unity is the role that media technologies such as television and the Internet play in the practicing of religious activities. Because of the phenomenal popularity of both television and the Internet, many theorists argue that we need to analyze relationships between popular culture and religion in dominant cultural representations. In the introduction to his edited collection called *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, professor of religious studies Bruce David Forbes maps out four distinct relationships between religion and popular culture: religion as popular culture, popular culture in religion, popular culture as religion, and religion and popular culture in dialogue (10).

In the first relationship, religion as popular culture, popular culture repeatedly creates a Christ-like figure in the image of a lone individual who stands apart from the dominant culture and saves the culture by some heroic act. Superman, E.T., and Ellen Ripley of the *Alien* series are examples of this usage of religious icons in popular culture. Secondly, the popular culture in religion relationship "refers to the appropriation of aspects of popular culture by religious groups and institutions" (12). This occurs when churches or synagogues "borrow popular musical styles, or organizational or advertising techniques or popular-culture slogans and icons"(12). Forbes cites Neil Postman's warning about these intersections: "The danger is not that religion has become the content of television shows . . . but that television shows may become the content of religion" (13). The third relationship, popular culture as religion, highlights that for many, media "events" such as the Superbowl and fan re-enactments of *Star Trek* have become the rituals through which they live their lives. Forbes contends that "popular culture and traditional religions function in similar ways, providing meaning and helping people cope with life's problems" (15). The fourth and final relationship, popular culture and religion in dialogue, analyzes dialogues and usually consists of religious leaders analyzing the effects of media on family, religion, and children. Forbes gives the example of violence in the media, an issue that "is an ethical issue which concerns both religions and religious people and the general population as well. Religion wants to take part in the broader discussion" (16). These four major relationships identify the ways in which media technologies intersect with religious belief systems and practices.

While we find Forbes's four categories useful to our study of Oprah.com, we have revised his framework because studying the ways the categories interact

with each other best explains the significance of the shifts in Oprah.com. In the following analysis, we combined religion in popular culture with popular culture in religion because the role that religion plays in popular culture helps to explain how religious organizations have increasingly incorporated popular culture principles into their practices and doctrines. In that section, we analyze the ways in which Oprah as the Christ-like or mythic hero has a direct influence on the ways in which people define religions other than their own and the manner in which religion takes up and uses popular culture strategies in delivering its own message. We have also combined popular culture as religion and religion and popular culture in dialogue because the ways in which popular culture is seen as a religion illustrate the kinds of possibilities that exist for religion and popular culture to discuss and debate issues. In that section, we compare Oprah's television show and website as a religion to Buddhism as explained by Thich Nhat Hanh in order to demonstrate the singularity of Oprah's religious views and the limits these views place on the possibility for dialogue between religions.

Within our analysis of each of these four categories, we draw upon Hutchison's mapping of three major stages of pluralism: pluralism as tolerance, pluralism as inclusion, and pluralism as participation. While these stages can be linked to progressive historical time periods, with tolerance being an earlier phase than inclusion, Hutchison argues that these stages compete with one another in any given time period of American culture's discussions around and practices of religion. According to Hutchison, the potentials for religious pluralism to open new conversations and create space for active participation of all members of our society will remain unrealized until we determine if our culture truly embraces pluralism as participation.

Pluralism as tolerance is best illustrated through the notion of legal acceptance. This means that different religions will not be banned from being practiced in the U.S.: "According to this definition of acceptance, a deviant person or group should be accorded the right to exist and even to thrive, but in general to do so only as an outsider to the dominant religion and culture" (Hutchinson 8). Others are accepted in this framework, but their position as other, as deviant, is clearly maintained. Paganism, for example, can be tolerated because it is kept at the margins, with its practitioners labeled as outsiders.

The second stage, pluralism as inclusion, occurs when minority religions are added to the culture, but their addition does not change the dominant Protestant definitions of religion. The concept of the melting pot demonstrates that when difference is added to the dominant mix, it is erased. Hutchison offers the image of the "other" being able to ride on the bus, but having to sit at the back.

Hutchison argues that the third stage—pluralism as participation—is the most progressive one. "Pluralism as participation impl[ies] a mandate for individuals and groups (including, quite importantly, ethnic and racial groups) to share responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society's agenda" (7). In this framework, pluralism demonstrates the way that religious alternatives can affect the long-standing hold that the singularity of Christianity has had on legal, political, economic, and cultural components of our society. With these three definitive stages of pluralism in mind, we now turn to the first of our category groupings.

Religion in Popular Culture/Popular Culture in Religion

As we outlined earlier, images of Christ-like saviors and mythic heroes permeate our culture. Looking at Oprah.com, we asked the following questions: in what ways does Oprah.com present the "hero"? Further, what do the patterns that emerge through examination of the website's evolution over the past two years reveal about Oprah.com's relationship to religious pluralism?

To be sure, Oprah herself has permeated all facets of the website from its inception: her face, her name, and her words are everywhere. However, in 2002, there seemed to be more space for other voices and experiences. Dr. Phil McGraw and Gary Zukav (see Figure 1) were both featured prominently in the 2002 version of the website.
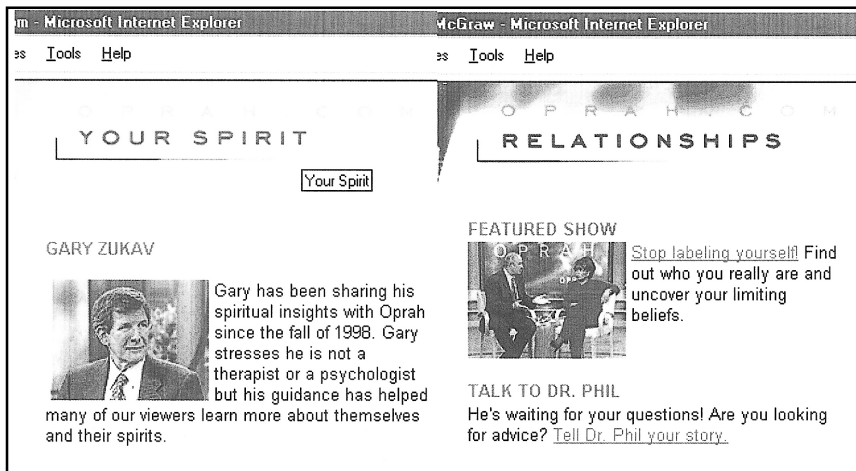
Figure 1

For example, on the "Sexuality" page (a sub-link under the "Mind and Body" category), Dr. Phil was listed with several other sexuality experts. Viewers could also follow a more general "Dr. Phil" link, leading them to excerpts from Dr. Phil's numerous appearances on The Oprah Winfrey Show and advice on a wide variety of relationship issues/problems. In addition, Oprah.com 2002 advocated Gary Zukav as a dispenser of knowledge in a similar fashion. With a stable link devoted to him under the "Your Spirit" page of the website, Zukav offered viewers "guidance for self-empowerment and spiritual growth," the opportunity to email him questions, or to read excerpts from his books or interviews taped on Oprah's television show. Even though their messages were certainly compatible with Oprah's own philosophies, both Zukav and Dr. Phil (and various other experts) were powerful authority figures in the 2002 version of Oprah.com. This type of inclusion seems to hearken to Hutchison's third stage, pluralism as participation: Zukav's and Dr. Phil's differing views were both welcomed equally on Oprah's website, and both share responsibility in creating knowledge on Oprah.com.

In 2004, these links to the two men either do not exist or are not as prominent; the website's search engine must be used to locate the pages related to the men.

Dr. Phil's presence on the site is relegated to the website's archives of The Oprah Winfrey Show, where he made over 100 appearances before launching his own talk show. While Dr. Phil's diminished presence on the site can be explained by the creation of his own show, Gary Zukav's seeming disappearance has no similar explanation. Zukav's presence on Oprah.com is reduced in the same manner: he can only be found in the archives devoted to the television show. As these archives only initially list the theme of shows on particular dates, it can be difficult for a viewer to locate Dr. Phil and Zukav unless she or he knows what topics to associate them with. In this way, Oprah.com seems to have regressed into pluralism as inclusion, offering the men's alternative viewpoints, but privileging Oprah's own messages over anything the men have to say.

This drastic reduction of the presence of knowledge-makers like Zukav and Dr. Phil is significant in showing how Oprah.com has gradually de-emphasized ways of knowing that aren't specifically Oprah herself. In fact, when examining Oprah.com through Forbes' frame, Oprah does seem to have become a mythic character, the Knower/Savior. From a stable link entitled "About Oprah," viewers have a variety of options, all providing insight into some aspect of Oprah. For example, viewers can read a biography of Oprah's life. The first two sentences of this bio are a vivid example of how Oprah's mythic status is fostered on the website: "Oprah Winfrey has already left an indelible mark on the face of television. From her humble beginnings in rural Mississippi, Oprah's legacy has established her as one of the most important figures in popular culture." Oprah epitomizes the Horatio Alger story, but this updated version even overcomes race, class, and gender.

On the "About Oprah" page, viewers are also bombarded by images of Oprah: in all, seven pictures of her are scattered throughout the page (see Figure 2). Although this page is exceptional in the number of images of Oprah it contains, every main page of Oprah.com contains at least one image of Oprah, thus solidifying her monolithic presence as "The One" source of knowledge. Of course, the repetition of Savior imagery is prevalent throughout religious iconography (Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Buddha, etc.), and Oprah.com sets up Oprah in a similar fashion. Oprah's one-name status (is it even necessary to use "Winfrey" anymore when referring to her?) and the instant recognizability of her symbol "O" (featured prominently throughout the website and as the title of her magazine) provide further evidence for the Oprah-as-Savior religious motif.

Oprah, as mythic hero and Knower, now professes a singular wisdom on subjects that used to be presented as a dialogue. Interestingly enough, many of the themes identified by Forbes earlier in this section, love ("What Would You Do For Love" and "Getting the Love You Want" are among the over 2700 hits on Oprah's site for "love"), finding meaning ("Finding Meaning and Purpose in Your Life" is one of 115 hits on the website), and forgiveness ("Ritual for Forgiveness: Atonement," one of 142 hits), are all themes central to the website's messages. The 2004 website presents a unified vision of each of these topics now and situates Oprah as the Knower. Much of Oprah.com is devoted to these types of soul-searching questions.

In keeping with the Savior-like motif of the rest of the website, Oprah.com does contain other voices, but they are presented as disciples spreading Oprah's messages to the masses. One recurrent theme on The Oprah Winfrey Show is "Lifestyle Makeovers." Many pages on the website are devoted to this

theme (and, really, isn't the notion of remaking one's life in positive ways a central religious tenet?). One example of this is the page entitled "Lifestyle Makeovers: What Do You Need To Surrender?" Here, Oprah allows motivational speakers and life coaches Cheryl Richardson and Debbie Ford to share their recipes for successful living, but neither woman's presence on the site is as visible or as permanent at that of Dr. Phil's or Gary Zukav's on the 2002 site. No permanent links to Richardson or Ford exist on the website. Instead, excerpts from

Figure 2

their texts and worksheets for self-improvement can be found underneath Oprah's larger "Lifestyle Makeover" categories, making it clear that Richardson's and Ford's ideas fall underneath Oprah's larger rubric. In this way, Oprah.com continues its reversion back to pluralism as inclusion. Each prophet is allowed to share part of Oprah's gospel, but not the whole thing: only the Savior can provide the whole message.[1]

It seems clear that much religious imagery and thematic material are present on Oprah.com. What needs to be explored next is exactly how Oprah's religious views play out on the website: what form does her religion take? How does the lone hero actually present her wisdom? A savior, a knower, must, after all, have a message. In describing how popular culture in religion often manifests itself, Forbes suggests that the line between religion and entertainment is often problematically blurred:

> "Religion on television is presented simply as entertainment. .
> . . When churches adopt the strategies and techniques of modern
> marketing from the business world, and 'the audience becomes
> a market and the gospel is transformed into a product,' should
> religious people view these influences as effective adaptation
> or a threatening transformation?" (13)

Forbes's concerns are valid ones and lead to an interesting question: is there a product being sold on Oprah.com? Our analysis indicates that the answer to this question is yes. The website's portrayal of Oprah as hero/savior effectively serves to commodify her: it is this image of Oprah-as-Knower, as the way to personal enlightenment that is being packaged and sold on Oprah.com. Pluralism, if found at all on the 2004 site, goes no further than inclusion.

As we mentioned earlier, Oprah's religious themes of love, finding meaning, forgiveness, and so on permeate all facets of the website, including the portion of Oprah.com devoted to her television show. Here, viewers have the opportunity not only to read excerpts from the Oprah-approved[2] expert discussions (led by the likes of Richardson, Ford, Zukav, and Dr. Phil) that took place on these topics on The Oprah Winfrey Show, but also to purchase transcripts ($7 to receive them via mail or $6 to download them) or videotapes ($29.95) of the episode desired. Oprah's messages can be sent directly to one's home, if the price is right.

The ability to purchase her message is also offered through the opportunity for a more dynamic multimedia online workshop (Figure 3). After following the link entitled "Oprah's Workshop" from the main page, viewers find themselves at an advertisement for "Live Your Best Life Online: An Online Workshop With Oprah Winfrey." Featuring a large picture of Oprah in another dynamic red shirt (much like the one on the 2001 *Newsweek* cover) speaking into a microphone

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[1] The presence of Oprah's disciples can also be seen on the website's "Phenomenal Women" page (a category under "Inspirations" on the "Spirit and Self" page). Here, Oprah.com shares the stories of inspirational women: "Every month, *O, The Oprah Magazine* profiles women who are inspiring others, forging new paths, or beating the odds. Discover how these women are using their lives. Their stories might change your life." These profiles function as parables, providing readers with stories that show the life lessons learned by the authors, and offering the reader the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences. In this way, Oprah.com brings new disciples to the website each month.

[2] Not all discussions that took place on the television show are included, obviously, but the ones highlighted on the site privilege the singular message that Oprah-as-hero is presented as delivering.

(preaching to the masses, perhaps), this advertisement explains how the workshop can help the user to "develop more meaningful relationships, enrich your life by learning who you really are, [and] live a happier, more fulfilled life." To help one achieve these goals, "Oprah's personal insights and life moments" will be included, rendered in "rich multimedia" that will make "these stories come alive!" The individual's growth seems to be based on drawing on the hero's journey into the unknown and delivering an enlightened message when returning home. Without the inclusion of Oprah's own stories, would one be able to achieve the goals of the workshop? Are the Knower's own tales integral to achieving success and happiness? For $24.95, one can find out.

Figure 3

Even Oprah's Angel Network, a non-profit organization created by Oprah to raise money for charity, contributes to the creation and commodification of Oprah-as-Knower on the website. From the main page of Oprah.com, there is a link to Oprah's Boutique, which sells Oprah merchandise (shirts, hats, tote bags, loungewear, etc.). Even though all the proceeds (ranging in price from a $10 key chain to a $120 spa robe) go to Angel Network charities, the Boutique items themselves contribute to the construction of Oprah's iconic mythos. Most of the items contain Oprah's signature religious symbol: a large, stylized "O." Those Boutique items that don't contain the "O" instead bear Oprah's name or say "Oprah's Book Club," a sub-sect in Oprah's larger group of followers. The inescapable presence of Oprah symbology on all Boutique items helps to cement the commodification of Oprah's iconic religious status.

In much the way Hutchison warns, a singular, unified definition of religion can disguise itself as an inclusive pluralism. While Oprah.com includes other voices, the image of Oprah as mythic hero and/or Christ-like savior permeates both the 2004 website's presentation of Oprah as well as the ways to interact with the concepts/messages Oprah offers. Yes, other voices are tolerated. Yes, other perspectives are included through guests and show transcripts. But, as Hutchison argues, true pluralistic participation requires not only the representation of multiple religions, but also a "mandate for individuals and groups . . . to share responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society's agenda" (7).

While the first factor—representation—might be present on Oprah.com, shared responsibility is overshadowed by a commodified image of Oprah as savior.

Popular Culture as Religion/Religion and Popular Culture in Dialogue

When popular culture becomes a religion, the form that religion takes has a direct impact on the possibilities for dialogue between religion and popular culture about beliefs and values of cultures and communities. While Forbes argues that religion and popular culture in dialogue is a category that covers actions that do not fit in the other three categories—as a sort of clearinghouse for the "extras"— we contend that because popular culture is seen as a religion it necessitates that the two entities be in dialogue with each other, either implicitly or explicitly. If, as Forbes argues, "for many . . . religion provides an interpretive lens through which culture may be read and critiqued" (241), then it makes sense that the status of popular culture as religion would be shaped by and in turn shape the interpretive lenses used to create dialogues around them. In order for constructive dialogue to take place, we must go beyond tolerance and inclusion; active participation and shared responsibility of pluralism as participation are required for effective dialogue.

As we argued before, Oprah has become a mythic or Christ-like hero for many, and her message has become a religion in and of itself. In 2002, Oprah.com worked to resist "electronic colonialism" (Cobb 237) by avoiding "the homogenization of culture into one particular viewpoint" (237). Despite the fact that Oprah.com uses English exclusively both in 2002 and 2004, the 2002 version of the website attempted to connect individual transformations to larger social changes. These pluralist goals were illustrated through the website's "Connecting with Muslims," one of the 2002 "O Discussion Groups" (Figure 4). The stated

Figure 4
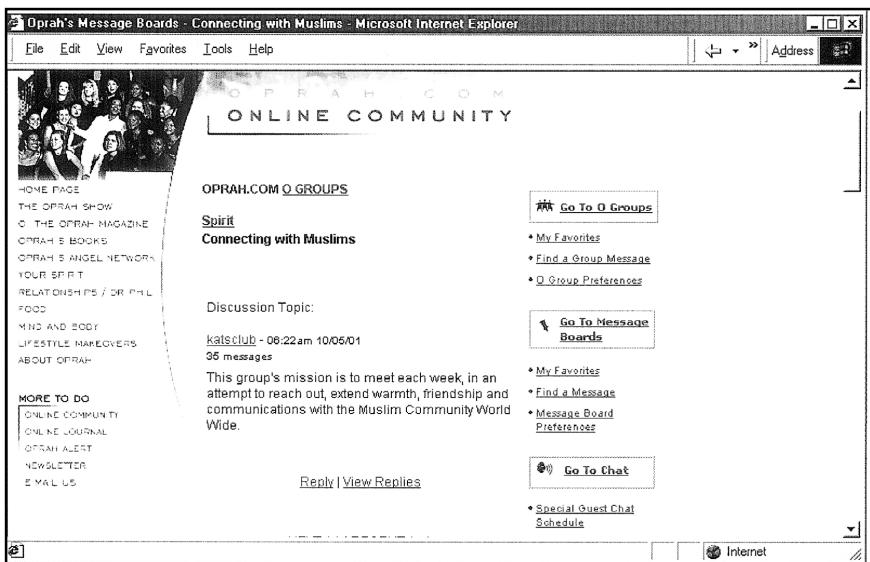
purpose for the group was as follows: "This group's mission is to meet each week, in an attempt to reach out, extend warmth, friendship and communications with the Muslim Community world wide." The types of messages here ranged from direct questions about Islamic religious beliefs (misty902 asks: "I am interested to understand your religion and I wonder if your coran being your version of our Bible contains the book of Revelations as does our Bible.") to calls for wider understanding (missd63 writes: "Wouldn't it be great if we could start a group of people of all religions, colors, nationalities, etc. so we can learn about each other and understand. I would love to talk to people in Afganastan, Pakastan, Iraq, Israel, and so on. Maybe just maybe if we understood each other we could pass the word on and enlighten others. If anyone knows how to get in touch with others let me know please").

While the discussion board opened a space for pluralistic discussion, the conversations were clearly situated in an Us/Them binary. Yes, a community aspect is part of the discussion, but one community, the American Christian community, is established from the beginning as the "One" and the other religions are situated as other. Reaching out to the Muslim community suggests that the discussion board includes and tolerates the "other," but has not allowed the other into the community fully. In the stated goals along with writers' messages an assumed unity among Christians can be found. Misty902's "our Bible" creates an "our" that is unified. Questions are posed by those identifying themselves as Christians, assuming that the "other" will answer them in a way that compares them to the "standard" of Christianity. Misty902's comment specifically asks a "you" and a "someone" to compare their Koran (which she misspells) to "our Bible." The discussion board tries to create a community, but does so in a way that prohibits an "other" community—Muslims—to actively participate in the shape of the discussion.

No matter what its failings were, the 2002 focus on community was a move toward religion as participation because it called for people of various religions to be in dialogue with each other. The 2004 Oprah.com site's over reliance on "the individual" as the driving framework/structure erases the possibility of communal participation that not only tolerates or includes other religions but actually makes them active participants in the construction of the belief systems. Now instead of communities divided into Us/Them, we find the individual who is out to better her life for the sake of her own self. Discussion boards such as "Goddess Women" and "Pagan and the Novus Spiritus" still exist on the 2004 site, but the entire site is overshadowed or dominated by an emphasis on the individual.

This emphasis on Oprah's doctrine as religion to the exclusion of dialogue with other religions is clear when comparing Oprah.com's (2004) presentation of meditation to Buddhist practitioners' definitions of meditation.[3] The web page, "Spirit and Self" includes a link to "Meditation." Once there, users find this basic introduction to meditation: "Meditation allows you to bring together your mind, body, and spirit. Take five minutes out of your day to get in touch with yourself." Another link offers a guided meditation from Cheryl Richardson: "Just be yourself . . . just ponder the question: Why am I here? . . . What are you called to do?" By

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[3]We acknowledge that there are multiple forms of Buddhism and various practices attached to these multiple forms. For simplicity's sake, we are using Thich Nhat Hanh's definitions of and practices in meditation.

understanding one's "calling," meditators can "be yourself" and relate "to what is happening." The focus is on meditation as means to individual success and/or fulfillment.

Most telling is a link to a print version of a presentation made by Oprah and Cheryl Richardson (Figure 5). Oprah's view on mediation is presented in the following way, in her own words:

> We believe in meditating. I believe in meditating in the tub with some very nice bath products. Origins Ginger Bath is one I use a lot. However, you can do it however you want to do it. You can sit in a chair, you can sit on the floor, you can sit in the window, you can sit in the tub. I give myself at least ten minutes every day in some form of meditation. I happen to like the tub.

On the surface, Oprah seems to be offering multiple interpretations of meditation— you can meditate, she says, in multiple places. But place is the only multiplicity offered. The purpose for meditation, the ways of actually meditating and various religions' interpretations of meditation are not offered. The only choice lies in where one will practice the supposedly "universal" definition of meditative practice. Further, this meditative practice focuses on the individual doing something nice for themselves—taking a bath—while at the same time selling products—Origins Ginger Bath—that are supposedly important to the process.

The form of meditation being advocated on Oprah.com is decontextualized,

Figure 5
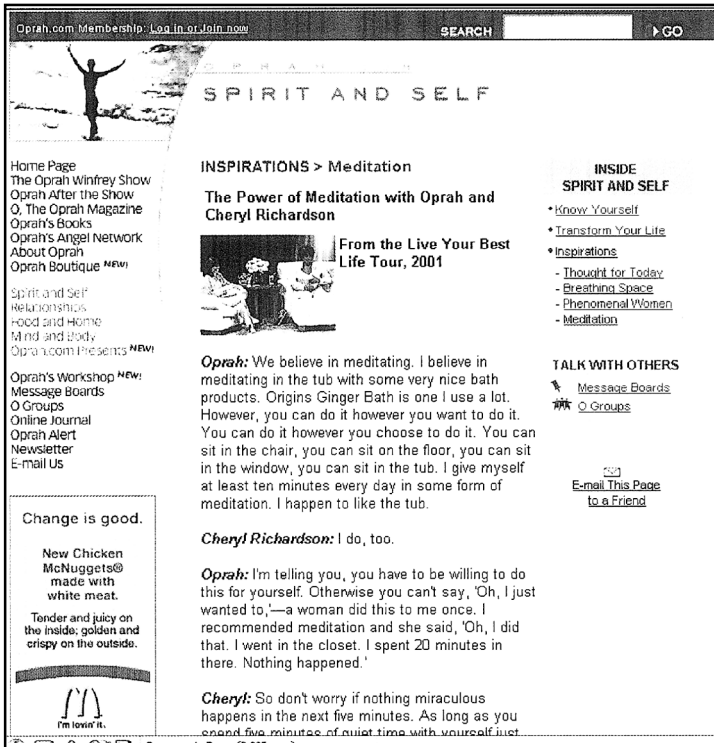
universalized, and individualized. Not only are other religions' meditation practices not invited to participate, they are not even included on the website. Clearly, Oprah's way of meditating (in the bath with Origins' products) is the religion and presented as the "One," so much so that there is no recognition of, or dialogue with, other religions. How the popular culture religion gets constructed, then, directly impacts the possibilities for dialogue.

Compare this presentation of meditation to Zen master, peacemaker, and author Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings about meditation. In *Teachings on Love*, one of over thirty-five books he's published, he recognizes that meditation is an individual practice that begins with looking "deeply at our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and see[ing] clearly what our real needs are, so we will not drown in a sea of suffering" (15). However, for him, the end goal of meditation is not solely individual growth. Hahn explains the communal significance of an individual's meditation:

> If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness. Here and there are people who know how to take good care of themselves, who live joyfully and happily. They are our strongest support. Everything they do, they do for everyone. (18)

Instead of asking what the purpose is for life, as Oprah's and Richardson's comments suggest, the individual meditates in order to take care of the community.

This unified Christian representation demonstrates the ways in which American religious traditions have not lived up to the pluralism claimed by many Americans, including Fuller and Eck. The underlying message of such representations is that there is one culture that perhaps includes others, but our analysis of Oprah.com (2004) demonstrates that this inclusion occurs only to the extent that the "other" does not threaten the unified view of religion as seen through the Christian lenses. So, while a dialogue might seem to be occurring, it does not include others as full participants with shared responsibility. When looking at other religions such as Buddhism, we see religious beliefs that encourage active participation and dialogues across religions. Instead of insisting that one adopt only Buddhist practices, Hanh argues that "Buddhist practice can offer effective means to heal, reconcile and reunite with one's blood and spiritual families, in order to discover the precious gems in one's own traditions" (166). Buddhist practice can help people of all religions to redress dissatisfaction with their primary religions:

> Thanks to the practice, people will see that Buddhism and their own spiritual traditions have many things in common, and therefore it is not necessary to reject their own spiritual tradition. They will see that there are things that need to be transformed in Buddhism as well as in their own tradition. (166)

In his configurations, Buddhism encourages dialogue between religions and invites multiple religions to participate in a variety of religious practices. Buddhism is not presented in this framework as "the One." However, since popular culture is dominated by Christian religious themes, dialogues with other religions are stifled and limited. Therefore, popular culture does not get represented through Buddhism and hence popular culture conversations with religions are limited to the dominant form of religion as presented in popular culture, Christianity. As a

result, the individual reigns supreme over community good.

Drawing Conclusions

We began this article by asking whether pluralist claims about religion are making headway in our culture or if pluralism has been so thinly defined that it is actually unity disguised. Eck takes a very optimistic stance on this issue:

> America's religious diversity is here to stay, and the most interesting and important phase of our nation's history lies ahead. The opportunity to create a positive multireligious society out of the fabric of a democracy, without the chauvinism and religious triumphalism that have marred humanity, is now ours. (383)

However, Hutchison argues that pluralism holds no significance if it is "defended as little more than a necessity, a prudent stance taken because of the pressures of diversity and the demands voiced by the American Civil Liberties Union" (236) nor if a religious group demands respect (not just tolerance) for their beliefs but in turn are intolerant of other religious groups' beliefs. Instead of these idealistic claims of pluralism that do not acknowledge the failure to achieve the kinds of pluralism that make a difference in our culture, Hutchison argues for a new, civil pluralism that arises "as much from day-to-day social experience as from social theory or judicial decisions" and emphasizes the right of every group to not only be tolerated or included but also be able to participate and to "share responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society's agenda" (7). This civil pluralism would be framed through tolerance, inclusion, and participation.

Our analysis of Oprah.com suggests that multimedia mogul Oprah Winfrey not only fails to achieve religious pluralism as participation, her website has in fact moved further away from it over the past few years, increasingly depicting Oprah's way of knowing (a decidedly Christian way of knowing) as the way to enlightenment. Yet less discerning viewers may perceive Oprah's website as space where all forms of religion are equally welcomed. This is problematic in that Oprah.com unquestioningly and uncritically presents Christianity as the norm, ignoring the social and historical construction of the faith. Even though the website on the surface seems to welcome multiple voices and perspectives, in actuality opportunities for dialogue are shut down: the view of Oprah-as-Knower offers no invitation for contradictory perspectives.

Our analysis of Oprah.com also reveals the need for constant vigilance in monitoring dominant ideologies: they manifest themselves in many guises, often seeming to embody traits and embracing perspectives that they really do not. Oprah has sold herself with great success as a religious icon in keeping with the dominant religious doctrines of our society, all the while seeming to embrace a wide variety of non-denominational religious views. This is a clear example of how we entertain the illusion that we are embracing diversity even when we never have to challenge our (dominant) core beliefs. While Eck argues that the "ongoing argument over who 'we' are — as religious people, as a nation, and as a global community — is one in which all of us, ready or not, will participate" (385), our analysis of Oprah.com suggests that Eck has been too hasty in proclaiming the arrival of religious pluralism in America.

The shifts in Oprah.com from 2002 to 2004 demonstrate the insidious power of any religion that dominates through an assimilation of any challenges to its

authority. Recognizing that these dominant power structures have prevented pluralism from living up to the claims made about it is a first step toward greater acceptance of pluralism as participation. Creating dialogues between multiple religious communities must follow this recognition if effective change is to happen. Religions in participatory dialogues that lead to alternative practices that challenge current perceptions can help us fulfill the promise of sharing "responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society's agenda" (Hutchison 7).

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Critical Geography and the Real World
in First-Year Writing Classrooms

Matthew I. Feinberg

Recently, during a media analysis unit in my first-year writing class, we discussed the influence of the media on college alcohol consumption. Students chimed in about recent portrayals of college life from television and the movies. *Animal House,* the *American Pie* movies*,* and the Will Ferrell film *Old School* all came up, but only one student offered a personal experience to contrast or problematize the topic at hand. I was astonished. These were (mostly) first-year college students talking about the experiences of first-year college students, but doing so from a distinctly objective point of view. Their own experiences did not seem to inform the discussion. They were willing to consider the topic at hand and discuss it but refused to shift their gaze towards their own experiences and to explore how their lives might be influenced by the images and narratives of college fed to them by the media and the culture around them. They examined the text of culture from a distance, ignoring their existence and participation in that text.

This split between the academic and the "real" was particularly noticeable during another classroom discussion. While our class was having a lively debate about an extremely graphic and physically imposing anti-abortion display that an off-campus group had set up in a central location on campus, one student suggested that the display was important and necessary to allow students to begin to confront difficult debates. As he put it, it would prepare them for later on when he and his fellow students would need to negotiate "real" life. The implication in the student's statement was that campus life and, more importantly, the debates about women's choice, personal freedom, the public use of space, free speech, and, even, the emotional encounters and conversations raised by this politically charged demonstration were in fact *not real*. For this student, anything that occurred in the physical terrain of campus was a mere fiction, a simulation of a world lived beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the campus, a warm-up for the reality that arrives with the job market and student loan payments.

Too often, it feels as if students consider the view from the classroom as if it were some detached god-eye peering out onto the world with an isolated, all-seeing omniscience. This omniscient view separates the observer (the classroom) and the observed (the world and culture) and suggests that the world of the classroom is not connected with the world they live in. This distance makes the classroom (and, more broadly, life at the university) simply the practice round that precedes the "real world."

It is this idea of the real world that I wish to explore. It is alarming how students (and often teachers as well) persistently rely on language that juxtaposes the classroom with the real world. Typically, this language use takes the form of off-hand remarks in casual conversation, and, therefore, we rarely consider how

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these remarks situate the classroom and academic work. For when we speak of a reality "outside" of the classroom, it is implicitly juxtaposed with a fiction within. And, if the classroom is merely a fictional space within the real world, then the work and conversations within it are as well.

Since these classroom conversations, often informed by critical pedagogy, help students explore discourse, power, and the construction of identity and culture, I find it troubling that they are considered not real.[1] Ideally, discussions of ideology, culture, and discourse provide students in writing classrooms with better awareness of the ways that rhetorical context shapes meaning in different writing situations as well as in broader cultural contexts. Reading the text of culture is an important critical thinking skill and one of the foundations of a liberal education. When discussions of culture are easily dismissed as fiction, it undermines the goals of a liberal education to develop a critically aware citizenry. The classroom quickly becomes the production zone where new workers acquire the information to succeed in our new technocracy. This acquisition process may lead to market success, but may also blanket students in dominant ideologies that prevent them from acquiring the knowledge and skills to critique or change their communities. The university should not be simply a vocational institute, but rather a place for developing the skills for life-long learning and inquiry.

Jonathon Mauk's recent dissertation, "Writing in Place: A Story of Geography and Composition Pedagogy," emphasizes this tension between vocational learning and inquiry as it highlights the role of critical geography in composition pedagogy and the community college. Mauk focuses on the ways that the pedagogy of the four-year university classroom is often applied indiscriminately to community college classrooms with little regard for the different cultural geography in different institutions. Because many community colleges lack a residential life, the population is often more transient. The campus is set up for a commuter student but not the classroom assignments. Using assignments designed for the four-year university within this physical landscape, Mauk finds that students have trouble developing an academic sense of self. Mauk suggests that his students sees academic space as separate and apart from the rest of the world. Mauk sees this relationship with academic space as problematic and argues that a greater focus on the geography of our classroom spaces will help students conceive of the space outside of the campus, outside of the classroom, as academic. And the academic space needs to be conceived as transportable and mutable—as something that is tied to being, rather than material surroundings exclusively (121).

To make the academic "mutable," we need to move critical pedagogy from abstract ideas of gender, race, and class to more concrete discussions of the effects of ideology, discourse, and power on bodies within a physical environment. Over the last few semesters, to help make my students' academic experience more mutable, I have introduced them to the idea of critical geography through a series of assignments and activities. This method of critical inquiry examines the intersection of the built environment, ideology, and culture. Critical geography not only explores how the built environment is shaped by culture, but also how the physical landscape reinforces that culture and its underlying ideologies.

The unit that I devised has two key assignments. First, students observe a classroom on campus and write a short one to two-page observation and analysis

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[1] For more on social epistemic theories of writing instruction see Berlin; Shor.

for homework. Later, students write a more detailed analysis on their own about a site or artifact of their choosing. Both assignments are helpful in encouraging students to consider the dialogue between space (i.e., the physical landscape) and culture. Reader response moves beyond asking what a poem *is* to include what a poem *does*. These assignments take a similar approach to the physical landscape and built environment: they ask not only what it is (observation) but what it does (analysis).

Discourse and ideology inscribe our bodies by manipulating the spaces those bodies inhabit. As students consider how culture functions spatially, they develop a more complex understanding of rhetorical context and discourse communities. Ultimately, I believe that this richer understanding helps them become more effective writers and critical thinkers. Students learn that culture is not merely expressed linguistically, but physically as well.

Several classroom conversations help make these connections among ideology, culture, and the built environment as we work towards the writing assignments. Early on, I have my class do some in-class writing on the following two questions: "What is the difference between place and space?" and also "Do people control space or does space control people?" For both questions, students struggle to find explicit definitions and begin to recognize that these two questions have answers that overlap and inhabit one another. The physical parameters of a space contribute to the way in which that space is made into a place with meaning and vice versa. Our sense of place helps us craft a sense of physical boundaries. The cultural and physical feed into one another, and this conversation helps introduce this dialogic.

These questions lay the groundwork for additional discussions of more concrete examples. For example, we consider how the vestiges of the English pastoral might contribute to the ideology that connects lawn and home with success. We also consider the consequences when this ideology becomes codified in stringent municipal housing codes that ignore the climate of the local geography. Reading about and discussing the emerging national landscape that has appeared with the stripmalling of America, students consider how a built environment that is increasingly hostile to pedestrians, but privileges the automobile, affects the relationships within a community. On a more local level, my classes examine how the basketball arena on our campus has a Pepsi sign twice as large as the university's logo. Our class discussion connects this observation to debates about the branding of identity and the commercialization of public spaces.

These in-class analyses prepare students to examine a particular type of text as a group: the classroom itself. Students are asked to observe a classroom (during class time and preferably not a class they are enrolled in) and consider what their observations indicate about who has authority, how knowledge is created or communicated, and how the space might teach certain lessons about obedience or indifference exclusive of the subject matter being taught.[2]

During the in-class discussion regarding this assignment, I pair their writing assignment with a discussion about different classroom organizations and their effect on the relationships in the classroom. For example, I usually have my students sit in a circle, but on the day of this discussion I left the desks in a standard row arrangement. After only a few minutes, one student spoke up and

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[2] This activity is adapted from Stephen Reid.

said that the rows made him uncomfortable and asked when we could move the desks back into a circle. Granted, part of this discomfort came from being accustomed to our classroom community being arranged in a particular way, but the change helped emphasize that spatial organization matters and affects how that space is used.

Another student pointed out that the bulletin board in the classroom contained a variety of advertisements and that credit card ads were the most common. They also noted how the windows and the clocks in their classrooms were available for the teacher's view, but not for the students.' We considered how these different features—a circle of desks versus rows, a teacher's lectern, etc.—affect the relationships and power within the classroom. As we drew a diagram of the typical classroom on the board, one particularly savvy student noted how the arrangement of desks reflects the rows of scantron ovals that have become the mainstay in public education at all levels, primary school on up.

After completing an analysis of the classroom, students were then asked to perform an analysis of a space of their own choosing. To provide them with the necessary critical vocabulary, we read and discussed essays on space and the physical landscape including Mike Davis's "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space," John Fiske's "Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance," Eric Liu's "Remember When Public Space Didn't Carry Brand Names," Robert Mugerauer's "Toward an Architectural Vocabulary: The Porch as Between," Tom Wolfe's essay "O' Rotten Gotham," and selections from *Geography of Nowhere* by James Howard Kunstler. These essays helped the class generate a critical vocabulary that included terms like resistance, trickery, militarization, power, branding, and betweens. This language and the concepts they represented helped open up their readings of their sites. Also, it helped to bridge the gap between what was being read and what we see in the everyday. For example, when we discussed militarization of the urban landscape in Los Angeles (Mike Davis's essay), students began to make connections with the camera that oversees the activities of the central plaza on campus, the lock down that characterized their high school experiences in a post-Columbine world, and the quasi-military character of the SUV fad.

After discussing these ideas within the classroom, students are then asked to take this critical vocabulary into their community to consider how these ideas play out in the built environment of their daily lives. The assignment sheet asks students to consider how and why people define what a particular space means and how individuals of different cultures interpret and perform the codes of a particular space. Most significantly, it asks students to examine how the layout of a particular space affects how individuals use it and how attitudes about public space in a community reflect that community's values.[3]

The student essays from this past semester reveal students' engagement with the idea of a culturally constructed landscape. Students begin to see that critical inquiry is not just a part of a classroom space, but a way of seeing and understanding the world that roots itself in our being. For example, one particularly compelling essay examined how "nature has become commodity. It is something to be marketed and consumed by the American people." The writer focused on how this commodification of nature can be seen in everything from nature tapes

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[3] This essay assignment is adapted from John Trimbur and Diane George.

at the mall to a carefully crafted and maintained waterfall at a nearby recreation area. The student noted,

> [T]he rock we were sitting on where the water was thundering down had a screw in it. I glanced around a little more, . . . and I noticed even more screws connecting the rocks keeping them from eroding, shifting, keeping the falls thundering. . . . They had been arranged for an effect. . . . I guess we modify nature for our own pleasure and convenience a lot more often than I thought.

This student paper grappled with the ways in which our ideas (and ideologies) of nature constructed not only our understanding of nature, but also the actual landscape of nature itself.

Most importantly, this student began to see her work beyond the mere choreography required by the fictional space of the classroom. In the postscript to this assignment, the student was proud that she "brought all of the ramifications of [her] topic to a point, [because she] felt like it actually had some purpose other than a grade." These comments reveal a student seeing the writing and thinking of her essay as more than a school essay. Her writing became a valid commentary on the culture around her, an intellectual inquiry that occurred in her being, outside of the space of the classroom.

In her personal evaluation of her writing from the semester, this student commented on her peer workshop feedback and noted, "everyone has always thought I have a way with words, but no one has ever complimented their meaning." This student realized that academic writing isn't just about the style, tone, or fancy words, but it is about thinking carefully, communicating clearly, and applying difficult ideas and new concepts in a variety of contexts.

Another student evaluated the geography of campus and focused on the accessibility of the university's counseling center. The student suggested that a "counseling office should be [as] comforting and accepting as possible to pass with a satisfactory grade. All too often, however, places of practice fall short of providing such an environment." The student pointed out how the counseling center is not located in the health center as one might expect, but "sits in the basement of an academic building halfway across campus. . . . If not cumulated [sic] with other health services, the counseling center should have its own building. . . . To have it stuffed away in the bottom of some unpredictable place shows that CSU just doesn't care." For this student, a map of campus became a lens through which to see the values and priorities of the university.

The paper suggested that this student considered how physical layout, hierarchy, and power are interconnected. In doing so, this student seemed to be taking on Mauk's "mutable academic being." By turning the critical analysis skills from the classroom to an actual used space on campus, this student began thinking critically about the physical space of her educational environment and her lived environment. Instead of seeing critical reading as a skill to be used in the classroom with an assigned text, this student applied critical reading skills to a text of her choosing. Although they were applied within the context of an assignment, this student decided where and when to be critical. This critical engagement generated from the student as opposed to being generated by classroom space or academic texts.

Finally, another student used the examination of a juice bar to explore the

ways in which health and class are related. The writer observed a local juice bar, its patrons, and the advertisements on the wall and wrote that:

> in American culture, you need to have money in order to participate in the health craze that is going on and become healthy. . .Fast food restaurants are less healthy and cheaper, thus forcing the poorer to remain unhealthy. The only people that can afford to buy the hiked up prices of organic foods are in the upper to middle economic range.

Later the essay concluded that:

> American culture makes it hard for people to get out of their economic class, since society has set so many obstacles, with one huge one being how others view you. If you are seen as being obese or unhealthy then you are at a disadvantage to the healthy or slim people. The only way to gain the prestige of being looked at as healthy is to have money.

This student's paper showed a writer grappling with new ways to consider the body and also the way that the codes of the body not only provide access to particular spaces but also to class mobility.

This student's awareness of the cultural codes inscribed on spaces and bodies in spaces is similar to the way other students were able to uncover layers of meaning in the texts they examined. This engagement with the layers of meaning inscribed in their spacial texts allowed students to write about their subjects with more depth and a different kind of development. They connected what they were seeing with larger cultural trends and ideas.

For example, several essays explored the connections between the use of public space and ideas of democracy. In one essay, a student considered the central plaza on campus and its free speech regulations as emblematic of larger American ideas of pluralism and open debate. This student noted how the rules and regulations that controlled the use of this democratic space compromised its democratic function. The student wrote that "through my observations, I have realized that not only is the Plaza a mixture of democracy and lack thereof, but that our entire society is. I don't think it will ever change because of the fact that our culture has to maintain order." This student's depth can be seen in the way that the overall conclusion is problematized. The essay sees the plaza as emblematic of the dialogue our culture must engage in to be true to democracy while also maintaining some kind of order. This awareness of culture as a dialogue moved this essay's claims beyond either/or thinking into a terrain of complexity required by an academic attitude.

As each of these essays considered how ideology informs how we read the physical landscape and how that landscape reveals ideology, the students confronted the ways that a text might be layered with meaning. I must note that many of these papers had trouble generating specific evidence to support their claims; however, my students also engaged these new ideas with a level of depth that never characterized essays produced during my media analysis units. The willingness to ask new kinds of questions and explore the intersection of the spatial, the cultural, and the ideological helped students explore "the body" of the real.

I see these assignments as useful because they help to collapse the distance between the polarities of our real world/classroom binary. Reducing this distance

is important because the real world/classroom binary, like all binaries, derives its power from the separation and marginalization that contributes to the construction of hierarchies. Eco-feminist theorist Val Plumwood describes this quality of binaries particularly well in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. She writes that dualistic binaries are "a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterized by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower" (47-48). Notably, Plumwood also points out that the idea of dualisms not only depends on a radical exclusion of one pole by the other, but also acts to create two separate spheres of reality and deny the relationship between them. As Plumwood notes:

> [t]his dualistic construal of difference usually treats it as providing not merely a difference of degree within a sphere of overall similarity, nor a major difference of degree within a sphere of overall similarity, but a major difference in kind, even a bifurcation or *division in reality* between utterly different orders of things. (50, my emphasis)

This system of separation and bifurcation of realities becomes the necessary component for binaries to subvert each other. In short, they function because dualism "denies continuity" (50). So the radical exclusion within binary systems is essential to the hierarchies within them by "denying or minimizing overlap qualities and activities, and by the erection of rigid barriers to prevent contact" (49).

In the classroom/real world binary, the real world, the realm typically defined strictly in market terms, supersedes and oppresses the critical inquiry of the classroom, naturalizing its exclusion from the reality of the work world. In doing so, it denies the interdependence and co-habitation of the classroom and the work world. It denies that they are a continuous reality informed by the same ideologies.

Using critical geography in writing classrooms helps blur these distinctions between the real and the academic; it emphasizes that we are not merely disinterested observers noting the nuances of a media culture from afar. Rather, like characters in a thickly woven meta-fiction who self-consciously consider their fictional world, these critical geography assignments emphasize that we are in the middle of the text of culture and ask students to self-consciously examine the text that they inhabit. We cannot extricate ourselves from the world that we see with our critical lens. The intertwining narratives of culture and the classroom become like the inter-dependent narratives of a Borgesian labyrinth. Instead of two separately ordered worlds or realities, the end of one passage and the beginning of the next, the end of one story and the beginning of the next, become unclear

Seeing the classroom as distinctly separate yet intrinsically intertwined with the world beyond allows us to understand the classroom from a more phenomenological approach that emphasizes synergy and relationship instead of distance and separation. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that our capacity to see and feel the world around us requires that we, too, must be visible and tangible beings. In order to sense the world, we must occupy the realm of tangibility with the objects that we touch and see. Merleau-Ponty insists, "he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at"(35), and therefore individuals are inextricably linked with their environment. They inhabit a shared phenomenal realm that defies the distinct

categories of subjective self and objective world.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical outlook merges mind and body and self and world, and it undermines the classroom's separation from the world. Phenomenology seeks to undo the body-mind dualism; it is useful to begin to see that same dissolved dualism reflected in our understanding of the classroom. In contrast to the Cartesian rift between the world of the mind and the world of the body, the academic/real binary reverses the hierarchy of this relationship. In the Cartesian framework, there is an intrinsic separation between the body and the mind in which the mind is privileged over and dominates the body. In the binary at hand, this hierarchy is reversed as the classroom (theoretically the terrain of the mind) becomes subjugated to all that is external to it. The university is a fantasyland that contrasts with the world of the job search. All that is external to the mind achieves an embodied and physical (or real and tangible) existence from the seemingly originary signifier of capital and economy. Most importantly, regardless of whether the mind is subjugating the body or vice versa, the key point here is that the language of the real bifurcates the mind and the body, the academic and the real. The university, and the classroom in particular, has become a disembodied mind: a thinking entity knocking around within but disconnected from the body-shell of the real world.

Confronting spatial and tangible components of ideology and culture might help us to move closer to a classroom that sees its intrinsic inhabitation within the text that it reads. Similar to the way Merleau-Ponty's philosophy bridges the gap between self and world and the visible and the invisible, critical geography emphasizes the connection between the classroom and the world that it sees. By raising students' awareness of their relationship with the spaces they inhabit and the ideological components of these settings, we might begin to highlight the inter-relatedness of the academic and the real.

In the online journal *Philosophy of Education*, Merleau-Ponty scholar Marjorie O'Loughlin explores the implications of phenomenology for education and suggests that "[a]s teachers, educational theorists and the like, we need to direct our attention to the realities of bodies in discursively constituted settings." With bodies in mind, O'Loughlin suggests "while we cannot deny the fundamental category of gender (or race or disability), we need also to examine (differently) embodied subjects' 'first hand' involvements with 'place,' and the intimate connection of the sense of 'place' with other dimensions of living that subjects experience." In short, we need to consider students as "'ecological subject[s],' bodily attached to a geographical location and encountering it in the fullest sense." Although O'Loughlin's argument focuses more particularly on issues of place in terms of a larger geographical sensibility, her idea of "bodies in discursively constituted settings" reorients our understanding of classrooms and environment from a series of discrete objects within an inert setting to a system of ideologically constructed relationships between bodies and the spaces they inhabit.

Relationships between bodies and spaces are important because writing and reading at their very core are also about relationships. Because writing operates within multiple rhetorical and cultural contexts and must respond to these various environments and audiences, this phenomenology of the classroom and the critical geography assignments are particularly appropriate. This idea of relationships, writing, and environment (i.e., rhetorical context, space, or place) has become central to many scholars in the emerging field of ecocomposition.

In particular, Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser have done much to help bridge this gap between the idea of rhetorical context and a larger concept of environment and ecology. In the lead essay to their edited collection on the theories and pedagogies related to ecocomposition, Dobrin points out that "composition and rhetoric studies . . . is also a study of relationships: between individual writers and their surrounding environment, between writers and texts, between texts and culture, between ideology and discourse, and between language and world" (12). Dobrin further emphasizes the intrinsic connection between space and writing when he writes, "the relationship between discourse and the construction of environment, nature, and place is a deeply enmeshed, co-constitutive relationship. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the writing from the place and the place from the writing" (18). Writing and reading are acts that are always situated rhetorically, but they are also situated geographically within a physical environment. In these formulations, Dobrin and others, like O'Loughlin, have focused on the idea of place and geography as being instrumental to understanding rhetorical context.

This examination of space, though, is not just about relationships; it is also about power, discourse, and ideology. By examining the way power operates in our classrooms and in the physical landscapes of our communities, we might develop a critical gaze that examines not only the space from which it emanates, the classroom, but also the ideologies implicit in the space of the classroom and the university. Hopefully, through this gaze into the lived spaces of their lives, students might begin to consider the academic vision of critical thinking as a part of their lived experience, as a part of the real and not merely sequestered in the windowless room where they have composition class.

Mauk articulates the reasoning behind these types of assignments particularly well when he points out that "space actually functions in the re-processing of the systems [of culture]"(80). He cites Michel Foucault's assertion that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (qtd. in Mauk 80) and reinforces the idea that, when we talk about space, we are not just talking about the physical landscape, but also discourse, ideology, language, and, of course, power. This role of space and geography in the naturalizing power structures suggests that it is imperative that we also include the physical in the cultural critiques taking place in our classrooms.

In addition, I believe that discussions of culture can often persist in the muddiness of abstract objectification. That is, we can talk about culture as something "over there." However, physical observation of spatial organization and the built environment forces a more careful exploration of the tenuous line between the tangible, the visual, the linguistic, the cultural, and, most important, the individual's role within this matrix of experience. On this intersection between place and culture, Mauk writes that "critical theorists . . . making claims about power and space are not suggesting a pre-meditated plot by governmental organizations; rather they are describing the subtle inclinations of a system which maintains its power through the control of bodies in space"(80). His use of these terms "bodies in space" implies an intermingling. Bodies don't exist within the shell of the classroom, but fill that space, investing it with meaning, just as much as the chalkboard and the lectern. As Merleau-Ponty has suggested, the organism is not separate from its environment; it lives, rather, within and amongst it: it is a part of it.

We are bodies that teach and learn in physical spaces. Unless we shift the idea of the academic and the critical from its fixed location in a physical space to a more mobile sense of being, the work of the classroom will continue to be the fiction within the lives of our students: the play within the play that unsettlingly resembles real life, but, because of our naturalized notions of space, seems to be a production only and not the real thing. For all the world is a stage, not just the classroom, and we are all players in it. ⌂

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Image into Word:
Glimpses of Mental Images in Writers Writing

Hildy Miller

For a long time we have known that mental imagery plays a significant role in the thought and writing processes of creative writers. In the *Writers at Work* series and similar publications, writers sometimes reflect on ways in which compelling images serve to generate ideas. They report that even a simple mental picture, occurring at the inception of a writing session, can then diversify and develop into complex plots, characters, and settings. John Hawkes, for instance, described some of the mental images that inspired his various writings:

> In each case what appealed to me was a landscape or world, and in each case I began with something immediately and intensely visual—a room, a few figures, an object, something prompted by the initial idea and then literally seen, like the visual images that come to us just before sleep. (10)

It is easy to guess how and why mental images should figure as centrally to composing for creative writers as they do. After all, such images in the writer's thoughts of rooms, people, or landscapes are often mirrored by the images they include in the texts themselves. But it is not so easy to see how or why such mental images might play a significant role for writers using forms other than creative writing. Why should they? Most non-creative texts, abstract rather than concrete, typically contain few images.[1]

In a study of mental images and non-creative writing, I attempted to answer this question by taking "thought samples" designed to capture mental images as participants wrote an assigned essay. I also conducted interviews with those participants who relied heavily on mental images as they wrote. In the portion of the study presented here, I highlight several examples of mental images used by writers and their varied rhetorical functions. I have also included examples of mental imagery from other retrospective or concurrent self-report accounts of writers in other studies and from the informal self-reports in interviews with creative writers because all these accounts not only provide close glimpses of actual mental imagery, but also suggest their rhetorical functions.

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[1] For lack of a better term, I will call this large category "non-creative writing" in this essay. By non-creative writing, I include such pieces as the expository essay written by my participants, the academic writing samples from all disciplines that my participants brought to interviews, along with the variety of forms found in studies I cite such as technical or expressive writing. In other words, I am looking at the large category of work that is not creative writing.

Other Self-Report Snapshots of Mental Imagery and Its Role in Writing

In choosing to gather exemplary data through self-reports in my study, I was partly following the general approach of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes who, in their studies of cognitive processes in writing in the early to mid-1980s, produced some compelling and informative snapshots of writers' ways of working. Setting aside all the now-standard critiques of their work (the reductionist nature of their model, the lack of a social dimension, the limitations of protocols, and all the rest), what I found most interesting in their studies were the mental images that appeared from time to time in the snippets of protocol transcripts. In one piece, in particular, "Images, Plans, and Prose," Flower and Hayes focus on mental imagery, proposing what they call a "mental representation thesis" to explain how mental images are one of an entire array of internal representations for knowledge that are then subsequently translated into conventional prose. Ultimately, they explain: "Concepts—the power and glory of verbal thought and the hallmarks of precise analytical prose—are themselves abstractions, often mentally represented by generalized prototypes . . . by images, by buried metaphors, or by schemas" (142). For them, the verbal representations are far more significant than the imagistic. However, they found enough evidence of mental imagery in their protocols at least to note their presence. In part of one protocol, for example, we see a brief reference to what is called a "party schema," that is, information about social gatherings that appears to be "stored" as imagery:

(1) Rhetorical question or introduction.
(2) I'm thinking—where can I go to find all of these people happy together?
(3) My fields are partying they brought over all these people.
(4) Quote—unquote—Kentucky Lady—etcetera—now
(5) I feel blank.
(6) Who's the strongest—person in the world [mumble].
(7) The question is who is the strongest person in the world.
(8) Competition—remarks—your policeman—he holds up—cars with one hand.
(9) But cars are so big—but cars are—but cars don't wiggle.
(10) My job—no.
(11) I disagree [mumble].
(12) But cars don't wiggle—but cars don't wiggle. (127-28)

In this example, the writer does seem to be proceeding digressively by fits and starts, sifting through fleeting images of parties ("My fields are partying…"; "Kentucky Lady"), though the images never wind up appearing later in the writer's actual text. In a subsequent piece of the same protocol, the writer continues to play with the images associated with colorful drink names ("Kentucky Lady," and others). Such mental imagery can also be found scattered throughout other Flower and Hayes protocol excerpts in other articles, though they do not call attention to them. For Flower and Hayes, mental imagery, then, appears to play a limited role in writers' processes and to serve a largely generative function, acting simply as one of a variety of mental representations to aid invention. Yet this particular piece of protocol provides a close glimpse of mental imagery at work in writing.

A more recent view of mental imagery and writing from psychology can be found in Mark Sadoski and Allan Paivio's *Imagery and Text* in which they note multiple experiments conducted throughout the 1990s in which participants were

asked to write briefly the definitions of abstract and concrete words. In the post-sample self reports of all the participants, writers reported far more mental imagery in writing when the topic was to define something concrete (instead of something abstract). In addition, the texts of concrete definitions were significantly longer, thus suggesting that copious mental imagery may encourage greater writing fluency and output. Sadoski and Paivio treat the abstract and the concrete as distinctly different categories, unlike George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who theorize that abstract concepts have an underlying experiential base. In my study, too, many writers, explaining "how they learn," an abstract concept, saw mental images exemplifying the abstract concept, whether they used a concrete example in their essays or not. Sadoski and Paivio also theorize a dual coding system of the verbal and the visual, unlike Flower and Hayes who envision multiple codes. Perhaps for that reason, they envision a far more central role for mental imagery in writing than do Flower and Hayes who see it as somewhat peripheral. In fact, Sadoski and Paivio speculate that mental imagery must play a variety of rhetorical roles, including, for example, shaping the writer's persona and conception of audience and producing rhetorical constructions from which all sorts of stylistic choices may be made. Their conjecture is that writers may continuously draw on visually coded material in their long-term memory throughout any writing task.

Other indications of the rhetorical role of mental images occur in, for example, Kristie S. Fleckenstein's work in which she found that high levels of engagement in writers were correlated with both their scores as high imagers on a standard instrument for measuring images and a greater amount of imagery actually present in their texts. Demetrice A. Worley, in her study, trained technical writing students extensively in using visual imagery and found that the training improved their writing in a variety of ways, including encouraging them to use more detailed information, to see situations from a variety of viewpoints, and to play out varied scenarios in which different causes lead to different effects. Both these studies were carried out in the 1990s, preceding what has become a general renaissance of interest in "visual rhetoric." For decades, as Linda T. Calendrillo has pointed out, mental images were as marginal in our field as they were in psychology and classical rhetoric. Flower and Hayes probably spoke for most compositionists in saying: "The [verbal arena] is where most of the work gets done; it is the sine qua non to *written* verbal knowledge; and it is the level at which education does the most good" (124).

Historically, most scholars agree that interest in the visual and writing/rhetoric waxes and wanes with developments in the visual in adjacent fields (i.e., computer technology in the last decade; scientific discoveries in the way the human eye works during the Enlightenment). Currently, we are seeing evidence of this renaissance in the appearance of not only new collections of research (*Language and Image in the Reading-Writing Classroom*), but also a variety of textbooks (*Visual Communication*; *Visual Literacy*; *Seeing and Writing*).

Outside the fields of rhetoric/composition and psychology, creative writers have often provided informal retrospective accounts of the workings of mental imagery when they reflect on their writing. Not only do they frequently refer to the importance of mental images, but they also suggest specific rhetorical functions that such images may perform. For example, at the outset, writers may become engaged by compelling generative images that seem to hold the kernel of an entire story. Tennessee Williams once reflected:

> The process by which the idea for a play comes to me has always been something I really couldn't pinpoint. A play just seems to materialize; like an apparition, it gets clearer and clearer and clearer. It's very vague at first, as in the case of *Streetcar,* which came after *Menagerie*. I simply had the vision of a woman in her late youth. She was sitting in a chair all alone by a window with the moonlight streaming in on her desolate face, and she'd been stood up by the man she planned to marry. (84-85)

This mental image seems to guide not just the development of his main character, but to suggest the entire melancholy mood of the play, its set of faded grandeur and decay, and the pivotal scene in which the faded youth of Blanche was exposed in harsh light. For E. L. Doctorow, such inspiration is a combination of image and intense emotion. He once commented:

> Well, it can be anything. It can be a voice, an image; it can be a deep moment of personal desperation. For instance, with *Ragtime* I was so desperate to write something, I was facing the wall of my study in my house in New Rochelle and so I started to write about the wall. . . . Then I wrote about the house that was attached to the wall. It was built in 1906, you see, so I thought about the era and what Broadview Avenue looked like then; trolley cars ran along the avenue down at the bottom of the hill; people wore white clothes in the summer to stay cool. Teddy Roosevelt was President. One thing led to another and that's the way the book began, through desperation to those few images. (305-6)

This inspirational mental image, like that of Williams, seems to encapsulate the novel, which, as its title *Ragtime* suggests, is more than a story but rather an invocation of an entire era. Other creative writers mention mental images that not only generate ideas but also structure and order them. For instance, Stephen Spender, in another anecdotal account, described how a mental image could suggest text structure to him: "Often a very vivid memory, usually visual . . . suggests that it could be realized in concentrated, written language, in a form which is adumbrated dimly, not yet clear. . . to be discovered" (70). William Goyen compared creating structure in writing to the visual pattern of a quilt: "That seems to be what my writing job is: to discover this relationship of parts. . . . In a beautiful quilt it looks like the medallions really grow out of one another" (197-98). Other mental images seem to serve less global rhetorical functions. Characters, for example, may come alive through visual and auditory imagery. Elie Wiesel said of his character Moshe the Madman: "I try to see him . . . I move him around. I hear his voice, and I see his eyes. I am burned by his madness" (235). These few representative accounts (and there are many more) suggest that mental images may take a variety of shapes and play a variety of rhetorical roles in writing, both creative and non-creative. But, as yet, we have only a few fragmentary descriptions of them.

Capturing Mental Images in My Study

Overall, my study was designed to determine how common mental images were during a non-creative writing task, to gather examples of them and their rhetorical functions, and to see what relationship, if any, imaging had to the texts

that were emerging in response to my assigned task. To gather this information, I asked 148 undergraduate writers to write on the topic of how they learned best. The writers were a mix of upper and lower division students from majors in business, science, social sciences, the technical fields, and the humanities whose writing abilities varied from weak to strong. During a forty-five minute writing session, writers were interrupted three times and asked to fill out a brief "thought sample" questionnaire in which they reported on their last few seconds of thought, along with reflecting on how their thought may have been related to what they were writing. They also marked an "X" at the spot in their texts where they were interrupted. Thus, I was able to compare the thought they reported on their questionnaire with the ideas in the actual text they were writing at that point. After their thoughts were reported, participants resumed writing. At the end of the 45-minute session, they also reflected on their entire experience of writing the essay in a post-sample questionnaire.

In choosing this method, I modeled my questionnaire on thought sample instruments sometimes used for mental image research in psychology (Anderson; Genest and Turk; Klinger). In some naturalistic studies of mental imagery, participants are interrupted periodically throughout their normal daily activities and prompted to fill out a thought sample questionnaire. Unlike think aloud protocols—better known from the Flower and Hayes studies of cognitive processes in writing—which are an ongoing report of all thoughts for an extended period of time, thought sampling is a periodic and random report of one brief thought. Protocol reports are said to distort natural thought by elongating it, whereas thought samples, which are only minimally intrusive, are said to preserve the natural brevity of thought. Indeed, most thoughts tend to last on average only five seconds (Anderson 168). Thus, as a method, thought sampling is generally considered to be less intrusive and more accurate than protocols. In my study, brief open questions asking writers to report the last few seconds of thought were combined with other questions, such as whether they were thinking in mostly words, mostly images, or both, and with questions designed to identify dimensions of images such as their level of detail or vagueness. Participants were trained ahead of time to report mental images using established training techniques (Klinger) in which they practiced filling out thought sample questionnaires. I described the purpose of the study and explained what verbal thought and imagistic thought were. Their essays were also holistically rated so that I could examine any connections between mental imagery and writing ability. Once I statistically analyzed the data from the questionnaires, I then interviewed eleven of the participants who used mental images extensively in order to learn more about the role of mental images in their ways of working. During the interviews, participants commented on their thought sample responses and the writing session itself, described their ways of writing using other samples of writing, and provided general histories of their use of mental imagery as writers.

Mental Images in the Writing of My Participants

Overall, mental images were reported by writers in strikingly large numbers of thought samples. Out of a total of 444 thought samples, in approximately a fourth of them, writers reported thoughts in "mostly images," with another half of them "both words and images," and another fourth, "mostly words." So clearly their processes were, as Flower and Hayes once said, "not a logical, fully explicit,

or even necessarily verbal journey" (129). Since I was able to compare the thought reported in the thought sample with the "X" each participant had marked in his or her essay, I was able to determine which mental images also appeared in their actual texts. Slightly over half (55.9 percent) of mental images reported in thought samples appeared in their texts. Most often, writers (who were asked to write about how they learn best) referred briefly to specific learning experiences (a class, or a trip, etc.) without making explicit the internal imagery accompanying these thoughts. However, an additional 41.8 percent of mental images reported in thought samples never appeared in the text at all. For example, one student who was making a point about Socrates was visualizing him when interrupted by a thought sample, but never mentioned him at all in her text. Thus there is an astonishing amount of imagistic activity that we would be unlikely to predict based on what actually appears in final texts. Selections from some of the students I interviewed, which follow, give a fuller account of the mental images they saw while writing and the rhetorical functions they served.

Gena: Searching Through a Succession of Mental Images

Many writers reported that mental images were ongoing, as might be expected from research on the role of imaging in the natural "flow of thought" (Klinger; Pope). Images occurred in procession, seeming to shift as thoughts shifted. Thus, a mental image reported in a thought sample might be associated with a thought just passing or one just developing. For example, one writer explained an image in his thought sample: "I was thinking of Europe because I had just written that one way my courses had helped me view things differently was through my six month trip to Europe last year." In his text he then further developed this idea by using an incident from the trip.

Gena, an art history major and a creative writer, told me that she was always aware of the visual, often noting and storing strong visual impressions. She said: "I look at something, and something will snap. I think, 'How could I paint that?'. . . . I always take a camera with me." While writing, even non-creative writing, she sees a procession of mental images: "I tend to float from picture to picture as I'm writing." Not all these images are used in the final draft, but instead seem to be part of an imagistic process she often referred to as "searching." As she described it: "A lot of the images don't get to paper because it keeps changing. . . . I'm searching for just exactly what I want." The mental images she sees are often vague and general until she senses she has found what she is looking for. At that point, they become very distinct and detailed. She explained: "I think once it's not needed anymore, it goes away." In one of Gena's thought samples, she was stopped while explaining what it is like to learn a foreign language. She wrote:

> Learning Chinese, especially the characters, is a lot like learning the alphabet if one thinks about it, (**STOP**) a lot of memorization and practice, just like the practice it took to learn to ride my bike or to draw.

In both her thought sample and interview, she revealed that she was seeing images of not only bikes, drawings, and the alphabet, but also several other mental images in quick succession, such as one in which she was learning to tie her shoelaces. Her process of "searching" or "groping for an idea," as she called it, meant searching through all the mental images that floated around in her thoughts.

Ethan: Caught at a Transition Between Mental Images

Sometimes writers were caught at transitions between topics, entertaining two mental images simultaneously, with the upcoming image gradually displacing the previous one. Ethan, for example, a student I interviewed who was an English and philosophy major, was stopped in his essay just before he was about to begin explaining his job. He wrote:

> One year later, I was hired as an intern in the county attorney's office. My job is to organize the witnesses for all cases (we prosecute all criminal cases in Hennepin County) and make sure they know when they are supposed to testify. Additionally, I go down to the actual court cases and watch those witnesses testify. (**STOP**)

In his thought sample he reported holding two detailed images in mind. In the first he said he was recalling an idea he once learned in a philosophy class while visualizing the actual classroom, with this mental image connected to a point he made previously. The second mental image was connected with experiences on the job, the topic he developed next. Like Gena, Ethan seems propelled forward from idea to idea by a stream of images: when the mental image changes, the idea changes.

In cases like these, mental images newly forming or just passing tend to be less detailed and less focused than those in which a writer is currently engaged. Overall, in approximately two-thirds of the thought samples, writers reported some degree of detail in their thoughts. In contrast, in nearly one-third, thoughts were "somewhat" or "very" vague. Writers I spoke to were aware of these differences in image resolution. Thus, while one writer struggled to flesh out the meaning of a teasingly fragmented and vague outdoor scene, another became engrossed in seeing and remembering all the minute details of a dance class. Even the same mental image tends to vary in its degree of detail over the course of a writing task. According to writers like Gena and Ethan, this procession of mental images moves continuously throughout a writing task and seems to provide them with a sense of continuity among the different ideas.

Bette: Managing Simultaneous Mental Images While Writing

While writers like Gena and Ethan described their mental images as sequential, other writers reported multiple images that appeared simultaneously as they worked. Bits and pieces of images coalesced into jumbled visual configurations from which writers then selected. Bette, for example, was interrupted while explaining how time is calculated in geological terms. In her text she wrote:

> When you're dealing with events that took place millions of years ago, you don't get exact dates, so you think in terms of what happened before or after what. So instead of thinking of the dinosaurs as existing 60 million years ago, I think of them existing in the Jurassic period which is shortly after Triassic when mammals where first coming around (**STOP**) and quite a bit after the Devonian when animals first came up on land.

At the time of interruption, she was seeing detailed mental images, as she

said on the thought sample questionnaire, "a double image in my mind." She reported:

> I was thinking of the fish in the Devonian period coming up on land starting to get little feet. I was trying to remember exactly how long—how many periods existed—between the Devonian and the Triassic. I had a double image in my mind. One of the geologic timetables, one of Mesozoic and Paleozoic trees and creatures coming out of the water to the land.

During her interview, she explained that the timetable was a replica of a graph she remembered from her geology class that she was using to be able to recall the different geological eras. Such internalizing of images that were once external in order to recall information later was a strategy often reported by writers in my study. The other mental image she was seeing simultaneously against this geological graph backdrop was a cartoon-like picture of creatures coming onto land from water. In fact, the only textual trace of all this visual activity was her statement in her text (where the STOP marks her interruption): "when animals first came up on land." Strong writers like Bette told me such profuse images were stimulating, while weaker writers, in contrast, often reported that they were confused and distracted by a flood of images that did not always relate to the idea at hand.

David: Struggling with Simultaneous Mental Images

David, a physiology major, told me he had always disliked writing; his problems with grammar and spelling were, in fact, so severe that he once failed an English class in high school. And, indeed, his essay was scored holistically as being in the "weak" writer range. In addition to his mechanical problems, he planned and revised little and had trouble generating and organizing material. But he was also a visual thinker with such a keen eye for detail that he could sketch a dollar bill from memory. While writing, he described his mental images as "like a video; it keeps going." He used these mental images to help him cope with his spelling problems, he said, by seeing general shapes of words and hearing them sounded out. But sometimes these images were distracting for him. In fact, in his essay he was interrupted while writing this passage:

> When writing I'm a very poor speller. It might be that I mispronounce my words. I can see when they do not look right because I'm good with patterns. I was writing a paper the other day and could not find the proper spelling for 'scathed.' I have trouble (**STOP**) keeping my b's and d's straight when I'm this tired.

In his thought sample (at the STOP) he reported his mental image as "Going through dictionary, making a phone call to a friend, remembering phone conversation." So he was not only seeing all these scenes simultaneously, but also hearing bits of remembered conversation, though there is no evidence in his text of all this visual and auditory activity. For stronger writers, like Bette, the profuse mental imagery seems to propel her writing forward. However, David, a weaker writer, told me he sometimes had a hard time controlling the flashing images. For him, the mental images were both a help and a hindrance, sometimes assisting him in spelling correctly and, at other times, distracting him and adding to a sense of cognitive overload that made his spelling even worse. In fact, when

I compared the 148 participants' overall use of mental imagery in describing their essays' theses with how their essays scored holistically (on a six point scale) as strong (5-6), typical (3-4), or weak (1-2), I found writers of weak essays far more likely to report their thesis as connected with a mental image. Twice as many writers of strong essays reported they saw their thesis as a mental image than as words, whereas five times as many weak writers reported their thesis as a mental image rather than as words. Thus, writers of weak essays may face additional difficulties in learning to control their mental imagery, along with the rest of their writing processes.

Ellen: Entertaining Successive and Simultaneous Mental Images for Her Own Amusement

Many writers spoke of their mental images as vital to creating interest in their writing, whether it was dramatizing what they had to say or just injecting some humor or playfulness into an otherwise dour task, particularly assigned academic writing, which for many of my participants was inherently boring. Ellen was an English major who was not a creative writer but who loved to read literature, had a vivid imagination, and was having difficulty adjusting to the demands of the academy. She had tried including colorful quotations and humor in her papers in order to enliven them. As she told me: "It's hard to just write the standard thing. I try to put some life into it." Yet her efforts generally went unrewarded.

When she described her writing process, she said: "Everything is in terms of images and feelings. I'm not even remotely logical." Indeed, the way she described structuring papers seemed to verify what she told me. She first selects quotations from her readings, types them on strips of paper, cuts them out, and sorts them into a pattern—both seeing and hearing the words as she organizes her paper. At one thought sample interruption, she was stopped while still taking notes for her essay. Listing classes in which she had done cross-learning, she wrote: "Theory of the Novel—too far above my (**STOP**) present limited capacities—calculus above all—my utter nemesis." In her thought sample (at the STOP) she reported:

> I was going to write that the class 'Theory of the Novel' was
> too far above my present capacities. I was thinking of examples
> of classes that didn't apply to my personal experience—and
> looming hugely above the others like a big black thundercloud,
> I saw 'CALCULUS' written in huge block letters.

When comparing the thought sample and text, the only trace of her complex mental image to appear in it is the word "above." The black thundercloud of block letters she saw is only referred to in the text as "my utter nemesis." In her interview she added that much of her dislike of calculus was because it was so rule-bound; its theorems seemed "written in stone." So it is not surprising that "huge block letters" appeared in the mental image she reported.

Ellen and other writers in my study who enjoyed their mental imagery found it not just a way to get interested in what was for them otherwise boring writing tasks, but a way to play, to express their creativity, and to experience strong feelings—and, if allowed, to enliven their writing. As some psychological research suggests (Wilson and Barber 340), "high imagers" or "fantasy prone individuals" seek out and enjoy the strong emotions and even bodily reactions associated with

their mental imagery. Ellen, in particular, seems to fit this profile, even more than Gena, Ethan, and Bette who also found mental imagery stimulating.

Conclusions and Implications

The examples I have included from my study demonstrate how pervasive mental imagery can be for some writers. Gena, Ethan, Bette, David, and Ellen all experience a procession and a profusion of mental images as they write. The rhetorical functions these images serve for them vary, including generating ideas, providing a sense of continuity, serving as a memory aid to recall information or simply to spell words correctly, and stimulating interest and engagement. Other writers in my study (not included here) used mental imagery to choose a voice, adjust to audience, develop innovative text structures, and arrive at a thesis for their essays. In previous work, we also see descriptive glimpses of mental imagery in the work of Flower and Hayes and in the various interviews in which creative writers reflect on their processes. And we see evidence of the rhetorical functions of mental imagery in the work of Sadoski and Paivio, Fleckenstein, Worley, and others. My work reinforces past studies by providing further descriptions and suggesting a similar variety of rhetorical functions. However, unlike Flower and Hayes who think mental imagery operates only tangentially, in my study, I show how pervasive mental images can be in writing, occurring overall in three-quarters of the thought samples taken from writers and appearing in such profusion in a single thought sample. In the interviews, the writers themselves also affirmed how much mental imagery figured into their writing processes as they reflected in the essay, the thought samples, and their ways of working.

Future research might elaborate on these findings in several ways. Thought samples provided a close general look at underlying processes, yet often the samples could only hint at sequences of mental imagery and at possible interactions between image and word and between mental image and text. Further studies might make finer distinctions. Different kinds of writers might also provide additional information. The writers I worked with were undergraduate students who were well trained to provide accurate thought sample responses and who were surprisingly articulate and reflective about their processes. Still, a similar study conducted with more experienced writers who were even more aware of internal processes might yield additional information. Or a study using creative writers, perhaps doing both creative writing and non-creative writing, might explain more about the similarities and differences of these processes. Writers in visual areas such as art, architecture, and engineering, who appear in my study to use more mental images than most writers, would also provide a more specialized set of participants.

Finally, our practices of teaching and assessing writing might change to reflect the pervasiveness and importance of mental imagery for many writers. The role of mental imagery is rarely mentioned in the majority of writing textbooks used in composition classes, even those geared for visual fields such as art, architecture, and engineering. Worley's study, in which she trained engineering students to use mental imagery intentionally, shows the value of making imagery explicit and of opening up the notion of writing processes to include mental imagery. In English studies, it would be particularly helpful to develop such intentional training for our many creative writers and literature enthusiasts, like Gena and Ethan, or students like Ellen who seem to write visually. In writing assessment,

too, the majority of studies rarely mention the role of mental imagery, though underlying assessment is the concern for helping weaker writers improve. Fleckenstein's work suggests that weaker writers might become more engaged by working with mental imagery. And, in my study, writers like David were shown to struggle to control mental imagery, in his case using it beneficially to help with spelling but also feeling overwhelmed with its profusion amidst his already confusing internal processes. The results of my study bear out the observation of Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman (284-85) that for all we have learned so far, the real figurative scripts used by writers have still not yet been fully described.

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Critical Thinking Skills and Emotional-Response Discourse: Merging the Affective and Cognitive in Student-Authored Texts through Taxonomy Usage

Ed Comber

Emotions, because they often interfere with critical or rational thought while simultaneously enhancing our writing, need to be more fully addressed in our research. In our Western rationalistic critical thinking, we tend to "objectify" subjects. Thus, by recognizing the role of emotions in student-authored texts, we begin to advance as well as complement more conventional composition agendas. To do this, we must help teach students to identify and analyze their personal affective language within their texts. By doing so, we not only acknowledge the importance of critical thinking, but also learn that effective pedagogy, when framed by critical thought, considers emotions which are necessary for, although frequently disruptive of, better critical thinking development. Thus, we better promote critical thinking and healthier attitudes which in turn produce more emotionally and intellectually balanced individuals.

As many researchers in the social sciences point out, emotions are an integral part of the human experience. Without them, each human ceases to be truly unique because emotions "lend significance to things, to events, and to ideas" (Brand, "Writing" 290). Yet these affective responses go largely ignored in composition pedagogy. While we all acknowledge the importance of affect in writing, we are less effective at 1) identifying affective discourse markers in student writing and 2) recognizing how and where emotive discourse interferes with rather than assists writing and writing pedagogy. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to present and explain a taxonomy of emotive-response discourse markers that helps teachers identify points in student-authored texts where emotion or affective language confuses, even flattens, the critical thinking and rhetorical abilities of students. Designed to help students identify inappropriate explicit emotions (or emotive-response discourse) within their own and others' texts, the taxonomy presents students with a visual guide by which they can begin to identify these complicating and flattening affective language areas within their analytical pieces. By locating and identifying the presence of affective interference, they are better equipped to revise accordingly. Additionally, because there is a need for emotions in critical thinking, teachers also need to be able to identify points where emotion both facilitates and interrupts student writing. By following the taxonomy, teachers can more effectively incorporate proper, non-interfering affective elements into their teaching.

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I define emotive-response discourse (ERD) as emotional or affective language that complicates the reading of a text. To expound, when emotional language (hatred, love, fear, happiness), themes (death, birth, abortion), and/or icon imagery (war, hospitals, death) are integrated into a text, the results often lead a writer off track and off topic because he or she subconsciously desires more fully to explore, explain, or release the pain, anger, or other emotion connected to the event, regardless of whether the event is causing them emotional hardship, aggravation, trauma, or even joy. Consequently, any indication that there is an emotional response to a topic, reading, or event that does not continue the flow of the text represents a point of emotive-response discourse.

The Importance of Critical Thinking and Emotions in Composition

In our classrooms, we often see the role emotions play in relation to our students' writing. In my experience, student writing at the start of the semester tends to run on the side of egocentric or predominantly "writer-based" prose, not the more balanced, rational "reader-based" (Flower) that includes some emotion, but relies more heavily on logic and rationality. By semester's end, while my students are still struggling with the myriad ideas, concepts, and marginalia with which I continue to bombard them, they are producing more competent and more critical prose.

The development of critical thinking skills is important because it helps to build more focused students; thus, critical thinking is a "logical and natural element of speaking, listening, reading, and writing" (Paul qtd. in Weinstein 284). "The ability to reason back and forth between the concrete and the abstract" in order to "follow an extended line of thought" (Lazere 1) is an important means by which to "foster development from egocentric to reciprocal and from conventional to autonomous moral reasoning" (2). As Donald Lazere notes, Mina Shaughnessy and Andrea Lunsford have both attempted to show this in their respective research. In fact, in some schools, the student development of critical thinking skills is so important that laws have been passed to ensure that they receive explicit instruction. In 1980, for example, California's nineteen state universities were mandated in Executive Order 338 to begin "formal instruction in critical thinking"; the universities were quickly followed by the state's community colleges and high schools (1). Additionally, "several reports of the National Assessment of Educational Progress have indicated that student writers' main weakness occurs in the progression from narrative and descriptive modes to modes directly requiring critical thinking" (2). The purpose and reward of such an agenda are to develop students who have "the desire and confidence to think carefully and responsibly for themselves" (Weinstein 287). This is a noble goal at the very least and, as Diane F. Halpern points out, "College students who have been taught general problem-solving skills showed significant gains in . . . cognitive growth and development" (279).

Too often, when we try to develop this cognitive growth, emotions seem to block many of our attempts. For example, students frequently encounter writer's block due to emotions they cannot or do not know how to rationalize. Thus, what eludes us and what needs to be further explored is a process of teaching students how to begin rationalizing emotions. After all, Brand tells us, "Skilled critical thinkers transcend the printed word and the here and now" ("Why" 436). Additionally, when "looking at critical thinking, we are also looking at moral

orientation . . . at belief systems . . . at attitude . . . at preference . . . at the fundamental polarities of good and bad and are expected to choose the good over the bad. . . . [When] we are deciding on the goodness and badness of things, we are trading in the affect" (438).

To help us better understand the emotional outbursts that are so natural and that also interrupt thought, we can turn to the works of Charles Anderson, Marian MacCurdy, Michelle Payne, Mark Bracher, Emily Nye, and Gillie Bolton, all of whom suggest that students often write themselves *into* any and nearly all forms of standard academic writing, regardless of whether it is done consciously or unconsciously. Many studies have shown—to varying degrees—that this phenomenon, the act of emotional placement into a text, actually does occur. These same studies indicate that inappropriate, personalized language is frequently found embedded in student-authored texts and can also be seen reflected in general topic selection, therefore creating the writer-based prose we frequently see (Comber; MacCurdy; Payne; Pennebaker).

The most obvious affective related problem in student-authored texts is the improper or inappropriate use of emotions in such writing as rhetorical analysis and research or problem/solution essays; these insertions are what are at the core of emotive-response discourse. Typically, no emotions are required in the text of these kinds of essays and, when these insertions are present, the reader usually perceives them as inappropriate. This inappropriateness also extends to tone and sentence phrasing that may interfere with the effectiveness of the writing. While the topic of an essay is often chosen for emotional allure, the texts themselves are not meant to contain the *emotional* opinions of the student writer. And though some assignments require rationalized opinions, in which the texts will include the use of pathos as a persuasive tool that may also include anecdotal information, these types of assignments are meant as exercises in analysis and critical thought. They are not places in which to express one's emotions, especially in the form of personal opinion. This is not to say that emotions do not have a place in writing; they most definitely do. As such, when attempting to locate these areas of inappropriateness, areas of emotive-response discourse should only be looked at in terms of rhetorical appropriateness with respect to the intended audience and purpose of the assignment.

Additionally, emotive-response discourse accounts for the reason a topic is selected and for such things as the presence of emotional baggage, "venting," or zealousness and enthrallment. Accordingly, ERD does not assume the presence of or attempt at any conscious or unconscious "healing" as is assumed under the currently used term "healing discourse." Writing is a daunting task for many people, not just our students, and the frustrations involved in writing can often carry over into the text itself. So, as a composition instructor who recognizes these feelings, I associate such ideas as "venting" more with frustration, stress, confusion, aggravation, and similar feelings and concepts, and recognize that these emotional responses often complicate writing and block students from fully developing their critical thinking skills.

To better illustrate what I mean, I offer two examples. The first example arose during my M.A. thesis work; the second is a hypothetical situation. The first instance is as follows: a female student analyzing an article on children and guns digresses into a story of how one of her friends was shot by the police:

> I can't believe he killed the dog, but if that dog was running at

me I would've been really scared too. What evidence did the police have that he was shooting at them? The bullet hit the dog like it was intended. I think in a lot of cases, the newspaper tries to protect people like the police, who in this case could've made a mistake killing [her friend]. He only fired one bullet and that was at the dog. They fired 8 shots at [him], 4 hit him. Obviously their intention was to kill him.

The preceding example could easily be seen as a paradigm of a bruised or traumatized ego/psyche asserting itself (Bracher). But consider this hypothetical second example. A male student researches reported rapes on his campus; he has never been raped, does not know anyone who has been or is the perpetrator of a rape, nor does he recall anyone reasonably emotionally close to him who has been raped, yet he becomes emotionally enthralled with the topic. As a result, he begins to insert egocentric or writer-based language into his work (e.g., "I can't believe how," "I am shocked at," and so on). Is he "healing," or has the student simply realized the topic's depth? Both of these are examples of emotive-response discourse: the first because of the obvious emotional connection the author has to the *topic*, the second because the emotive-response discourse markers developed *as a result of* the research, assignment, or composing of the text. In these cases, emotive-response discourse reveals the validity or relevance of the authors' emotional digression(s); the authors would, in later drafts, seek to assimilate them effectively into the essay. Both examples also clearly illustrate how emotional response complicated the students' cognitive abilities, thus flattening their critical thinking. The taxonomy is designed to help identify these occasions.

Examples of ERD Interference with Critical Thinking

The examples that follow illustrate the natural occurrence of emotions in student writing. Thirty-two of my students participated in the project aimed at determining whether young college students could easily and effectively use the taxonomy. I wanted to determine if the taxonomy could help students identify emotive-response discourse markers and thus begin to develop critical thinking skills through critical writing, becoming more emotionally and intellectually analytical. By asking them to analyze and reflect upon their own writing, biases, and emotions as a result of their lives and beliefs, I hoped my students could overcome many of the "basic" errors commonly made by first-year composition students, as Mark Bracher suggests is possible. I believed that the taxonomy would help my students develop four key learning skills; they would learn to understand appropriate and inappropriate affective language features, to think about their topic choices and texts to develop critical thinking skills, to identify the vast array of external and internal influences that affect writing, and to combine the affective and to create more effective texts.

The development of these acquired learning skills became more apparent during my study. To better illustrate the development of these skills, the next few examples reflect this growth. The examples are both narrative-style critical essays; the personal "I" was allowed in both instances.

The first essay assignment for the participants was to find one to three events (local, national, or global) that happened on or near the writer's birthday. As part of the body paragraphs, they were to explain how that event influenced their family

and how the world has changed since in relation to the event. The intent of the assignment was to start students looking analytically at their lives, helping them realize the poignancy of how even a local event can sometimes have a profound impact.

As I had anticipated, most students struggled to find events they "liked" or thought were interesting or were "easy" to write about; all of these are clear emotional responses to the assignment. Eventually, they all did find topics they *felt* suited them. As might be expected from such an assignment, emotive-response discourse permeated the texts, with an astounding 94 percent having at least one clear spot in which emotions caused trouble, such as sudden and uncharacteristic misspelling in one or two paragraphs; digression away from the original topic or from the requirements of the assignment; sudden problems with fragments and run-ons; and/or similar rapid declines in sentence phrasing, focus, and tone.

The best and most representative example of emotive-response discourse and truncated critical thinking skills came from one of my better students. "Tracy's" essay focused on the following: "Terrorist attacks on America have become an increasing concern in the years since [her] birth." Her introductory paragraph wonderfully summarized the events (the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1984 and the continued terrorist attacks throughout that period) Tracy intended to discuss in her text. However, at the start of the essay's body she mentioned the embassy bombing briefly in the first body paragraph, only to dedicate the rest of the paragraph to the events of September 11, 2001. In her next paragraph, Tracy did the same. After this point all references to Beirut and the "increasing concern" of terrorism disappeared entirely for two pages, only reappearing in the conclusion.

The language in the body strikes a rather somber chord as well. Statements, such as "Americans have been living in fear since the September 11 attack," "We have a false sense of security," and "we are naïve," riddle the text, appearing on average every three to four sentences. Additionally, she continues her digression by talking about anthrax, the "shoe-bomber," and Al-Qaeda. However, not once does she indicate how any of this is indicative of an "increasing concern in the years s*ince* [her] birth" (emphasis added). Obviously, the events of 9/11 had, to varying degrees, an impact on all of America. What this student's work shows is how profoundly those events have affected her. The impact has been so deep that she cannot see that she has wandered off into a vent or rant of sorts about September 11, 2001. While there may be several other factors responsiblefor her off-topic narrative (e.g., a learned pattern from high school or the choice to focus on other things because doing so is easier than supporting her thesis), it is, nonetheless, such venting or ranting that clearly illustrates how emotions interfere with the critical thinking process. It is for this reason that we must teach students to refocus their attention, to help them move away from wandering emotions, and to focus those ideas more clearly. In this case, after one use of the taxonomy, Tracy acknowledged the emotive-response discourse and attempted to integrate more effective emotions into the text by refashioning the thesis and showing the writer the points that digress.

The second example comes from a student who was first in my basic writing course the semester before I began this project. In that class, "Rich" had written one of his essays about trouble he was having with a roommate. To many researchers and teachers, such a topic is considered superficial; however, in this case, it was not. The student had (and apparently, as will be seen, still had at the

time of this project) a serious concern about the tidiness of one of his roommates, and that legitimate complaint makes it less superficial or easy than we might first believe.

When Rich came into my first-year composition class, we spoke briefly about the roommate, mainly because I discovered he had encouraged his other two roommates to take my class as well. I assumed from our conversation that everything had been resolved; since all three said the roommate had "shaped up," it seemed a logical conclusion. Rich and I were incorrect.

Our second assignment was a reflection upon a text, specifically a short story taken from one of the books in the *Chicken Soup* series. Rich chose a roommate story that was commonly reflected upon. This story reopened the supposedly "dealt with" situation. Emotions came out that echoed the previous semester.

Rich attempted throughout the essay to integrate his experience with that of the short story and, while clearly and wonderfully attempting to "go to the next level" throughout 90 percent of the essay, he failed twice. In these two areas emotive-responses interfered with his plot development. In the first instance, Rich discussed how untidy one of his three roommates was, the same topic chosen in our previous class together. This first example illustrates how Rich's emotional involvement with the topic interrupts his flow and ideas:

> One day I came into our common area to find all of John's papers all over the floor and couch. Lynch says that one of her shoes found its way underneath Kim's bed, and it made Kim furious. For example Lynch stated. . . . With depth in my voice I said, 'What is all this shit on the floor and whose is it?' Believe me; I had already known whose mess it was. I just wanted my rational [sic] to look fair that I was referring to all of my roommates. Lynch has a similar experience with her roommate. He [John] didn't seem to understand why I was so upset. The reason I was so upset was [it was a mess]. The biggest reason I was so upset was because I felt embarrassed when we would have guests over [because they couldn't sit down].

In this passage, we can see several things happening. The attempt at integrating the read text with what he is writing is the most apparent problem. The skipping around is representative of the interruption. Rich knows that as part of the assignment requirement he is continually to refer to the story he read, but he also wishes to vent. None of the remaining paragraphs are nearly as choppy as this one, nor do they have nearly as many basic errors. In addition to the faulty integration, Rich also fails to fully explain his reasons for feeling so strongly. He mentions that the room is a mess and that he would be embarrassed to have guests over, but he does not detail why this is such a "big deal." Rich seems to fail to consider how easily such items could be moved out of the way or how he might again approach his roommate. And, while this lack of paragraph development may be the result of not yet fully understanding how to develop each paragraph, we can still see his utter frustration as it pertains to his roommate, thus indicating a point of emotive-response discourse.

The second example of emotional interference in Rich's essay provides additional evidence of emotive-response discourse:

> When you leave the dorms for a break, you have to clean up the whole room and make sure all the trash is out. . . . During our

> second meeting with John just before break, we told him . . . to clean the bathroom. . . . Instead he vacuums and checks the windows to make sure they were locked. John left on a Tuesday and the rest of us were still going to be here for the remainder of the week. Since then, we have witnessed a substantial change in his cleaning ways. Now everything is [sic] our room gets cleaned with the added help of John.

Obviously, this passage does not make sense. There seems to be an inference throughout the piece that he and the other roommates have spoken with John on numerous occasions, but here, depending upon reading, Rich states that they have either spoken to John only one other time prior to break or two times during break week. Additionally, this issue doesn't seem that big of a deal after all because when the roommates told John to clean the bathroom, he shirked that responsibility, as it seems he has every other time as well, and opted to do the easiest clean-up chores. Also confusing is the fact that John took off earlier than the others, yet somehow this has made for a vast improvement in his helpfulness and cleanliness. Here we see how the writer has become confused and turned around in circles. Rich almost seems to be attempting to state that he's made a big deal about all this and that his messy roommate really isn't that bad of a guy. While this too reflects a failure to develop the one topic-one paragraph concept we attempt to teach our students, Rich's turn in opinion is representative of an affective response that confuses the reader and further interrupts the flow of his essay.

These examples reflect with reasonable clarity inappropriate emotions. The above example is not only easily identified, but noticeably out of place. In this instance, Rich has done fairly well at including his emotional response to a messy roommate into the reflection, but has failed to truly integrate the images through clear explanation so the text flows smoothly. As in example one, this again illustrates how emotional-response discourse interferes with the cognitive abilities of the student. In this case, the asides are not simple matters of venting or rambling. Here we can see how the examples relate to and to some extent reflect back on the overall topic; thus, the emotive-response discourse has a place in the actual text, but the text requires revising in order to incorporate the interruptions.

A final example is more difficult. In assignment three, my students were required to analyze a recent (within the three months prior to the assignment) opinion piece/editorial from either Time.com or Newsweek.com. No personal language—specifically "I"—was allowed, and the students were to determine if the article was effective or not in persuading readers through its use of Aristotle's rhetorical concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos and the five arguing styles (anecdote, analogy, authority, assertion, and allusion). I believe the reason for the difficulty in finding suitable examples is because by this time my students had become much more adept at finding explicit and inappropriate emotive-response discourse; they had more fully developed the key learning skills they were supposed to have learned. Only a surprising three of the thirty-two respondents included "I" and/or attacked the author of the piece being reviewed in their initial instructor-read drafts. By the time the final drafts were turned in, the students had succeeded in removing those references. This was a noticeable change from previous semesters where I would typically have upwards of ten or more students writing from the "I" or opinion perspective. The only emotion

remaining in the case study group's texts was the implicit.

This conclusion, and a further indication that the students did develop the critical learning skills needed for more balanced affective-cognitive texts, is perhaps best illustrated by what students had to say in their final journal entries about the taxonomy. One student wrote: "It was different than what I was used to and that gave me a new perspective. The taxonomy grid also laid everything out in front of me and it was a constant reminder of what I was looking for. . . . It made me more aware of what I was looking for and how it can be fixed." Another valid point that reflects the opinions of numerous other students are comments similar to these: "[I learned that] [e]motion can take on different levels which makes it harder to identify," and "I feel that I can identify points of inappropriate emotions in my essays now because I can put myself in the reader's shoes. I think I can write in an unbiased way without inappropriate emotions." These comments are all clearly reflective, with a handful being near epiphany. The difference shows in that, overall, the participants' first essays contained about ninety-four percent clear emotive-response discourse markers; the second essay dropped to a remarkable fifty-nine and a half percent. This indicates an astonishing thirty-four and a half percent drop after only two uses of the taxonomy during peer- and self-revision of two similar essays.

Interestingly, much of the language in the responses also reflects the "I think" statements Robert J. Stahl states we need to work toward. These "I think" statements indicate that our students have taken a crucial step to traversing the abyss between too much emotional involvement without reflection and entering the realm of critical thought in which they have started to analyze their emotional responses. It is in large part a result of these realizations that the participants were able to remove successfully so much explicit emotive-response discourse from their third essays. The taxonomy appears to have hastened the development of student critical thinking abilities in this study. Any affective related material that remains in the student-authored texts was completely acceptable; the students, after all, made an emotional investment in choosing the topic as well as in writing their analyses. Thus, as a result of the removal of inappropriate explicit emotions, what I received in their third essays were more balanced, more logical, and more critical pieces than I have had in previous semesters.

While we are able to identify emotions in our students' writing, the difficulty here is determining if students have developed the ability to do the same in both their own and their peers' writing. The volunteer End-of-Project Surveys indicate that most of the students believed they had learned to identify explicit and inappropriate emotions in the various texts reviewed over the course of the project. Additionally, the majority stated that the taxonomy did help their writing and that the more they practiced using the taxonomy the easier it became to use and understand.

Of the thirty-two student responses, 56 percent stated they had learned to identify ERD while 31 percent admitted to either being "clueless" or having learned nothing. The remaining 13 percent stated they really did not know if the taxonomy helped, admitted they just didn't use it or care about it, or confessed it was too hard for them to understand. The numbers were more clearly separated for the question concerning whether the taxonomy helped students write better: 56 percent stated yes; 41 percent said no; 3 percent indicated they didn't know. Finally, when asked if the taxonomy became easier over the course of the semester,

the students overwhelmingly indicated that it did. 91 percent of the participants stated they had found the taxonomy easier to understand after each use. Only nine percent stated the taxonomy and grid did not get easier or they hated it so much that they didn't really do the taxonomy (which interestingly reflects their emotive response to the taxonomy itself, an area worth exploring more).

These statistics indicate the use of a taxonomy does allow students, through a visual guide, to look more deeply and critically at writing. As for the emotional identification, I believe the reasonably close split indicates a need for more in-depth instruction and explanation of what inappropriate emotions are as well as how emotions might be implied; however, the scope of this project was intended only to help students *identify* explicit emotions.

That most students (nearly two to one) realized how and why certain emotions are inappropriate or out-of-place for certain writing scenarios is a clear indication that a change in student thought processes had started. Additionally, many students had started more clearly to articulate, analyze, and identify the affective side of writing. As could be seen from the results for assignment three, students also began to take appropriate steps to integrate emotive-response discourse into their texts. Though problem areas still existed in the students' texts, overall their work became more concise and critical and the affective domain of composition more controlled. These improvements were demonstrated by better mechanics, grammar, diction, explanation, in-depth thinking, and attempts at more profound conclusions. Clearly, the use of a taxonomy on emotive-response discourse motivated students to improve by looking deeply at texts.

Conclusion

Critical thinking and emotions are obviously inextricably connected; one must have a passion for something to think about it in a critical fashion. Thus, the key question that this research has answered is how do we help students grow out of their tendency to insert *inappropriate* emotive-response discourse into their texts (again, emotions *are* appropriate in some cases). One way is by teaching students to use a taxonomy designed to help them identify these insertions.

While having students work through their own essays to find emotive-response discourse places a greater burden on students, thus taking some of it off teachers, this activity also acts as a tool for helping students develop the critical thinking skills they will need for the future. By examining and analyzing their own work, students begin to learn to work through their own problems and to rely more upon themselves, thus steering away from too much teacher involvement. Through a taxonomy designed to help students identify areas of emotional transgression and digression in their essays, students learn to think through any emotional baggage, biases, and/or prejudices as these areas appear in their own essays. As a result, the teacher is released from the weight of assuming the dreaded therapeutic/therapist role while students have the opportunity to peer within themselves, hopefully learning to change or readapt their thinking in a more critical manner. Finally, teachers need to understand the emotional states of their students because, as Bracher and James W. Pennebaker indicate, students who are mired in their own emotions often are sicker, miss more class, make more basic writing mistakes, and/or become frustrated and give up on writing more frequently than their more emotionally healthy counterparts. Any of these problems has the potential of

causing the student not to improve upon his or her writing skills and to fail the class needlessly.

This study supports the idea that emotional maturity does directly influence student ability to think critically and objectively. Emotions inappropriately inserted into student texts are clear indicators of students' subjective thought processes. Their preoccupation with egocentric or "me" thought—the initial habit of many first-year composition students to write more writer-based prose—illustrates a lack of intellectual maturity. So, in order to move beyond this egocentric writing style, students must learn to recognize these inappropriate emotional areas in both their own writing and that of others (Bishop; Bracher; Comber). In doing so, we "recognize that feelings are products of thinking. . . . We cannot ignore the fact that students are *motivated* toward that which they *think* is important to them" (Elder 41). Through the identification of emotive-response discourse markers, students develop a clearer sense of which emotions are and are not acceptable in certain types of written discourse. As a result, students learn to think through their topics and texts more thoroughly, which then leads to improved critical thinking skills. Such an activity also allows us to teach students to recognize a vast array of external influences. It is in this manner that we teach "our students to think critically . . . detect the manipulations of advertising, analyze the fallacious rhetoric of politicians . . . [and] resist . . . stereotypes" (Tompkins 19). We also begin more fully to "reconcile the cognitive and the emotional structures of written discourse . . . and factor them all into a common conceptual framework" (Brand, "Social" 403). Additionally, because writing "objectifies" a subject, an act of Western rationalistic critical thinking, recognizing emotions and emotive-response discourses goes hand-in-hand with more conventional composition agendas—for example, the idea that a good liberal arts education teaches students to think critically—and thereby this research suggests that teaching students to identify emotive-response discourse markers promotes critical thinking and healthier attitudes which in turn produce more emotionally and intellectually balanced individuals. ✑

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Appendix A

<u>Taxonomy: Identifying Emotive-Response Discourse Markers</u>

1. <u>**Personal Speech Patterns**</u>:
   a. *Inappropriate or misplaced use of personal language or "I."*
   b. Consider: *Are opinions of author called for or allowed as part of the assignment?*

2. <u>**General Topic Problems/Conflicts in Form and Content**</u>:

   • Overall Topic/Subject Matter*: Is it controversial or a "hot" topic or a general "no-brainer" topic? Is it an easy or complicated/complex topic or subject?*

   • Development: *Is the topic subjected to generalities? Is there a noticeable amount of repetition and/or shifting of verb forms or tenses? Is there a logical progression of the text? Is it organized?*

   • Transitioning/Topic Cuing: *Do numerous transitioning problems exist?*

   • Conflicts: *Are there two or more conflicting topics "activating" (or playing off) one another (e.g., does the writer go from describing a baseball game to talking about his/her experience with a coach although the assignment does not call for reflection)?*

3. <u>**Language Features/Conflicts in Style**</u>:
   a. General Language:
      i. Voice and Tone*: Is the essay predominantly of one voice/tone, or does it skip around (e.g., does it go from happy to sarcastic and back; or is it overly or falsely academic/formal; does the author use "big words" or odd word groupings)?*
      ii. Level of Thinking: *Is there active or in-active/Low-Level Thinking or Problem-Solving? Does the author seem preoccupied with superficial ideas/topics and/or generalizations, or is there a flattened or monotone voice? Is the essay emotionally and/or stylistically flat (<u>very</u> <u>basic</u> sentence structure, grammar, language, etc)?*

   • Self/Labeling: *Is the writer intimately involved with or passive about the topic? Is the piece overly abstract or does it label people and things in such a way as to obscure or conceal the writer's identity?*

   • Proof/Development and Clarity/Coherence: *Is the thesis "proven"/developed, or is there a lack of movement/proof? Does it follow and develop the topic clearly and coherently?*

   • Clichés and Metaphors: *Is there an overabundance of these which aid the writer in not having to think as deeply?*

   • Iconic Imagery and "Re-experiencing the Past": *Are/Is there (a) point(s) which seem(s) to be a flashback, a re-experiencing of the past? Is there evidence of something deeper going on under the surface (e.g., describing a dorm as being analogous to a hospital)?*

Appendix B

Taxonomy Grid

Criteria	Essay

Language Features or "Inferring Conflict from Style":
 	
4   General Language:
      —Voice and Tone:
      —Level of Thinking:
 	
4   Self/Labeling:
 	
4   Proof/Development and Clarity/Coherence:
 	
4   Clichés and Metaphors:
 	
4   Iconic Imagery and "Re-experiencing the Past":
 	
4 Wording/Spelling and Diction/Syntax:	

Personal Speech Patterns: 4 Inappropriate/misplaced use of personal language or "I": 4 Consider:	
General Topic Problems: 4 Overall Topic/Subject Matter: 4 Development: 4 Transitioning/Topic Cueing: 4 Conflicts:	

Connecting

Section Editor's Message

Dear Readers,

I am entitling this issue's section "Moving Toward Connections." Let me begin by pointing out a pleasant and appropriate irony. *JAEPL's* intent with "Connecting" is to give teachers the opportunity to connect with other teachers through sharing their personal stories. These five narratives persuade us of the importance of this very same goal: as they share their experiences, contributors point out benefits of connectedness in their lives.

"Moving Toward Connections" is a theme in my own life, too. Co-teaching our senior capstone Writing Seminar with a poet from Harrisburg was a beautiful, first-time experience. We were not only facilitators but also wrote the assignments along with the students, and, as one of the students expressed it, the class often "felt like real church." To be honest, my dilemma now is that because it was such a connected experience, and thus unrepeatable, I am nervous about teaching the class next year, trying to achieve again what seemed a miracle this time.

I have also been in the throes of designing a house with my three grown children for a year. The actual building together begins this summer. I mean literal building here, us with power tools, shovel, hammer—luckily with the help of patient professional teachers. They have assured us that they don't mind having their patience tested. They believe in this intense family project.

Building deep connections does test us. However, as these five stories detail, it seems that this is the season for openness to breaking down barriers among players, for removing hierarchies, for establishing connections. I have been contemplating with fascination what Ken Carey says in his *Return of the Bird Tribes* about hierarchy on a global scale: "Violence is the root of hierarchical society. . . . Their people will always be restless, at war—if not with others, then within themselves" (iii). A view of "moving toward connections" as peace education has great resonance at this time in our history.

In the first narrative, JoAnne Katzmarek writes of the classroom of the outdoors and convinces us with her sensory images that we cannot ignore its connection to our learning. The next piece, "I'm With You, Huck," presents Steven VanderStaay's internal struggle with his "interdisciplinary transgressions" with the standard collegiate emphasis on a teaching specialization. In actuality, though, the piece celebrates his choice to teach in several disciplines. His reward is the connections among his colleagues, students, and his scholarship which his openness creates.

Irwin Ramirez Leopando presents his "Moment of Connection" the day he read his painful narrative to his students, describing what happened as a result. After that, Christopher Sweet shares a speech he gave on Back to School Night for senior and sophomore English classes. In it, he presented to the parents his view of writing and what it means to teach out of this view of "inseparability" among the writer and writing and audience. As well, the attempt to demystify

this view of a transcendent and mysterious writing process to his students' parents is one more level of connection that we can consider.

Finally, Howard Wolf tells us from personal experience that the "rigid barriers" he finds in academia should and can be overcome "to discover the levels and layers of likeness" that will allow us to develop our collective potential in this interconnected world. ⌂

Carey, Ken. *Return of the Bird Tribes*. San Francisco: Harper, 1988.

Thoughts Like Flying Grouse

JoAnne Katzmarek

The late afternoon sky is that special saffron color found in a Midwest winter. I am skiing across a frozen lake behind our house. I do this a lot. I am alone. I am sweating. My legs ache because my journey around this one hundred acre lake is nearly finished. And as I make the turn in the far bay and head back west to the house, the porch light has just come on.

This is an important learning environment for me; three years earlier I discovered the important connection between discourse theory and the data for my dissertation. Here, too, I understood the contribution Emily Dickinson's poem "I See It Lapping The Miles" could make to an article I was writing on passenger trains in Illinois. Here is the classroom, actually, where all the strands of ideas, images, and impulses come together for me, and I make meaning of my work, my teaching, and my reading and writing.

Aldo Leopold had his chicken coop, the Shack made famous in *Sand County Almanac,* where the ideas of his work at the nearby University of Wisconsin campus made the most sense to him. "Many thoughts, like flying grouse, leave no trace of their passing, but some leave clues that outlast the decade," he says as he ponders the central Wisconsin landscape (61). Today my thoughts are like those flying grouse, leaving clues about the work I do and the students I teach.

I think about the many classrooms where I have taught. For example, there is the sunny second floor of a Catholic school, Room 204. The seventh graders and I worked together there on creative writing projects, skits about characters in books we read, and lessons from the history of the church. Not once did I think to take the students outside to let them wander in the spruce-lined playground of Sacred Heart to integrate these ideas, maybe even discard some of them because finally they might not have made sense. Not once did I share with them how I do this. I wish now that I had.

I remember, too, the cubicles of countless rooms at the suburban high school where I taught American literature and sometimes a course called Writing in the

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Real World. Did I ever load those students onto a yellow school bus and ride with them away from the fast food palaces and athletic temples of the suburb and say, "Go. Go find your thoughts. See how they come to you. Listen to their sense where you can hear them"? No. I never did. Not even when they asked me to do just that. They seemed to know what they needed in order to have the learning fit their lives. In fact, one student asked specifically. We were discussing Jack London's story "To Build a Fire," and Lee was intrigued when the narrator said that it was so cold that spit froze before it hit the ground. Why didn't we go outside on a very cold winter day and try this theory out? We all laughed. What a bizarre idea. Yet this teenager understood, perhaps better than I did, what they needed to have that London story or any story come alive. A chance to work through the ideas. Try them out in our own way and on our own schedule.

For me, learning is the processing of information we encounter, which leads to changes or an increase in our knowledge and abilities. An environment that facilitates that process for me is outdoors, in a natural setting. Adding physical activity is the spice for the stew. Then, ideas become clearer and connections among the ideas emerge. I am reminded of the story that Thoreau tells in his essay, "Walking." A traveler had arrived at Wordsworth's house, and, when he asked to be shown to his study, the servant answered, "Here is his library, but his study is out of doors" (25). This isn't just a Romantic notion. This is what teaching and learning are for.

As I approach the snow-covered boat dock in our yard, the swish of my skis the only sound, I am planning the groundwork for my current students to have a chance to learn where there is space enough to know their thoughts. My plan goes beyond instructional objectives or content standards or authentic assessment. This is about self and the relationship of self to what we think we know, and to know it deeply maybe for the first time. I consider the possibilities.

I unsnap the skis and step off the slender runners, ski boots sinking into the snow. Without warning, an owl, perched in the top bare branches of a tall oak in the neighbor's yard, hoots. I have participated in a great event, a winter dusk. I have learned much. As I head up the slight hill to the house, I think of Sigurd Olson's lesson about his life. "The song of the North still fires me with the same gladness as when I heard it first. . . . within me was the constant longing, and when I listened to this song, I understood."

Leonard, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Ballentine, 1966.
Thoreau, Henry D. *Walking*. Berkeley: The Nature Company, 1991.

I'm With You, Huck

Steven L. VanderStaay

I moved to teaching in a university after seven years as a high school teacher, bringing much of my orientation and philosophy of teaching with me. Having enjoyed the range of courses and content I taught in high school, I volunteered to teach in each of the areas of emphasis within my department: linguistics, literature, composition and creative writing, as well as my own specialty, language arts methods. This breadth is something of a contradiction at the university level where professors, hired within specific concentrations, more typically teach in narrowly defined areas. I saw no reason to accept such constraints and happily began teaching courses across these areas, finding that the benefits of doing so far outweigh the costs.

Teaching a variety of courses, I have the opportunity to build relationships with students over time and across subject areas. I am more apt to have a student more than once and much more likely to develop an appreciation of that student as a whole human being, a person with multiple intelligences. Reading a student's creative writing after helping her revise a critical essay or solve a phonology problem, I have a better sense of the background she brings to her writing, a better sense of her strengths, and a better understanding of the balance of assistance and independence she needs. I can relate her prose to the syntax we studied or the novel we read. In short, I know her better. And I more fully know what she knows.

Teaching out of my specialties, I also find I teach within them better. Teaching literature after linguistics or creative writing, I find it easier to help students connect the style of a passage to its meaning. I find myself more willing to let students create art in response to art. I teach my specialties less narrowly, and, in so doing, I find I teach them more fully.

Admittedly, I am less of an expert in four areas than I would be in one. I need more time to prepare for classes. I ask more questions of my colleagues than they do of me. I spend more time researching answers to student questions than I would otherwise. And, openly violating the greatest of professorial taboos, I more frequently admit "I don't know" when I don't.

Universities can make professors pay for such crimes. In my case, I began to worry that my interdisciplinary energies were sometimes read as evidence of my naiveté, proof to my new peers that I remained, in essence, a high school teacher. Of course, these crimes also made it easier for me to show what learning looks like and to place research in its natural context. Moreover, by the time I came to sense my colleagues' concerns, I was already convinced of the benefits to teaching broadly that I've described above. Yet, at heart a team player, I grew uneasy. Was I, in fact, a dilettante? Given the dominance of specialization in university

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teaching, might not there be some sense to it?

That was the devil speaking. I might have listened to him if it hadn't been for Huck Finn. Somehow, brooding about all this, my thoughts went to Huck and his quandary over whether to stay loyal to Jim or to do what was "right" and help return him to slavery. Sacrificing convention to science, Huck chose loyalty to his friend, deciding that, if helping Jim were wrong, he would have to be "bad."

In this way I came to accept my interdisciplinary transgressions, even—as I have done here—to celebrate them. In doing so, I've discovered yet another advantage to the practice: in teaching a variety of courses I more fully live up to Albert Schweitzer's admonition to teach by example. After all, inasmuch as a liberal education serves to create well-rounded students who are broadly educated, the tradition of academic specialization is contradictory, even hypocritical. What better way to teach the benefits of a broad education than to model it?

A Moment of Connection

Irwin Ramirez Leopando

> *"Now, years later, I walk the streets of Manhattan and overhear fellow Filipinos laughing together, speaking with the old accent. Where I once felt condescension, I sometimes feel something else. I feel envy. Now and then, when I'm alone, I mimic them. I whisper to myself. I try to raise the dead. I float a trial balloon into an empty sky. One afternoon, my therapist asked me to pronounce my name like I did when I was a boy. I couldn't."*

Last semester, I gave my Asian-American Literature students a choice between an analytic essay and a personal narrative. Most were more interested in the personal narrative, so, as an example, I decided to share one of my own. I had written the piece a few months before, and by some coincidence it ended up fitting perfectly with the themes we had discussed all semester. (Perhaps it wasn't a total coincidence; we teach what we need to learn.)

My narrative was about growing up in the Philippines, receiving a scholarship to the International School of Manila at the age of twelve, and, surrounded by the wealthy children of American expatriates, finding myself self-conscious about my thick Filipino accent. Ashamed, I forced myself to get rid of it and to speak with an "American" accent, which is the way I've spoken until today. I had written my piece as a way of working through my feelings of loss, my ambivalence about the price I paid to conform, and, ultimately, my sadness about the impossibility of retrieving the past. It felt like a particularly appropriate narrative to share because my class had spent the entire semester exploring questions of immigration and assimilation.

So I sat before my students on that Wednesday afternoon, my essay in my

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hands. I wondered: will they laugh at me? Will they think I'm pathetic? As soon as I started reading, I felt my confidence, my status, my authority all melt away.

That day I realized how power can so easily isolate us from our students, can so easily dull our sensitivity towards their fear of rejection and criticism. Hunched over my desk, my voice trembling, my palms sweating, crossing my arms over my chest (I needed a hug), I was learning firsthand about vulnerability. That moment, the most difficult of the semester, taught me that authenticity *can* slip through the cracks of routine and hierarchy and that teachers need to take risks, to make themselves vulnerable, to clear space for the possibility of such moments of openness and connection.

My students applauded when I finished. Shaky and grateful, I nodded to acknowledge their kindness. I could not look anyone in the eye. There was a feeling of warmth and community in the classroom that I remember to this day. "Silence has monstrous inertia," I had just read from the conclusion of my piece. "It makes me tired."

But not always. ⌖

The Brightening Glance

(For Back to School Night Senior and Sophomore English Classes)

Christopher Sweet

I want to share with you some thoughts on schools and on some areas where we might make improvements if we had it in our power to do so. Since I am a writing teacher and a teaching writer, I cannot resist introducing you to one of my favorite poets, who left us a vision of school he thought was worth preserving.

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats was for part of his life a school inspector, a sort of superintendent. In his poem "Among School Children," he writes about that experience. In the last part of the poem Yeats thinks about the labor that goes on in the classroom, and he comes up with a prescription for the kind of labor that school should be. He uses metaphors of a tree blossoming and a dancer dancing.

Yeats tells us:

>Labor is blossoming or dancing where
>The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
>Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
>Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.

Let's look at that. Assuming that we can all agree that we want our children's school labors to be experiences of natural growth and self-realization, we can also agree that we do not want teachers to beat our children—to bruise their bodies

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to pleasure their souls. Physical "discipline" was common in Yeats' day, and he knew it was wrong, as we do.

But he also criticizes an education that uses children's failures, their despair of achieving *beauty,* to try to force beauty out of them. The beauty I'm thinking of is the beauty of a really striking story or essay or poem. Yet I look around me at English education today, and I see that teachers often use *despair* as a teaching tool, forcing students to look at their failures for guidance. They say, "You did this and this and this wrong. Correct it."

To give you an example, last year I taught a sophomore who was simultaneously retaking freshman English. He asked me to read and critique an essay he had written for his other teacher, and, after I read it, I said, "It's a good draft, but still a first draft. Yet it is something you can work with. Try sounding it out to yourself until it sounds like you're talking to someone, telling it to someone you can say *anything* to. Tell it to someone, in your imagination, with whom you can trust your own voice. And tell it to that part of yourself that listens to you. Listen to your voice as you sound it out, and make changes on the paper until it really sounds like talking to someone."

Then I went to his freshman English teacher and told him what I had done. The teacher said, "Well, I just told the whole class that their papers sounded like they were talking, and I didn't want that. I gave them the assignment to circle all of the *to be* verbs and replace them with better ones."

I thought of the students, told not to listen to their voice, circling *to be* verbs and replacing them with others that they probably took from a thesaurus and would never use in real life, words that, in effect, meant nothing to them, because they couldn't hear them as part of an exchange between concerned people. It was an example of "blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil" if ever there was.

I suggest to you that the problem is not a superabundance of *to be* verbs, nor is it solved by anything like a superficial stylistic change. The problem is that we have conditioned students never to trust their own voice when they write.

How did we come to this pass?

It may have started with the New Criticism movement of the 1930s. The New Critics were champions of *objectivity.* Writing must be objective, they said. Take all subjective notions out of writing. Take the biases of the writer away. Pay no attention to the author or to biography, but approach every text as an object, as if it just dropped out of the sky one day. It has no author, no history. And most important: do not try to give it one! Ultimately, writing that follows this prescription *is* objective and constrained to the point where there are no human voices, and thus no human connections, involved anywhere in the business.

And ever since, English and language arts teachers have tried to separate the voice from the writing.

Back to Yeats' poem. He says that education should be blossoming or dancing, and that we must not try to beat anything into the child. Then, he considers that blossoming tree: "O chestnut-tree, great rooted-blossomer,/Are you the leaf, the blossom, or the bole?"

This goes right to the heart of the problem. As a writer and teacher, I can see the danger of dividing up the writing experience into small pieces and calling that a lesson in writing. The tree is more than its leaf, more than its blossom, and more than its bole or root-ball. It is in fact more than all three put together. It is far too complex to survive division and classification.

Yeats, then, considers the dancing student: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

What I like about this is the moment when the dancing girl meets the eye of someone she can connect with in the audience, that "brightening glance," when the art and the artist are seen in their true relationship. They are, Yeats says, inseparable, one.

What has this to do with the way we teach writing? The writer and the writing are inseparable, and writing is an all-at-once activity, like dancing. More than that, the glance that the dancer gives her audience is all-important, in some ways the best part of Yeats' poem and of the experience of writing. Yeats comprehends that the writer, like the dancer, seeks to connect with someone out there, with anyone who is listening. Write to someone, I coach the students, someone you can say *anything* to. Look for someone out there and in here, inside you. That "brightening glance*,*" on the page, comes out in the writing in many ways—as a way to say *just the right word,* as phrasing, punctuation, paragraphing, cadence, direct address, humor, irony, teasing, and more. These are all important elements of rhetoric, and we use them every day in our oral language, in meetings on the street and in the classroom, with our mates and friends and strangers, to greet the old and the new. English teachers appreciate how important these elements of rhetoric can be, but most of us never get to them, or never get them right, because most of us were taught to "circle your *to be* verbs and replace them with action verbs."

We cannot know, analyze out, or separate the dancer from the dance, the composition from the writer's voice, without doing harm.

In practical terms, this means a bit of chaos and confusion in the lives of the students in my classes. It means they experience not knowing for a while. It means they learn new lessons. It means we reshuffle the deck. The hardest hit at first can be the students who have successfully negotiated school this far, the ones who know how to play the game of school and win. My rules are different. Yet I am not asking these successful students to do anything they cannot do and do in spades.

One of my sophomores asked, "Do you really mean this?" I said yes. "You're not kidding about this," he said. I told him I was not kidding. He said, "I wish I'd known this a few years ago when I needed it," and he chucked his pencil onto his desk and slumped that *I-suffered-all-that-for-nothing* slump.

Another time the same student said, "I don't mean to be critical, but don't you English teachers ever, like, get together and decide what you're going to teach?"

I did not know how to answer him. We all teach as we were taught. The business is self-perpetuating.

The fact is five paragraph essays promise to be easy to read, easy to identify as meeting mandated criteria and conforming or not conforming to a rubric. Teachers know all about "blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil" and often believe it to be, if not the best way, at least the only practical way. Some have despaired of beauty and artfulness and settled for the illusions of clarity and valid assessment that the rubric gives us. But I can think of nothing more dreadful, more painful, than reading a set of themes that were written to conform to somebody's rubric.

I should end on a positive note. Change is possible. I might have answered the student, "Most teachers are pretty much set in their ways. But you aren't. I'll

do my best to teach you, and then you can go out and spread the word to others if you think there is something valuable here."

Thank you for coming. ◌

Personal Teaching

Howard Wolf

I recently received an e-mail from a former student which speaks in its simplicity and vulnerability:

> I'm not sure if you will remember me, but I am hoping my last name will ring a bell. I took your Literary Journalism class along with your Short Fiction course. I was just wondering if you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for Graduate School. If you don't remember me, or don't have the time, that is not a problem.

This student's name happens to lend itself to puns, and I had often made them over the course of a year in class, some of them groaners. Because she had a bright spirit, I had often called on her for response. But she isn't convinced that I know who she is. There is, of course, some professional courtesy and assumed modesty in her "letter," but there is also an underlying insecurity about her academic visibility and identity. I do remember her, I shall tell her that I remember her, and I shall write a letter of recommendation. I shall fit my words to her achievements, personality, and professional needs. And I might even tell her, to balance the playing field, that I wasn't certain she knew who I was.

Another former student, working on Wall Street, recently wrote to me: "In the fish bowl setting of your classroom, I had some of the most memorable discussions and arguments of my four years at college." I like the notion that we were all in the swim together in the classroom, that the action of the dialogue was as important as the issues. I'd like to think that he meant as well the openness of our discussion, the light of our evolving enlightenment, but I may be making too much of his metaphor.

I remain puzzled, after five decades of teaching in the English department of an American university, by a set of divisions and separations that don't make much sense to me as rigid barriers: teacher vs. student, method vs. content (process and product, if you will), the phenomenology of the person (learner) vs. the patterns of the text, the active private lives of students vs. their anonymity in the classroom, the complex inferiority of the instructor vs. studied professional decorum, field vs. field, ism vs. ism, the interests of English departments vs. the interests of education departments.

The divisions are real, and if we do not find a remedy for some of these rifts, however hidden they may be to the world outside of the university, we may find

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that we will all be teaching electronically at The University of Phoenix one day (if we could all get jobs). We need, among other things, to tell each other who we are. If teachers and students can reveal themselves, in some fashion, to one another, it may become possible for them to overcome some apparent differences—ones that even provoke hostilities—and to discover levels and layers of likeness.

Each person's story is complex and incomplete. If teachers and students can find ways to tell the stories of who they are to one another, they will discover some areas of congruence and make a contribution to each other's continually developing sense of self. ⌂

REVIEWS

Phifer, Nan. *Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography*. Cincinnati, OH: Walking Stick P, 2002.

W. Keith Duffy, Penn State Capital College

Nan Phifer looked around the room, and a calm settled over everyone. Her eyes looked a bit tired—from travel no doubt—but she managed a warm smile. She gestured to the handout she had distributed and in a soothing voice said, "Now, in the middle of each empty picture frame you see here, I'd like everyone to write the name of a person who influenced you to become a teacher. This could be someone in your immediate family, a teacher from your past or present, a student you've had, or a famous author you've read and admired. It could be anyone." Like the rest of the group, I started tentatively at first, jotting one name at a time. But, slowly, my memories, the people who influenced my teaching career, came flooding back: my dissertation director Sue, my old cooperating teacher Mr. King, my mom, my TA directors Donna and Elizabeth, my personal rhet/comp superstars James Moffett, Lad Tobin, Wendy Bishop. Before I knew it, the page was filled, and I was still writing.

The 2004 CCCC in San Antonio had just gotten underway. I sat at a conference table surrounded by a dozen colleagues; we were all attending the annual AEPL workshop where Nan Phifer was graciously illustrating how she runs her memoir workshops in connection with the University of Oregon. The writing activity we were eagerly engaged in is just one of many presented in her book, *Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography*.

Phifer's book is geared mainly towards beginning authors who know little about the writing process. Her carefully phrased prompts, instructions, and examples ask writers to begin at the surface of their existence and to burrow deeper and deeper into their hearts and minds. With each chapter, she challenges would-be memoirists to take another step inward, to inch closer to their own souls. In many ways, Phifer's book is like a deep-sea diving expedition—or an archeological dig—where the depth of the self is revealed layer by layer, league by league, chapter by chapter.

It begins disarmingly enough. After a brief explanation of the writing process—brainstorming, drafting, peer review, revision—Phifer asks writers to examine specific artifacts, events, people, and places of significance. Many prompts in the first few chapters skim the surface only. Writers are directed to consider the people in their lives who have been important to them (alive or dead, young or old), places where significant events occurred (homes, parks, sanctuaries), objects they would be sorry to lose (handmade gifts, awards, books), and important activities (both physical and intellectual) (21-22). In each chapter, Phifer provides writers with specific prompts to follow ("A place I remember well is . . . " "My pulse quickened when . . . ") and tells writers to draft quickly without regard to form or convention (32-42).

The scratching of pens and pencils slowly quieted. Nan spoke up in a cool, reassuring tone: "When you are finished filling in the frames, take a sheet of tracing paper and place it on top." I did so, and the blackened squares and hastily scrawled names of my teaching influences blurred through, but I could still read them. She continued, "On the tracing paper, as you read each name, think about your relationship to that person. What part of yourself responds to that individual? What did you learn from that person? What did the person teach you? What in yourself do you ascribe to that person? In each frame, I'd like you to write that quality, that element of yourself, that you associate with that person." Again, I began writing tentatively. This was no easy task; the focus had changed from the external to the internal. And Nan wasn't only asking me to write about myself, but to examine my internal relationship to those whom I identified as teaching influences. This was going to take some thinking. . . .

As a teacher of writing, I've occasionally used memoir-type writing assignments like Phifer's in both first-year and advanced-writing classes. (One of my perennial favorites is having students write their own literacy histories.) Because of my semi-familiarity with memoir pedagogy, I admit that I was a bit ambivalent about the introductory chapters in *Memoirs of the Soul*. Though the examples of student memoirs that Phifer includes are often moving, her initial prompts (such as drawing a Valentine-shaped heart and filling it with the names of significant people) seem rooted in the same expressivist—and often sentimental—pedagogy that I myself have been criticized for using in the writing classroom.

However, around chapter 8 and 9 ("Adolescent Angst" and "Events that Shape the Course of Your Life" respectively), I found my misgivings shift ever so slightly. It is here that Phifer asks writers to do some hard work in confronting themselves, their choices, and their experiences, and to name their disappointments and frustrations, while revealing themselves as people who are not always in control. Some of my own research into the spiritual aspects of teaching writing have revolved around issues of imperfection, self-confrontation, and control; so, not surprisingly, my interest in her book was ignited when she guided me to write about "A time when I did not feel in control," "A time I realized my life would be different," "A time I felt humiliated," and "A time when I disappointed myself" (65-73). It was then I realized this wasn't necessarily the warm-and-fuzzy book it appeared to be. Clearly, a "feel good" pedagogical approach can play an important part of self-revelation when writing a memoir. But if would-be memoirists are willing to also do the difficult work of self-confrontation in writing and share it with others, this is when a manuscript can really come to life. As an author and experienced workshop leader, Phifer clearly acknowledges this.

"Now, I'd like you to examine all your notes and write a paragraph that describes why you became a teacher. When you are done, I'm going to ask you to get into groups of two and read your paragraph to your partner. When you share, wait until the person is finished reading, then make one positive comment about the paragraph and ask one question about something that was not mentioned or elaborated on." Nan's directions were clear. Having had ample time to brainstorm, I quickly got to work. In my paragraph, I mused that I have a tendency to gravitate toward that which feels difficult; if I feel a sense of resistance, if I feel uncomfortable, or if an act feels like a challenge or obstacle, I believe I am being called to pay attention to it. Teaching falls into this category for me. Because

teaching is such a social act — and because I am by nature rather reserved and private — I've often characterized teaching as a challenging task that forces me to stretch. This is a difficult, but important, realization. After reading my short narrative aloud to my partner, I glanced quickly around the room and saw everyone engaged in each other's stories.

Ultimately, the real guts of Phifer's book are revealed in later chapters: "Evolving Ideas About Religion," "Confronting Crisis," "Flip of the Compass," and "Inner Peace" (chapters 16-21). This is where Phifer asks the beginning memoirist to examine — and sometimes question — deeply held religious beliefs. She acknowledges that our approach toward religion is not static; it is in flux as we learn and grow and change. Likewise, she asks us to face calamity, our own despair and agony, feelings of loss, and being lost. Of course, Phifer is careful to balance this deep and sometimes troubling self-confrontation with love and understanding: "How do you reveal the quality of tenderness in yourself and the quality of patience? What was your source of courage? Where did you find hope?" (140). She also challenges us to ponder the ways profound disruption can lead to inner peace.

As mentioned, Phifer packs her book with a great many excerpts by writers who have attended her workshops: traditional students, single mothers, ministers, musicians, teachers, grandparents. These samples provide the beginning memoirist with more than just models, however; Phifer presents these individuals as comrades, all of whom are cultivating the habit of introspection, all of whom are traveling down the same path. She also sprinkles little breadcrumbs for the reader along the way, pinches of advice and insight from famous writers and thinkers, like William James, Blaise Pascal, Franz Kafka, and Paul Tillich. Additionally, the last few chapters provide a suggested reading list, tips for using the book in different academic environments (such as first-year composition classes and high school English classes), tips for using the book in a writing group or alone, and suggestions for preparing a final copy of a memoir (including ideas on revising and proofreading).

Having seen Nan Phifer in action, I don't think there's anything quite like attending her writing workshops, but her book is a fair alternative if a trip to Oregon is out of the question.

Daniell, Beth. *A Communion of Friendship: Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Women in Recovery.* Studies in Writing and Rhetoric 21. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003.

Elizabeth Vander Lei, Calvin College

In recent years, the field of composition and rhetoric has taken interest in the relationship of spiritual faith and writing (see, for example, essays by McCrary; Perkins; and Rand published within five months of each other in 2001). This scholarly interest has only intensified since 9/11, as students and teachers alike try to understand and respond to a world in which spirituality seems to matter more, both locally and globally. For many of these scholars, Beth Daniell's pioneering work has served as both insightful guide and inspiring example.

Daniell's earlier work gave us peeks at her research into the literacy and spiritual practices of six women who are members of an Al-Anon group in Mountain City (names of the women and the town are pseudonyms). Daniell throws back the curtain on this research in her new book, *A Communion of Friendship: Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Women in Recovery*.

A Communion of Friendship, part of SIUP's Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series, is bound to shape future research on spirituality and literacy in at least three significant ways. First, Daniell crafts a "little narrative" of the ways that literate practices help the Mountain City women accomplish the spiritual goals they have set for themselves in Al-Anon. While Daniell explicitly cautions readers to resist generalizing from these literacy and spiritual practices, they do contradict literacy theories that assume literacy looks the same and produces the same effects in all times and all places. Second, Daniell carefully considers the nature of the literate and spiritual practices of the Mountain City women, introducing us to the ways that literacy and spirituality, intricately intertwined, help these women "form and re-form" themselves. Finally, in her deliciously self-deprecating description of her research process (Chapter 2) and her astute analysis of the ethical issues inherent in research such as hers (Appendix X), Daniell acts as a trail-savvy guide for future researchers, pointing out dangers (practical, theoretical, and ethical) and encouraging them toward productive paths. And, happily, *A Communion of Friendship* is infused with good will and sparkles with Daniell's signature quick wit and adroit phrasing, making it a pleasure to read.

From the outset, Daniell makes it clear that she intends to describe the literate practices of six particular women: Tommie, Catherine, Jennifer, Lilly, Judy, and Jill. Her project is definitely "not, then, about the literacy of abstract, theoretical women. It is not about the literacy of women in general, or of American women, or of white women, or even of women who are or have been married to alcoholics" even though these six women fit all these descriptions (1). Rather, Daniell sets herself the task of creating a "little narrative," in the Lyotardian sense, that describes "particular persons reading and writing in one specific place and in one time for one purpose" (24). Daniell organizes her description of their literate practices into three chapters, one on writing, one on reading, and one on the peculiar political power of vernacular literacies.

Daniell begins her chapter on the writing practices of these six women with two disclaimers. First, for them, as for most of us, writing does not exist as an autonomous literate practice: authors read and re-read what they've written, they share it with others, they talk about it, and they listen as others respond to it. And second, literacy and spirituality entwine in complex ways that resist unraveling. While for these women writing often serves as a catalyst for spiritual exploration and personal spiritual development, Daniell cautions that we should not, therefore, infer that literacy necessarily produces "spiritual insight or higher forms of cognition" (42). This is a fine line, one that Daniell walks with grace. She describes the writing that the Mountain City women do at three key phases of their Al-Anon experience: inventorying their actions and beliefs (completing Al-Anon's fourth step), creating solutions for problems in their lives, and using language to shape their world. In each section of this chapter, Daniell weaves together the individual stories the women tell about their literate practices, contextualizing these narratives with reference to scholarship on confession and healing, identity negotiation, and power. In all this, Daniell emphasizes the pervasively social nature

of both literacy and spirituality, concluding that the plaiting of literacy and spirituality produces a peculiar kind of power for these women, enabling them to "name and claim" their lives.

In her chapter on the reading practices of the Mountain City women, Daniell finds that their reading practices, too, are intensely social. These women share two kinds of reading material: program literature—that is, council-approved publications of AA and Al-Anon—and recreational reading material such as novels and magazines. The women read and re-read program literature for purposes of identification and personal growth. At Al-Anon meetings, only AA and Al-Anon publications serve as springboards for group discussion. The women tell Daniell that they read, re-read, and discuss program literature both to develop themselves as "moral and spiritual agent[s]" and to track their progress toward this goal. The Mountain City women read aesthetic material, too, seeking a temporary break from the intense self-focus required for recovery. Even in this reading, though, they read books that address their daily concerns and ones that model positive social relationships. It may be that their source for books shapes the content of their reading. Daniell discovers that Lilly, program sponsor for several of the women, is an enthusiastic book lender; many of the books the women read come from Lilly's library. Perhaps the most important feature of their reading is the intensely social nature of their response to what they've read. These women discuss what they've read with each other, giving them an opportunity to articulate their beliefs on a wide range of issues and building the community of friendship that sustains them as they change their lives through spiritual practice.

From these interviews, Daniell concludes that we have thought about the power of literacy exactly backwards. Using Sylvia Scribner's three metaphors for literacy, Daniell notes that scholars most often think of literacy as that which people use to function in the world: to read instructions or to write a purchase order. Then, for those who achieve a higher level of literacy, often through advanced education, literacy serves as a source of political or economic power, allowing the educated to interpret legal documents or craft persuasive financial reports. Finally, for the most literate, writing serves as an aesthetic or creative outlet, an avenue of self-expression that most often takes the form of accepted literary genres. But, for the women she interviewed, Daniell argues, aesthetic or creative literacy that the women express in social, non-academic settings serves as a catalyst for spiritual growth. This spiritual growth, in turn, fosters a sense of spiritual power, an ability to act based on thorough self-knowledge. Finally, this spiritual power helps them imagine new ways they can function in the world, applying for a job at the local grocery store or beginning a new course of study at the university, for example.

When we consider the intensely, inherently social and spiritual nature of these women's literate practices, according to Daniell, we think better about the nature and function of literacy. We understand better how literacy empowers when we dismiss distinctions between oral and written: "The women who talked with me come to voice by means of the talk that goes on in response to their reading and writing. This is, I argue, literacy for power" (140). Furthermore, Daniell argues that we must acknowledge that for at least some people, spirituality plays an important role in literate practice and vice versa: "When whole areas of people's lives are closed off as unworthy of academic attention, the academy misses important information" (150). And finally, and perhaps most importantly, Daniel

challenges us to consider the ways we listen to what others have to say, that is, the ways we sponsor the literate practices of others. Noting the influence of Freire's Catholicism on his pedagogy, Daniell claims, "Being treated as if one is worthy, as if one's life is important, as if what one has to say is significant and deserving attention, as if one is—yes—a fellow child of God allows some people, even the most silenced, to come to voice and, in so doing, to see the world and themselves differently" (148).

It is this challenge that has lingered with me and has shaped my pedagogy in the first-year composition course I'm teaching this semester. I find myself pausing to ask students what they know about academic writing, questions such as what a bad thesis looks like, why it is so much easier to write a bad thesis than a good one, or how writers know when they're working with a bad thesis. And I find myself genuinely curious about their answers. Maybe it's a coincidence that I find myself enjoying the teaching, the students, and even (on some assignments anyway) the grading more than I have previously. Maybe. Regardless of the cause of my nearly-one-semester-long satisfaction with English 101 after reading *A Communion of Friendship*, I am left with a profound sense of gratitude, to the six women who shared their stories with Daniell and to Daniell who has brought their stories to us.

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The relationship between writing and healing has been recognized since pre-classical times. Prior to Plato's exile of the poet from the Republic, writers and theorists saw "the word" as a way to heal both body and soul. However, once the philosophical and scientific tide turned away from the power of language to effect positive change, writing and healing became more a part of popular culture and less a legitimate area of inquiry within the academy. That all began to change with the publication of Alice Brand's groundbreaking *Therapy in Writing* over twenty years ago and Peter Elbow's innovative expressivist pedagogy that placed the writer rather than only the written at the center of the enterprise. The last few years have seen a burgeoning interest in writing and healing coming from multiple disciplines. Given the evidence that writing can attenuate the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and asthma, among other illnesses, the medical profession has begun to include writing and healing in its professional curriculum. James

Pennebaker's original studies demonstrating the beneficial effects of writing on immune system functioning have generated much interest in the area of experimental and clinical psychology, and several new articles and books on writing and healing within composition studies have demonstrated that writing about difficult subjects is a natural and inevitable process that will occur whether requested or not. Until relatively recently most of the publications on writing and healing took the form of self-help books and articles that presented exercises and plans for writing, some of which have been innovative and popular. However, in the last few years several significant publications on writing and healing (see reference list) have begun to change the nature of the conversation and provide an interdisciplinary base where psychologists, medical professionals, literary critics, compositionists, and journalists, among others, can share perspectives.

Michelle Weldon's *Writing To Save Your Life: How to Honor Your Story Through Journaling* was published in 2001 by Hazelden Publishing and Educational Services, a division of the Hazelden Foundation, an organization that provides information, education, and recovery services for people afflicted with chemical dependency. The purpose of the book is to provide a guide for those who wish to use writing to "work through"—to use Dominick LaCapra's terminology—their painful experiences. Weldon, also the author of *I Closed My Eyes*, the story of her recovery from her difficult divorce, is a journalist who has written a great many by-line articles and essays for such publications as the *Chicago Tribune* and *West Suburban Living*. Her interest is in helping people break free of their pre-conceived notions of "correctness" and "appropriateness" and write what they feel and what they have experienced for themselves. This is not a book that will show how to get published or how to write a memoir that will appeal to others. It is a book that offers advice and guidance to those who are beginning the writer's path but who find their own pain in the way. Weldon offers Shakespeare's advice from Macbeth—to "give sorrow words"—and argues only by acknowledging that pain can anyone find rhetorical and perhaps personal freedom. She then offers a process for how to begin to use writing to heal "mind, body, spirit," as stated in the Foreword, coauthored by a psychologist and a therapist.

Weldon begins by setting out the process of writing, including internal and external hindrances to that process, and then provides examples from her life and writing of that process. Nineteen chapters describe the process of getting started, "igniting your power," dealing with internal and external critics, finding quiet time, using humor, knowing when not to write, etc. While some of these chapters seem redundant, they do include separate exercises, many inventive and helpful, designed to help the reader embrace a stage of the work. For example, her exercise on place can help writers get beyond labels to clear descriptions:

> Take me somewhere. It can be a place that was special to you in the past or is special to you now. Tell me about every nook and cranny of the room, about every quadrant of space. . . . Think about every detail and every sense—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling. By writing what you alone know, you are telling a story that is yours alone. So tell it in your own style. (119)

However, the third exercise in this section, while perhaps providing necessary verification for the writer, will take the writer away from those very necessary

specifics and into the pitfall of labels, the bane of the writer's life:

> List all the reasons why you are the only person to tell your story. Write that it is true. Write that you are intelligent and talented and that your story is worth telling. Write every positive adjective you can think of to describe who you are and why you are the only person to tell this story. (119)

The role of isolated author is a difficult one. Without positive feedback—sometimes obtained in a writer's group or a class—writers must find ways to be their own coaches, and certainly this exercise can provide that. But Weldon does not differentiate between those exercises that further the author's text and those that further the author's motivation. Weldon's commitment to her readers is clear, but her text has certain limitations that may prove frustrating to a reader who attempts to implement each of these steps.

Weldon calls her process "scribotherapy," apparently without knowledge of the term "scriptotherapy" that Suzette Henke and others have used. This is an example of the insularity of many practitioners in this field who see themselves as discovering the seemingly undiscovered but, in fact, well trod land. This process of writing and healing, indeed, occurs in cancer survivor groups, AIDS workshops, medical humanities workshops, summer camps for kids, prisons, and college writing classes around the country. Weldon offers the practitioner's perspectives that can help a budding writer, especially one struggling alone, with how to put feelings into words. She makes her position quite clear: "I am not a medical doctor, psychologist, therapist, social worker, researcher, sociologist, or psychiatrist. I am not qualified to tell you scientifically how and why your spirit, body, and soul will be healed by writing. . . . I can only tell you it does work. . . . I am a person just like you, with aches, sighs and laugher in my heart. . . . I can tell you the truth: Writing has helped to save my life" (7-8).

Weldon's conversational writing style provides access points for readers. She illustrates her points by ending each chapter with one of her essays. For example, she ended her chapter entitled "Everyone's A Critic," in which she argued that we should write for ourselves, not others, with an essay entitled "Average Is Ok With Her" that talks about her struggle against the pressure of judgments about her children. These examples, while interesting to read, demonstrate the limitations of using journalistic prose to represent personal essay or memoir writing. The audience of this book is, presumably, those who have been touched by trauma and who need help to represent it in ways that help them move beyond it. However, many of Weldon's essays appear more journalistically public than personal which can provide a disconnect for the audience enticed by her book's title. Her chapter entitled "Open the Door" discusses how difficult it is to write about painful subjects that feel hidden, maybe even buried. I had expected Weldon's end-of-chapter essay to address a moment in her life when she made that move to "open the door," but she did not. The essay, entitled "Where Imaginary Friends are Always Welcome" describes Weldon's and her own children's use of childhood imaginary friends to release the imagination. This seems rather tame stuff for a book whose title is *Writing To Save Your Life*.

As the authors of the Foreword make clear, Weldon is passionately committed to helping writers discover their stories. Her personable tone and energy are appealing and undoubtedly helpful to those just starting out on the path. This enthusiasm, however, also can cause discomfort when inexperience puts writers

at risk. In one workshop she urged a young woman to read a piece aloud that described events so painful that some in the class wept. Then, when one class member spoke a dismissive criticism, the reader was crushed, and the teacher did not know what to do. She, therefore, now exhorts her readers to write only for themselves, not for publication (unless they absolutely "must"). For me, this does not address the original problem—class management—which must be dealt with by anyone who stands at the head of a writing workshop.

The field of writing and healing has many entry points. It invites theorists, scientists, psychologists, humanists, writing professionals, doctors, and journalists. It embraces children, college students, and adults whose lives are touched by trauma. While *Writing To Save Your Life* may not present its subject with the depth and precision of some other sources, Weldon's compassion and energy help make her book a clear, practical, passionate invitation to discover the healing process of writing. ⟨◯⟩

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