

CHAPTER 4

WRITERS AS SITUATED PROCESS RESEARCHERS



Figure 3. Alice's photograph of her "very special office space that I don't use." Photo credit: "Alice."

I start with an image of process, one that surely feels familiar. In at least a Western corner of the imagination of many, this is what writing looks like—at least, what the “official” writing associated with schooling or with highbrow literary culture looks like. Better, this is what writing *should* look like: writing is precisely this rarefied, this cloistered, this orderly, this transcendent, this disembodied. In this image, I see Brodkey’s picture postcard, the recreated garret of the “solitary scribbler” (398). I see Cooper’s scene of the “solitary author” (365). I see the driving fantasy of Bizzell’s students that “when they finally become ‘good writers,’ they will be able to sit down at the desk and produce an ‘A’ paper in no more time than it takes to transcribe it” (175). Whatever the particulars, this image strikes us familiarly because, Brodkey tells us, it is the first lesson we learn about writing (397).

This particular image holds personal weight for “Alice,” who, at the time she produced it, was a fourth-year doctoral student in composition and rhetoric at a large Midwestern university. Alice submitted this photograph as part of my multimodal qualitative study that explored material environments and embodied movement in several graduate student writers’ processes (Blewett et al.; Rule). The image shows Alice’s wooden desk positioned by a narrow window of her upstairs loft. Bright sunshine cascades through to illuminate the desk’s surface, a stapler, an ordered couple of books, stack of papers, and a populated bookshelf nearby and in just enough disarray to suggest deep engagement.

My study design prompted participants to show me in photographs, drawings, and video (methods I use regularly now in my undergraduate teaching with processes) where their processes occurred—the rooms, objects, chairs, background, ephemera, desks, and tools that got involved in whatever they were writing at the time. Because the study focused on whatever composing was happening at the time of the study (rather than what any participant thought of enduringly as their process behavior) this wasn’t the only space Alice depicted. In a video recording, she showed me herself writing in an empty college classroom, a materially sterile session in which a wall clock prominently ticked in the background. She drew important comfort items—including a blanket, snacks, water—that she perceived as critical to the embodiment of her processes (items, I note, that do not populate the image above). She gave me a number of selfie-style photographs of her writing in an overstuffed armchair in her living room, laptop on her lap, her two dogs sleeping alongside, and sometimes on top of, her. The other academic writers in the study too showed processes in a range of locations and with and around varied material objects, as Alice did. But what was interesting about this image of this particular writing desk is that Alice gave me several shots of it, even though she told me *she didn’t actually write there*.

In our interview, Alice called this desk her “generic office space or my very special office space *that I don’t use*” (emphasis added). As I asked participants for the details of where their writing was happening at the time of the study, I wondered why Alice was compelled to photograph this desk at all. And why did she capture it *just in this way*, with the bright cascading light, and without her physical presence?

I think in part Alice thought this is what I expected to see. *This* image is writing—much more so, we assume, than the everyday material conditions and quotidian objects, movements, and rhythms that “actually” produced or got involved in Alice’s processes at the time (to name only a very few that she represented elsewhere: water, comfortable chair, pajamas, domesticity, dogs, impromptu workplaces occupied then deserted). This picture, though, remains

a strong presence in Alice's mind in relation to her academic writing. As she mused in interview:

And then I was also thinking about looking at the photos and thinking about what I wrote about the—oh, when I was talking about my generic office space or my very special office space that I don't use and how it's very meticulously cluttered. I feel like it always looks like somebody works there and that's on purpose. I mean it's almost to an obsessive level. I will go up there and arrange the books in a way that I think looks, I don't know, productive. I was thinking that with the photos because I took all of them with my phone but I threw them threw a photo editor before I sent them to you. . . . To just make the light a little better or make the colors pop a little more. I wasn't thinking about it at the time but now that I'm looking at them, I'm like, God, they're so deliberately composed in that way.

Alice doesn't write at this desk, yet she sees making and remaking it an important part of her physical processes and academic writing routines. Alice sees this space as "deliberately composed," "obsessive," "meticulously cluttered," and photo-edited to make the "colors pop." She likely gave me this picture postcard because performing some part of her writing self in this culturally sanctioned space somehow helps her make the messy, wandering, and less idealized daily labor of her high-stakes dissertation writing feel more possible. That's how Alice seemed to think of it, anyway.

But my purpose in starting with this image is not to decide what it did or did not do for Alice at the time it was taken. I raise it rather because it's evocative. I'm interested in how Alice sees this tidy, transcendent image as essential to writing, and in how she unthinkingly enhanced it. I see in Alice's picture the ways my own writing students tend to officialize their conceptions of processes—as steps or uninhabited rational action, always intentional, special and specialized, no labor or life per se—as similarly too "photo edited." Writing students do this, I think, not just because of the ways writing is constructed in our cultural imaginaries, but also because this is how our instruction can cast process. As explored in the last chapter, conventional process teaching might teach the lesson that processes are steps or strategies that are linear, textual and acontextual, matters of disembodied thinking, relevant only to school-based writing—processes as only ever "deliberately composed." And so like Brodkey, Cooper, and Bizzell, I raise this postcard image to undermine it, especially in how it limits the potential and work of process instruction. I raise Alice's image to keep our eyes on *what it*

misses, what is not seen in it about the specifying conditions—the tools, objects, movements, technologies, communities, conventions, interruptions, software, and so on—that differentiate processes across myriad everyday rhetorical situations. Student writers benefit from poking holes in this edited image, from disrupting its control over how they work with writing processes in our classrooms and across innumerable writing contexts.

But how to poke those holes? How can we rebuild process images and practices that dismantle myths of disembodiment and placelessness, ease and orderliness, and prefab strategies? We can start by repositioning student writers in relation to processes—no longer (if ever) as replicators of strategies but instead as curious and situated *process researchers*. By this, I mean observers of processes in the world, including those they engage themselves. I mean as generators of insights and actions that are “good for now,” both shaped by and suited to real-time and dynamic contexts. Such a vantage shows just how implicated processes are, casting process as a kinetic, improvisatory “making do” with the participating conditions of a writer’s surrounds.

But if we encourage students to observe and describe and respond to the details of processes in everyday life, if we teach with processes in excess of prescriptive strategies, if we suggest that processes are not stable steps alone but situationally determined and contingent, then process teaching is surely well out of the control of the writing teacher. Engaging in this kind of on-the-spot process descriptivism necessitates continued reconsideration of the process “knowledge” writing instructors can claim and of the roles that writing teachers and students take. I begin then by exploring (postprocess) pedagogical work which repositions students as (process) knowledge-makers. With that revised perspective, one at stake too in the final chapter, I describe classroom practices.

QUESTIONING PROCESS: TEACHING WRITING STUDENTS AS PROCESS KNOWLEDGE-MAKERS

As do many who take up the postprocess mantle, in his chapter in Thomas Kent’s 1999 volume, Sidney Dobrin undermines familiar process assumptions both pedagogical and conceptual (“Paralogic”). Dobrin’s main concern is emphasizing power (rather than assuming neutral relations amongst interlocutors), and thus ethics, in paralogic communication theory. His intervention nevertheless entails pedagogy, and not just in his interest in exposing power differentials in liberatory pedagogy. Instead, Dobrin makes meaningful calls to shift the mission and character of contemporary writing pedagogy in general, and of process teaching in particular.

Along the way, Dobrin performs a familiar postprocess refrain: if we can agree that communication is fundamentally neither systematic nor codifiable, then teaching writing is impossible. In Dobrin's terms: "there are no codifiable processes by which we can characterize . . . discourse, and, hence, there is not a way to teach discourse, discourse interpretation, or discourse disruption" ("Paralogic" 133). The assumption here seems to be that only things that are predictable and stable can be taught, and by its complex, situated, and dialogic nature, writing is not that. As such, this refrain resolves into the claim that teaching is "impossible." And as I've established, especially in the Introduction, such a claim of impossibility is often not about teaching at all, but a call to disengage the field from the primacy of teaching altogether. However, in my read of this particular argument of Dobrin's, he doesn't aim to dispense with process theories or pedagogy but points toward how we might practice through its deconstruction.

While postprocess characterizations of the process paradigm can sometimes feel like a strawman or caricature (Breuch; Matsuda), Dobrin in Kent's collection insightfully judges conventional process thinking. For example, building upon Raul Sanchez's claim that "the writing process is often just the teacher's vision of process" (138), Dobrin emphasizes how process behavior is structured for students by the teacher, as it is they who determine "what prewriting is, what editing is, what revising is, what a final document should look like, what is oppressive, what is politically virtuous, how to become critically conscious, and so forth" (138). This view of directive writing instruction is echoed by David Smit, as he notes that most characterizations of process teaching, "conceive of the teacher as facilitator or coach whose job is to help students work through the various stages of composing: getting ideas, planning and organizing, drafting, revising, and editing" (6). And while the field has come to recognize the political and sociocultural contexts of writing and in turn the ways that privilege, positionality, social class, race and gender is entangled with and shapes every language performance, process remains even in "the most politically savvy classrooms" (Dobrin 138) merely matters of "perpetuating inscribed methods of inquiry" (138). As we've seen in previous chapters, processes remain somehow curiously unlocated, even in spite of the ways the field and other aspects of our instruction have recognized writing as situated. The ways today that we talk about and do processes in our classrooms remains still largely *immune from* these situated forces, as "[s]tudents learn to repeat strategies rather than to manipulate discourse from communicative scenario to communicative scenario" (Dobrin 138-9). If we accept situatedness as a baseline though, we can no longer teach process for sameness and strategy and must move toward novelty and difference instead.

That is no straightforward task. Dobrin, while measured in his pedagogical gestures, does provide some direction (at least, again, he did so in 1999). For

one, like Kent and others, Dobrin believes that postprocess “demand[s] that we radically reconceptualize not only how and what we teach, but what we think teaching *is*” (134). We cannot simply establish the parameters of processes for our students and then evaluate their performance of our process scripts. We cannot just have students “reinscribe” the knowledge we give them. And this, actually, is not a new concept in writing classrooms at all. We often say now, for example, that we cannot just teach students forms of eternally “correct” or grammatical writing. Instead, we recognize the *situatedness* of language performance and “correctness” as *susceptible* to the shifting and shaping forces of genre, racial and ethnic privilege, occasion, discourse community conventions, and so on. Similarly, we’ve deconstructed general-skills writing instruction. Even if we have yet to relent talking about them, we at least understand that there are few if any writing “skills” that really can “transcend any particular content and context” (Petraglia, *Reconceiving* xii). As a result, since a general course in writing makes little sense, we’ve worked to *situate* our instruction in various domains: in and across the disciplines, activity systems, genre ecologies, our *own* discipline through writing-about-writing approaches, and so forth. But process seems to somehow get left behind as a concept that can largely transcend varying contextual specificities. Process remains—as I overheard a first-year writing student say as he observed a set of his class’s process drawings hung on the wall—mostly “a bunch of pages.”

But if we could help writers *physically locate* writing, then they might be better positioned to see writing and its processes as infinitely varied and sensitive to contexts both immediate and broad, both physical and social. The process “knowledge” that writers need would then not be best understood as stored-up strategies, but as “good for now” insights guiding writing moment-to-moment and discovered *in situ*. Rather than enacting steps from before, students must write where they are, not to practice what they “know” but to practice *figuring out how* to proceed. As Thomas Kent puts it, focused as he is on communicative interaction, “Teachers cannot . . . provide students with a framework that explains the process of collaborative interaction” like process or other strategies, because “the dynamics of collaborative interaction change *on the spot*” (*Paralogic* 165, emphasis added). As Dobrin concludes, “We cannot master discourse” (147) nor processes; we can only become increasingly practiced at perceiving and responding to the nuances of our attempts in living rhetorical situations.

In this way, I am in a sense being “postprocess” as I agree that an all-purpose set of writing “how-to” instructions, even an ever-expanding one, cannot really be taught nor learned. I see value in helping students to be skeptical of how much writing processes—just like any convention or rule we might raise in our classrooms—will hold still, repeat, or be reliable in novel and ranging rhetorical situations. There still are activities or habits useful to learn and enact in future

writing contexts but doing so is no guarantee that the resulting product or text will succeed, earn an “A,” or be received as we hope with audiences. “[W]e can never be sure that the process or system we used initially will prevail a second time around” (Kent, “Paralogic” 148). I describe process methods in this chapter then that are “postprocess” in as much as I favor teaching processes as, to invoke Thomas Rickert’s terms, thoroughly and *ambiently rhetorical*. Writers benefit from looking at processes to discover how they iterate differently in differing contexts, how they are performative, emergent, responsive to others (present, distant, imagined), unruly, ad-hoc, and improvisational.

But teaching—or better, *seeing*—processes in this way requires that, again in Dobrin’s terms, we “radically reconceptualize not only how and what we teach, but what we think teaching *is*” (134). I agree. But rather than *start*, the task is more to *continue* to interrogate what it is to “teach” writing. After all, we have been questioning the role of the writing teacher (and the writing student) for composition studies’ whole modern life—at least since Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers*. And, just as deconstructing teacher authority in our pedagogical imaginaries is familiar if challenging to enact, so too is positioning students in active, constructivist roles. But there is some direction. Activating students’ roles, especially in relation to process, is the goal of Nancy C. DeJoy in her 2004 book, *Process This: Undergraduate Writing in Composition Studies*. DeJoy observes how field machinations have greatly minimized the agency and subjectivities of students and teachers. Through conservative appeals to standards and within conventional process pedagogies, writing “students’ and many teachers’ roles in the writing classroom and in society more generally were restricted in particular ways, ways that favored adaption to and consumption of standards and process ‘models’ that favored those standards” (4). While DeJoy sees latent potential for agency, liberation, and social progressivism in composition, especially in 1970s-era focus on language rights and student-centered process approaches, she observes how ultimately stronger ideological conservatism continues to win out, propelling policed standards and diminished roles for students as only “consumers” (4) and conformers. In efforts to “right process,” DeJoy aims instead to “open spaces in which participation and contribution” become our disciplinary mode, where we approach “undergraduate student writers and their texts” (9) as a contributing part of our field, rather than just our objects of study.

DeJoy outlines several methods to make students contributors. For instance, she describes her own research study in which she partnered with undergraduate students to co-analyze admissions essays, suggesting that “exploring student assumptions about the concepts we propose” (15) is a vital way of making student writers contributing members of the field. Process in particular becomes one such concept to interrogate. In “I Was a Process-Model Baby,” DeJoy describes how

her own experiences in school led her to see “the real game” in process pedagogies was to conform to and “produce a teacher-identified discourse” (“I Was” 163). She reads into her experience a lack of feminist and critical practices in dominant process models, models which operated on axes of “enthymemic logic, identification, and mastery” (169). As such, in her own instruction, DeJoy dispenses with “pre-scribed and pre-scribable notions of process” (“I Was” 176). Instead, she and her students explore their and others’ processes using open-ended questions about invention, arrangement, and revision (176). Emphasizing difference, participation, critical analysis, and co-construction, DeJoy shifts the process pedagogy paradigm from control to analysis. She aims to make process teaching live up to its liberatory potential by unmasking its power differentials and by dismantling its universalizing and standardizing tendencies and its narrowed methods. DeJoy’s thinking inspires my own with her crystal-clear shift—seeing writing students as contributors to, rather than just reproducers of, what we know about process practice and by seeing writers as analytical investigators of writing.

This vision of co-constructive accompaniment and analysis aligns my own recent process practices not just with DeJoy’s, but also with Kent’s call for writing teachers as “co-workers” (*Paralogic* 166) and Kyle Jensen’s archival inquiry approach (explored in Chapter 3). Both Jensen and I enact observational methods with students to help them see what lies in *excess* of pictures of prefab processes. While Jensen accompanies students in the textual archive, I ask students to observe living bodily processes in context. For me, through these looking methods, student writers can more readily situate writing and its constraints through focus on bodies writing (v.) in place and time. Process instruction then becomes a kind of *accompaniment*—being alongside writers as they observe and perform situated processes.

ACCOMPANYING CLASSROOM SCENES: TEACHING TO SITUATE PROCESSES

It has become a trope in composition studies books to turn to “application” near the end of a work that might otherwise be historical, archival, or theoretical. This move feels especially warranted in a book like this one in which I’ve been working to reexamine process for the sake of teaching. I examined the state of process through various materials: compositionists’ stock-taking of the process paradigm, composition theory, research studies, pedagogical documents, post-process critique, and so on. But my look at classroom practice in this section might be among the *shortest* of the sections in this book (and if it is not, it’s meant symbolically to be so).

This is because my interrogations of process have not led me to think that

some “new” process pedagogy or one kind of “process approach” is desirable or even possible. While process still infuses instruction today, it is far from *the* paramount or controlling conceit. As instruction iterates differently across varying institutional contexts and with the needs of diverse students, how I have positioned my own students to be critical of received process “knowledge” and observe process as emplaced activity will not work the same as it would be in another classroom or at another institution. Just as I am arguing about process, pedagogy too inescapably situates in its varied and dynamic material contexts, which in turn are shaped by institutional, ideological, programmatic, political, and other kairotic constraints. That is, teaching writing, like all rhetorical and composing processes, is always ambient and emergent and thus local and improvisational.

So in lieu of process teaching prescriptions, this teaching section orients around a fundamental guiding question: how can we position student writers to *situate* and *differentiate* writing processes? This big question can be approached through related sub-questions: How can student writers deconstruct and critically engage with their *own* preconceptions of “processes”? How can student writers observe and describe processes (theirs and others) to discover rather than receive ways to proceed?

These questions have helped me to construct, reconstruct, and trouble process with my students in my first-year and intermediate writing classes over the years. Like for many of us that teach college writing, process has been at the center of the courses I teach in different ways. For instance, I’ve taught the first semester of first-year writing with a reflective, narrative focus on writing processes. My students reflected on themselves as writers by sharing their own writing habits, routines, idiosyncrasies, and so on. Students read and analyzed writers on writing, and we discussed what experiencing writing was like for us. I aimed along the way to expand their textual process strategies for brainstorming and revision. This kind of focus on processes, I think, is pretty familiar. And I think it has some good outcomes. Students tend to develop more of an interest and stake in writing, discover the complexities of their academic writing, and maybe come to see more of themselves as “writers.” This approach always spawned good conversation as we shared the dimensional details of what it really means, to evoke Paul Prior, to say that we “wrote the paper over the weekend” (*Writing* xi). And we too revealed some underconsidered embodied and material dimensions of processes, ones I am especially interested in making visible.

However, eventually I began to question this reflective process approach, focused as it was crafting conscious reflection upon habits and enduring practices. This approach, I came to realize, looks very much inwardly; it can keep processes in the garret with the writer alone; it reinforces the idea that processes are writers’ own, uniquely “their” enduring process. And it focuses us on what we try to

make the *same*—repeated, habitual, and controllable—in our processes and in ourselves. But, so much of writing—even most of it, as Bizzell and Cooper and others have shown us—is *never just ours alone*. Processes are never dependent on only what we do, never just our will as individual writers but also the will of impromptu local conditions in which writing finds itself.

I've also come to question my own reflective process teaching as a result of some multimodal case study research I've conducted (from which I draw this chapter's opening example) on graduate students' physical processes and composing environments (Blewett et al.; Rule). In that study, I focused on writers' reflective senses of the places they wrote and the importance of objects and physicality in their writing, dimensions the study no doubt revealed. But I also saw just how much of their process activity these writers didn't really control and how much went on in their writing sessions of which they were not aware. These realizations led me to experiment with not just having students *think* about their own processes but having them closely *look at* them, too.

The activities I use now to teach writing with processes as such don't focus exclusively on drafting strategies or habits. That kind of focus is still valuable, but it's not what I think now is most important about having students see processes, theirs and others, inside and outside university. Sameness is actually what I want to counter or complicate to some extent in my students' work with and through processes. It is critical that students experience that producing effective writing is not a matter of hauling along the same process or even multiple processes to every writing situation they'll encounter (nor their same seven comma "rules" or the lasting assumption that academic writing never uses "I"). Instead, writing efficacies are contingent, best built upon first situating writing processes—looking around first to see where the writing is, what constraints can be discerned, and how to proceed. Observational methods can help writers reconstruct writing and its variable processes as ongoing embodied sites of learning, reflection, and responding *in situ*—on-the-spot and amidst the shifting contexts that prompt and differently shape writing activity.

DATA COLLECTION AND BACKGROUND

To illustrate some of how I situate processes with my student writers, I draw on the curricula and collected student texts from two different writing courses. Each data collection was overseen, reviewed, and exempted by each institution's IRB; and in the case where I cite or reproduce students' writing, I have secured their written permissions to anonymously do so. I invoke student work to illustrate practice and generate adaptable pictures of reimagined process work in contemporary classrooms.

The first illustrations come from two Honors sections of a second-term first-year writing course at a state flagship university in the south. This course focuses on rhetorical concepts and analysis, research and information literacies, writing with sources, and multimodal composing. From here, I refer to this course as “FYW,” or the “first-year writing” course. I also draw practices from a sophomore-level intermediate writing course at a large Midwestern university, a course focused on advanced rhetorical and analytical practices, primary and secondary research methods, and practicing writing in context (I refer below to this course as “IW,” or the “intermediate writing” course). I’ll describe work from one of these IW courses, “Investigating Composing Processes,” in which I had students read writing research, observe and experiment with their processes in various contexts, and conduct a qualitative study of the composing processes of a writer or group of writings in a certain context.

Both my IW and FYW courses take on a “writing-about-writing” ethos: I make “writing itself as a topic consider” (Downs and Wardle, “Reimagining” 129) and consider the phenomenology of writing a site to investigate and learn from. I also position students as writing researchers. But I see students as researchers not just in terms of formal research projects on writing, as Downs and Wardle’s approach emphasizes (“Teaching” 562). Rather, I more so see writers as researchers first in terms of taking an *inquiry posture* toward every writing experience and process. Said another way, my process teaching emphasizes that *any* writer in *any* context is a researcher to the extent that to be successful, they must investigate and respond as fittingly as they can to the complex contexts in which they and their writing find themselves.

The process practices I describe have been inspired by and repurposed from innovative visual methods in composing process and writing research studies. These methods, which include drawings, photographs, videos, screencast compose alouds, and other observational methods, capture the dynamic surround and embodied contexts of processes (e.g., Ehret and Hollett; Gonzales; McNely et al.; Pigg; Prior and Shipka; Shivers-McNair; Takayoshi). Many more practices than I will describe below can be pursued from these researchers’ methods. On top of these methods’ disciplinary yield, writers themselves benefit from engaging them in our classrooms, and not exclusively as a formal scholarly inquiry, but also toward building an inquiry stance toward writing: an orientation of curiosity and information-seeking as processes emerge differently in different situations.

DRAW PROCESSES

I title recent sections of my FYW course “Rhetorical/Inquiry/Processes” because I emphasize rhetorical analysis of texts of all kinds—methods equally for the

analysis, evaluation, and critique of published *and* students' own texts. I focus on inquiry rather than argument as a way to help students expand beyond rote formal features of essay writing they might have internalized (and the manner of one-sided, oversimplified pro/con models of engagement they've learned from living in contemporary cable-news America). And, most significantly for this discussion, processes plural in the title helps us see the rhetoricity and difference of processes as guided by *where* our writing happens. In class, my students and I consider the writing we do in everyday life and across our ranging academic work; we study popular press essays as "mentor texts" to acquire the genre of the "inquiry essay," we examine genres we encounter in the everyday—like podcasts, PSAs, print ads, political cartoons, Facebook posts, and so on—to help students define their own communicative goals and choices in a multimodal recast project. In short, physically situating processes becomes a critical foundation to all of this work as it helps writers *see* that *all* writing is located and shaped by factors that exceed and precede them. In turn, the writing experiences within my class come closer to the rules by which writing plays in the world: one of discovering and adapting to the constraints of *where* writing is.

The wheres of writing processes is something my writing students and I capture regularly with drawings. This practice is largely influenced by Paul Prior and Jody Shipka's 2003 study in which their participants draw and discuss their composing processes and spaces. The drawings help the researchers show, from a cultural-historical activity theory perspective, the "chronotopic lamination" of the writers' ranging process activities—or what the authors define as "the dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action" (181). Process drawings depict the immediacies of writing space, time, objects, and activity, but also that which is not contained, like affective dimensions, felt pace of a writing session, memories and inspiration, and more. Drawing thus also stretches conventional conceptions of writing time: while we might think of processes as demarcated by the time a writer is seated and inscribing, drawings from Prior and Shipka's study participants and from my students reveal longer, wandering timelines, as processes blend with everyday activities like laundry, walking, showering, or listening to a class discussion.

Given these affordances, I start the process conversation with drawing on the first day of this course. Supplying paper and various art supplies, I ask students to: "Draw the writing process for something you've written recently. Try not to use any words, don't worry if you're not a good artist, and I don't mean anything specific by 'writing process'—just depict what you recall doing." After some time, students hang their completed images anonymously on the board. Then, placed into groups to meet one another, they work together to closely examine

all the drawings, looking for points of interest, patterns, repetitions, trends, and outliers. Groups write up informal notes for me about their collective observations, and each group shares their insights.

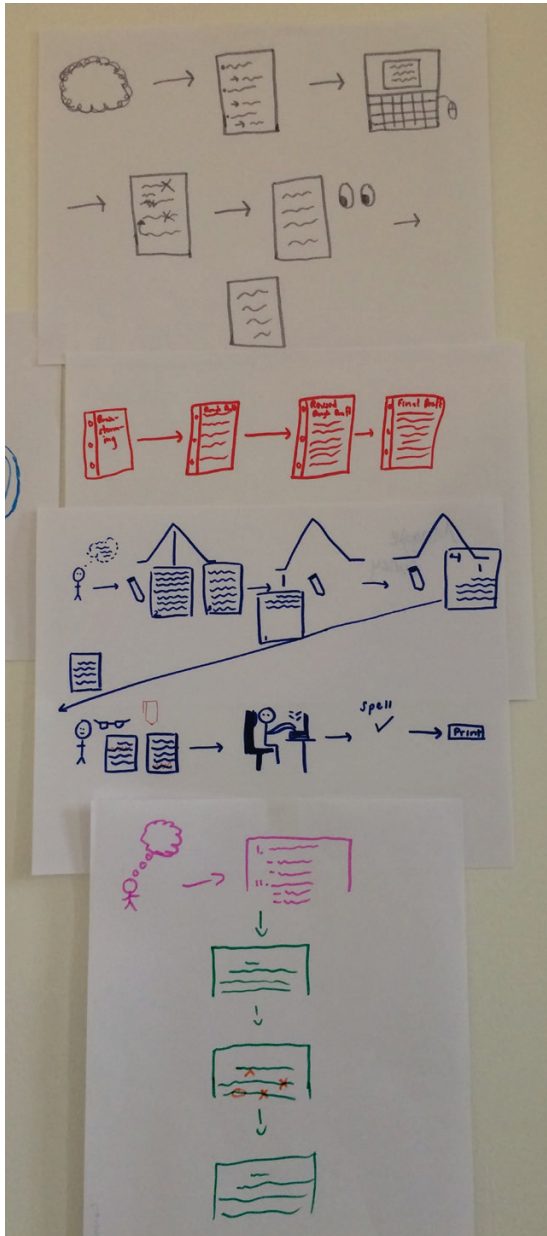


Figure 4. Process as "pages."

To illustrate in more detail, I want to look closer at the drawings and descriptions from just one of my recent FYW classes. As the very first and informal activity in this course, it is no surprise that many of the drawings are general and familiar. Indeed, some drawings appear to be an exact rendition of the process wheel—prewrite, write, revise, edit, publish—an image they might have seen hanging in a prior classroom. Taken as a whole too, students' group observations of the drawings also cast process in familiar terms. The most recurring insights from looking at everyone's drawings had to do with seeing in them generalized "steps" or procedures—in my students' words, "step by step," "multiple steps to each process," "multistep process," or "linear processes." Similarly, students noticed in the drawings the familiar stages of process, given name by writing instruction, like "brainstorming to rough draft," "revisions/additions/edits," "writing & rewriting." Others noted the repetition of representations that indicate "thinking" or an "original idea." Less common insights mention "stuff" like "research," "calendars and clocks," or "distractions." Even less occurring was affective dimensions, like "difficult" and "time consuming." And finally, one group saw simply that "Most, if not all, include a distinct process."



Figure 5. Processes as pages, selves, and stuff.

As I take my turn looking at the drawings, I see about four different kinds of process renditions. The first show writing processes as *pages*—I term it this way

as during the activity I overheard one student say as his group was looking, “I guess, I don’t know, it’s like a bunch of pages” (Fig. 4). That characterization resonated with me. Indeed in at least six of the eighteen drawings, *pages* in various states are really the *only* entity depicted. Similarly, the second kind of drawing I see too prioritizes pages, but also includes selves and stuff, like computers, pencils, or books, or disembodied brains and eyes (Fig. 5). Together, I would say two-thirds of the drawings, all using arrows to indicate linear development, reproduce generalized processes stages. Perhaps I needed not have collated this set of students’ drawings to have demonstrated this. We all might have predicted that more than half the class of students would, given the context, reproduce the familiar terrain of processes in school, giving me what they thought I expected to see. Processes, after all, are most often “teacher-identified.”

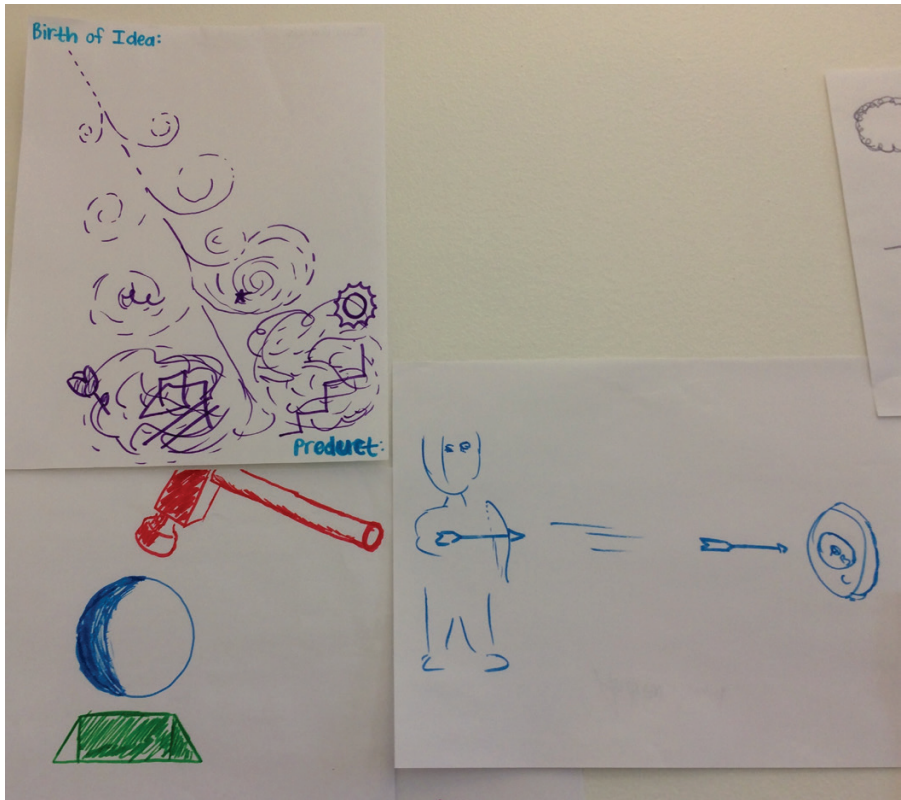


Figure 6. Processes as metaphorical.

But what the remaining drawings show is less similar and familiar. Three of the remaining drawings are rather conceptual or metaphorical—what they might suggest isn’t as clear (though I do notice that two of them seem to show

something about the “game” of writing: bash one’s circle “voice” into the “school writing” square perhaps, or the art of hitting the narrow mark of what’s expected (Fig. 6). The others show scenes or snapshots—writing as experienced while watching TV (or at least sitting in front of it), as a first-person *mise en place* of texts within and outside a screen, and as what appears to be an ephemeral tour of moments of planning and conversation that preceded inscription (Fig. 7).

By here dividing these drawings into “familiar” and “less-so,” I do not want to oversimplify any of them. I don’t suggest that the “familiar” images are those I eventually want to tap out of writers’ consciousness—I don’t. What the whole set of drawings do show to me is that writers internalize all the things writing instruction has told them that processes are: development, steps, drafts, the process wheel, thinking, and so on. They show that writers have conceptual stakes in process as an idea that at least sometimes shapes, enables, or inhibits their experiences with writing.



Figure 7. Processes as scenes.

Opening my FYW course with this activity serves critical functions: it displays baseline presumptions about what it means to see “writing as a process.” It allows students to start seeing *differences* in processes, to see others’ conceptions and experiences alongside their own, and to begin to cultivate a critical and curious orientation toward the particular *wheres*, *whens*, and *hows* of compos-

ing. And it serves as the foundation from which I introduce course outcomes related to situating processes, including “engaging in processes of figuring out how writing works differently in different contexts for different purposes” and “practicing writing processes as distinct and varied—shaped by the particulars of environmental and rhetorical situations.” To introduce these less familiar process ideas, I can literally point to in the drawings how, for example, all the written texts or products depicted *look so very the same*. None of the drawings differentiate the *kinds* of writing (n.); all are just shown as “a bunch of pages.” Writing (n.) in these drawings, in other words, is identical, even though we know—or as we begin to see in this class—that the range of written texts we make each day, and their processes, are quite *different* from one another.

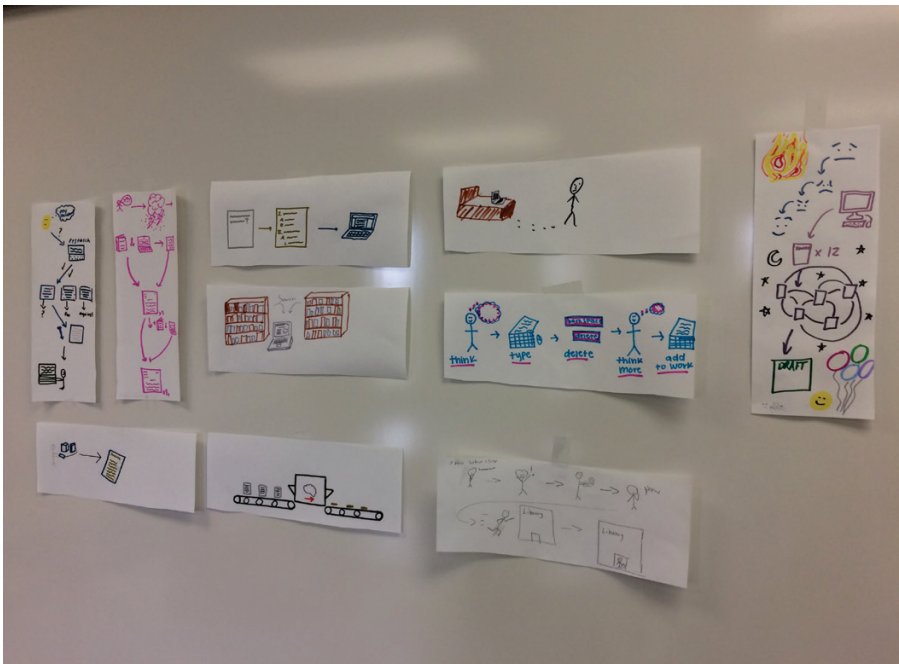


Figure 8. Short draft processes, first class.

Drawing doesn't stop on day one. Students draw again, for instance, as a part of a review activity called “Speed Dating.” Working with a short partial draft they have prepared, in rounds of five to seven minutes, students work with a different partner on a focused task. Tasks vary but might include something like the following: “take turns reading each other's first two paragraphs aloud back to the writer; after, discuss what you each notice in hearing the writing.” At one of these stations, writers are prompted to draw the *particular* process (or one aspect) of the process they used to produce this specific three pages of draft in their hands.

After each partner has finished, they are to again, hang their drawings on the board and discuss what they notice about them all. Embedded as they are in this buzzing, kinetic review structure, I don't get to hear much of the conversation around these drawings. But I notice a few key differences across this particular set I collected recently (Figs. 8 and 9): for one, while I still see familiar process procedure represented, the arrows across the drawings have become less orderly (and much less used). I notice too that the process starts this time with something *else* besides “thinking.” For instance, several drawings show engagement with research texts *before* thinking or brainstorming begins. I notice too interesting scenes that seem to be of “not-writing”—getting stopped by a deadline (or a dog or a horse?) (Fig. 7, left top), walking away from writing (Fig. 6), or feeling time ticking by as a writer sits still with legs crossed, at a far distance from the keyboard (Fig. 7, right bottom). This activity, staged in the midst of their working on a text, allows students to render much more specific process experience.

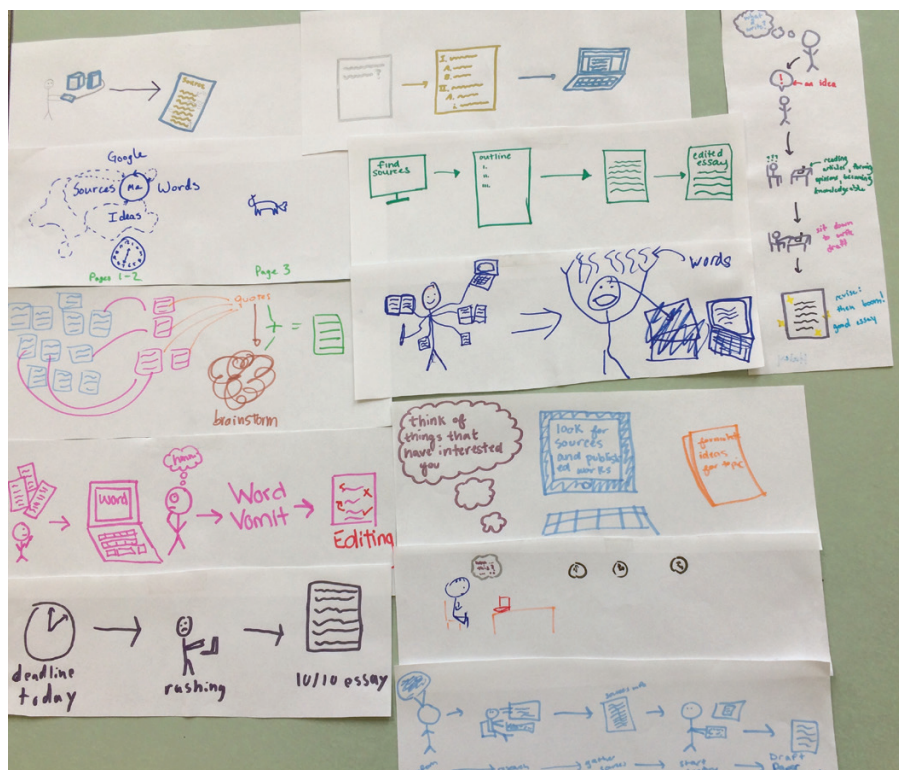


Figure 9. Short draft processes, second class.

Drawing in my courses too does not only just capture what students did when they wrote specific texts. To connect reading and writing processes, for

example, we use drawing to collaboratively map the paragraph structure of a sample inquiry essay. Or, as a way to brainstorm a hook of exigence, urgency and timeliness in their own inquiry essays, students draw a dramatic scene they want their readers to *see* when they read their introductions, a scene which can embody the essay's focus and stakes. As my students' drawings accrue and we look to and consider them together, they don't teach processes, they *provoke* critical expansion of this foundational writing classrooms concept. Drawing is a means to access, reconsider, and stretch the foreground of processes to include writer's experiences in place as they grapple with time, affect, disengagement, tools, and environments, and varying situations.

EXPERIMENT WITH AND STUDY PROCESSES

In addition to drawing, my writing students also use a range of observational methods to see processes—video observations, descriptions, interviews, narratives, photographs. The purpose of these methods are manifold: for one, I hope they reveal how situated writing activity well exceeds any process schema offered. Second, observation reveals how writing is embodied and grounded in lived time and space through partnerships with material environments and things. Third, through observation, writing students can broaden what they think counts as “writing” and its processes—writing is pervasive and different, not specialized, not limited only to school-based writing tasks, not one set of rules to master. Perhaps most importantly, these methods show how writing is ineluctably located and shaped—each time a different situation, a different set of constraints, and different processes, depending on where and why writing is.

My IW courses focus expressly on such visual investigations of processes. Students read narratives about authors' processes (e.g., Diaz; Lamott), read writing research about processes (e.g., McCarthy; Wyche), and reflect on their own. Putting extra focus on the emplaced physicalities of writing, we also analyze selections from the *Orion Magazine* blog series, “The Place Where I Write,” and based on study and discussion of those narratives, students craft their own detailed essays describing where they write. Students also engage in what I call “Reflections: Experiments in Process.” Since the major research project in this course blends secondary and primary research methods, these experiments also give students concentrated low-stakes practice in the challenging arts of observation and interviewing. They allow students too, in an ethnographic sense, to see theirs and others' discrete processes “strangely.”

To illustrate, I focus on the first experimental reflection in the course, what I call (in a title that is not so great!) “Zooming in on How Writing Works.” The prompt is simple: students choose a time when they are writing some-

thing, something for school or not. They can use any means of observation: audio record themselves talking about what they are doing as they do it (compose-aloud), video record themselves, have someone else observe them, and so on. After listing their observations in detail, they answer reflective questions: What surprised you? What sparked your curiosity in what you observed? What conclusions can you draw about your processes in this particular situation? If you were to do this observation again in similar conditions, what would you watch for more closely?

Looking back on one set of these first observations, I note the great range in kinds of writing students watched themselves doing. Many focused on the making of school-genres: discussion board posts, questions for Marketing homework, a self-introduction for an online class, chemistry notes taken from a PowerPoint, a “specialized lab report for the Anatomy and Dissection of a Rat.” Others focused on how they wrote in a professional genre: a study-abroad application letter, a practice response for a GRE essay prompt, a background check form for a new job, a movie review for a student newspaper. Still others observed processes of personal or social writing (several of which, surprisingly, were *letters*): a note to a girlfriend, a “personal letter to my friend,” “a letter to my best friend . . . who is now in Prison for the next two years,” text messages about evening plans, a post-it note schedule, a to-do list fashioned from a paper plate cut in half, or Facebook chats. Students described writing in study rooms, bedrooms, common rooms, basements, libraries, couches, beds, and other people’s living rooms—locations which buzzed with other activity that sustained and paused, halted and enabled processes: music of all kinds, movies and TV watched or as background, texts for reference, phones, family members, pets, drinks, and more. And students described their surprises in watching themselves: for instance, that “the TV and phone didn’t play as a big of distraction as I would have thought;” that “It took me 45 seconds to start typing once I put my hands on the Keyboard;” or concern at “the time I actually work verses the time I spend fooling around on the computer with the internet, the TV, and searching for music.”

Throughout this book I’ve suggested seeing writing processes helps writers situate and differentiate writing. But as with the first day process drawings, of course, it’s not as though students in this first time observing themselves saw nuanced specifics of how genres might shape their language choices or how what constitutes “revision” will change as they write an application or as they Facebook chat. At first, they all mostly just seemed to see themselves “write” for a while and then, of course, dutifully fix their “errors,” no matter what and where their writing was. And too, often their observations were general and glossed: I sat, I drank water, I moved the pillow, I wrote, I stared, I wrote. (And I asked in response, but what did that “writing” really look like?).

So though generalities surely remained, what began to be cultivated in this first “experiment” was at the same time some sharp *curiosity*—the beginnings of conceptualizing how writing across their life domains is *different*. Pondering their first observations, provoking questions emerged, as they asked in their reflections:

- “I would want to know how my writing differs between subjects, i.e., History and English.”
- “Did my other actions I was performing simultaneously, such as class and reading, influence my subject matter?”
- “What are my behaviors while writing an essay, poem, blog post, text with friend, writing while blocked vs. writing while inspired, different moods, different weather, and so on. I think I need a broader range of observations to come to any real conclusions about my behavior while writing.”
- “What are other people’s list-making habits?”
- “Another thing I found interesting about this method was the number of things I was able to notice [about what I did when I was writing], which raises the question to me of how many did I miss?”

Here students notice and ask about differences in discipline, genre, situational, environmental and ambient contexts. They want to know about others’ writing behaviors. They want to know what they’re missing about their and others’ processes. Curious investigation of writing continues to be exercised in this IW course through other impromptu studies of processes: interviewing writers about how they write, observing writing in an unusual environment or with unusual tools, closely examining the physical body engaged in writing (inspired by Perl’s composing guidelines), and culminating in a formal study of ethnographic-style study of a writer or group of writer’s processes.

SEE PROCESSES, SITUATE WRITING

Seeing writing processes is a means to help student writers situate writing in contexts. Describing processes is one illuminating step. Becoming more aware of and responsive to the locatedness of processes is another. This process inquiry posture helps students perceive abstract constraints and factors that shape writing—contextual expectations for language, punctuation, genre moves, structure, and so on. With a final illustration then, I describe how student writers might connect their literal looking at writing activity to processes of “observing” or researching writing (n.) to determine ways to shape their own writing (v.).

As established, my FYW students conduct secondary research directed by an intentionally vague constraint: research must be on a problem or tension related

to writing, broadly construed. There is always some palpable initial consternation about this required focus as many students have not thought much about writing at all as more than a transparent tool or set of skills. Certainly, almost none of them have *studied* writing. So as one way of kickstarting their thinking (really as a prewriting exercise unannounced, as students don't know exactly why they're doing this), I send students into their daily lives to observe and record where and how they see writing around them. I make it vague: just observe and record the details of where you see writing all around you during your day.

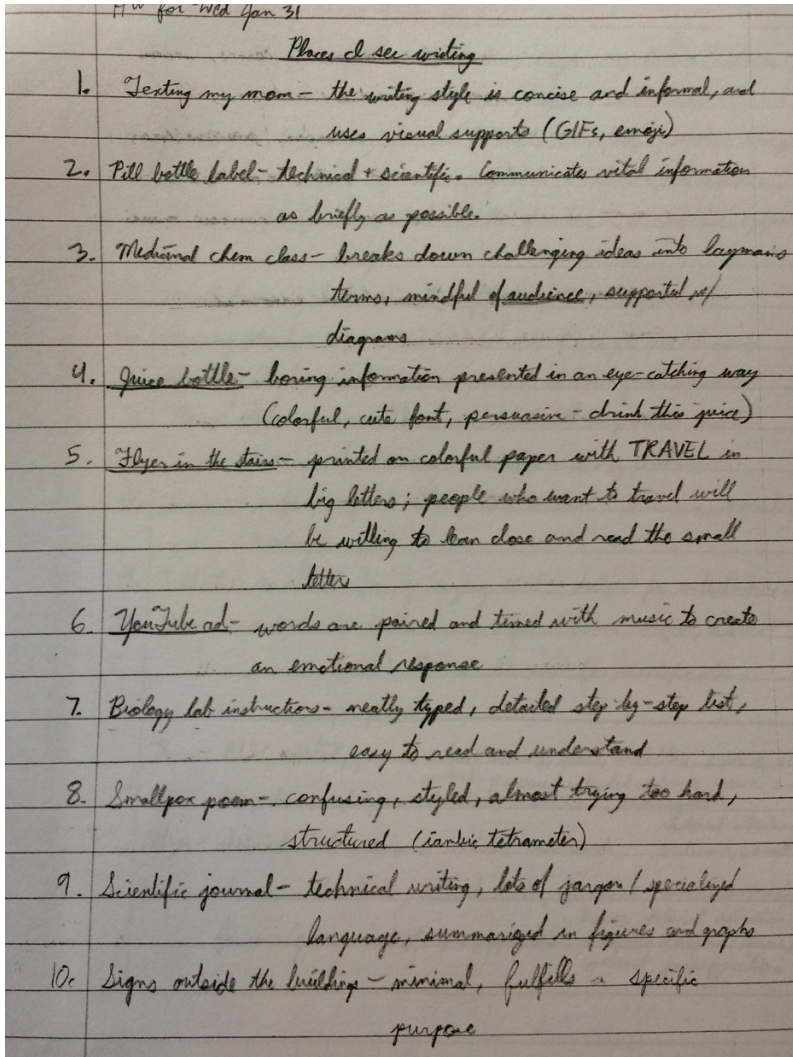


Figure 10. Sample "Places I see Writing" Observations.

I randomly collected and photocopied about fifteen of these lists from students' notebooks across two of my FYW sections, from which I form the following analysis. With their observations lists in hand, students get into groups to share the details about where they saw writing. As with the process drawings, seeing, sharing, analyzing the observations of others is a critical extension of this activity. But when beginning to share what they observed, I hear concerns across the room about having "done the prompt wrong." This is because some have described writing (n.) around them—the texts that surround them on campus including, for instance, signs, banners, posters, ads, professor's PowerPoints, notes on a board; or those they see online like Instagram captions, news articles, Snapchats, Facebook posts, and so on (see Fig. 10 for one such example list). Others have described scenes they observed of people "physically writing"—people in their classes writing notes; writing math problems in notebooks with numbers, signs, and words; writing code; professors writing on the board; a person jotting on a sticky note, writing homework in Spanish, a restaurant server writing orders, a friend writing a birthday card, a person doodling. Only a few students' lists described both written texts and writing processes in progress. But this confusion in sharing is productive, as the purpose of the activity is to get students to see writing (n. and v.) everywhere all around them, serving very different purposes and shaped by all manner of constraints. As one student, "Jim" noted in an annotation of his list: "I realize now that I took a fairly close-minded approach to this assignment. I only looked at people in the act of writing instead of pre-existing writing and all the different ways writing exists in the world."

As with the IW students' first observations of their own processes, much on these observation lists was general, rote. But many were able to, through an ethos of curiosity, begin to *see* processes differently, to *see* how situational demands differently shape writing. As "Michelle" wrote as one observation in her list (Fig. 11):

Sending a text to my grandma today made me think about how often we truly do write and often how quickly we are willing to throw our words out into the digital world. I take time curating a response to my grandma's text, but when my best friend texts me I'll shoot off a response so fast I barely know what I said. I watched my friend spend 5 minutes texting a classmate to ask them to come help them with homework- then shoot off a second text telling their roommate to bring them a book. even w/ small messages, the audience matters.

Writing in the World Around me.

Text messages: ^{relates to} ^{inquiry.} ^{doing}
 Sending a text to my grandma can alr
 today made me think about in Jon
 how often we truly do write-they'll
 and often how quickly we look w
 are willing to throw our I ALB
 words out into the digital before I
 world. I take time curating when I
 a response to my grandma's watchin
 text, but when my then p
 best friend texts me I'll post it
 shoot off a response so I find
 fast I barely know what forms of
 I said. I watched my it's Jom
 friend spend 5 minutes very spe
 texting a classmate to one person.
 ask them to come help it to a f
 them with homework. So it do
 then shoot off a 1 of though
 second text telling their jotting ha
 roommate to bring them note make
 a book. even w/ with you
 small messages, the close to you
 audience matters. sticky note que
 self reminders: I have a very orga
 due date + assignment. the kid next to me

Figure 11. One of "Michelle's" observations.

“Michelle’s” pause of curiosity about the ways she found herself developing a specific text message that day to her grandmother turned out to be a rich opening for reflection. In her description, she gestures at the reckless speed with which we launch words into the world today. She observes differences in a simple and likely taken-for-granted genre like “texting.” To one audience “Michelle” is slow and careful crafting her words; to another, she is fast and unfiltered. Looking closely at her friend texting shows another layer of nuance, based on perhaps, registers of formality versus familiarity. These small quotidian observations lead “Michelle” to perceive broad rhetorical considerations like audience and revision and style in a manner specified and differentiated.

What’s more is that “Michelle’s” pause over writing this particular text message caused her to become curious about how we keep in contact today more broadly, leading her to pursue an inquiry essay about the art and value of snail mail letter writing today. In seeing this tiny lived process of text messaging, “Michelle” discovered just how nuanced “writing” is; she perceived texting as a situated and differentiated genre. Other students in their observations maybe didn’t get as deep or curious as she, but all were able at least to see writing more expansively and as a site of inquiry, eventually each finding a provoking writing-related question to research—topics which included the challenges of science writing for the public, Twitter as a forum for artistic and essayistic writing, emojis in modern communication, factors driving online commenting, the rise and conventions of clickbait, benefits of expressive writing, social media and mental health, and so on. By looking at writing (v.) as it’s practiced and writing (n.) as encountered in the world, students through this activity expand and differentiate writing and its processes.

Situated observation continues as a central method of this course. My FYW students don’t just observe writing (v. and n.) to locate a writing-related focus for their research or to differentiate theirs and others’ processes. We also extend this inquiry habit toward observing sets of particular *kinds* of writing (n.) in the world. That is, these writers also repeatedly “observe” writing (n.) to determine how to write in an entirely new genre to them: an inquiry research essay.

The inquiry essay is not a “real genre,” in as much as it would not be identifiable by this name to anyone but my students and I. Rather, as I emphasize, this is a genre I basically have “made up.” I do so by collecting a small set of journalistic, essayistic writing from the web and online magazines that serve as our primary inquiry essay “mentors.” (In my last FYW sections, we focused mainly on two “inquiry essays” by Robert Rosenberger and Clive Thompson). We also shape this genre’s purposes and character through reflective think-pieces on the essay (those, for example, by Philip Lopate and Christy Wampole) as a genre not for air-tight narrow claims with superficial evidence contained in predetermined

forms. In other words, the inquiry essay is not the research and argumentative essay students have likely experienced in school. An inquiry essay instead is enacted more in the spirit of Montaigne, a genre through which we doubt, wonder, and discover and reconsider our claims through critical dialogue with ranging source material. Throughout the term we continuously look back to the same set of genre examples to see the similarities *and differences* among them in terms of tone, ethos, kinds of source material (original studies, anecdotes, testimonies, recognizable authorities, etc.), attribution, sentence-style, structure, introduction and exigence-building, and so on. Difference in the inquiry essays we examine is critical, as this method is not about models or imitation, but *mentorship*. And, as we zoom in to examine different characteristics like persona, I bring in additional inquiry excerpts (like Tom Chatfield's on attention, for example) that provide range and confound writers' instincts to do just exactly what one of the examples does.

I am influenced in this practice by "mentor text" methods (e.g., Anderson; Gallagher; Paraskevas) as well as Sarah Andrew-Vaughn and Cathy Fleischer's "Unfamiliar Genre Research Project." In brief, their project starts with having students examine a giant list of genres—scrapbooking, flash fiction, obituaries, sonnets, editorials, and so on—and highlighting ones that seem strange, unfamiliar, or otherwise challenging. Students then select one of these unfamiliar genres to work on. Each assembles and studies a set of genre examples for its conventions, purposes, deviations, and uses; experiments with and enacts the genre based on their research and analysis; and assembles a portfolio including their genre research, criteria that guided their attempts, and a reflection on this process of moving from disorientation to enaction. All of this discovery and experimentation is done, it should be emphasized, *totally without* teacher arbitration, fully without her criteria or control over the genres or students' choices. Rather students themselves mindfully situate themselves in the genre through their research. As such, teaching "unfamiliar genres" is ultimately an observational *research* process—students move from not knowing anything about a genre (like the "inquiry essay") to, through analytical discovery processes, applying newly formed knowledge in the performance of writing that was formerly totally foreign. As I repeatedly underline, the point of closely studying or "observing" this inquiry essay genre is *not* to learn how to write an inquiry essay successfully. The point is the *processes* by which we approximate this, or any, genre. The point is the method itself of *learning how to learn* to write something you've never written before by looking for guidance from genre mentors.

There is much value in these processes of "looking" at writing (n.). The first is in performing ad-hoc and independent processes of figuring out how writing works. This is, after all, how any writer anywhere begins to acquire facility

in a new genre. We learn the window of acceptable writing on Facebook, for example (a genre like many which students initially see as a non-genre and as not-writing) by *reading* Facebook and intuiting often subconsciously through violations (public, sappy devotions to a significant other) *and* patterns (Throw-back Thursdays) how to shape our writing there. I am not *teaching* genres here, but positioning students to learn how to learn a genre. As such, students discover that to write successfully is always in *situating* that writing (n. and v.) in what can be discerned about the situation, genre, purposes, rules, tone, criteria, available tools, and so on. There is value too in the uncertainty that students experience in shaping their own inquiry essays. Writing, after all, is a game of approximation and attempts, not one of set or defined rules. The measure of a successful inquiry essay is not in what the teacher expects, as the teacher and the student (and all writers) are beholden first and foremost to the machinations of genre and situation and specific Others as audience. As Andrew-Vaughn underlines, both writing students and teachers become “the central inquirers” as to how any particular genre works.

Positioning students as observational process researchers thus takes on several dimensions in my own teaching practice. First, seeing and describing processes variously and repeatedly helps writers see beyond entrenched process commonplaces like ordered textual change, writing procedures, or surveilled school routine (Jensen). Observing processes reveals the infinite material embodied and procedural differences in processes involved in making any everyday text (a diary entry, text message, a tweet or a meme or a Snap, a literary interpretive argument, etc.). Gathering these concrete views of writing activity help writers see processes differently across their and others’ experience. In turn, writers *see* and *feel* and better *respond to* broader and more conceptual contextual constraints. And writers enact observational habits too in the close-up study of genre mentors. Broadly, student writers as curious process researchers cast processes as on-the-spot responses to shifting contexts and genres that exert control and shape their writing. Writing and its processes are not one thing, not just what we as writers alone do. Writing processes are rather always a matter of continuously looking to discern and respond to the terrain of *where* writing is.

CONCLUSION: WRITING PROCESSES *ALWAYS* AND *ALL* WAYS EXCEEDING THE PICTURE POSTCARD

Seeing writing processes is revealing for writers, but also for their teachers. I remember one of my IW students describing how he had taken to writing essays for school on his TV screen through his Xbox (still not sure how he configured

it, or if I'm recalling correctly his hack that made this possible). He talked about the size of his words on the screen being particularly enabling. Inspired, I recall sneaking into an empty classroom to begin drafting a conference paper I had been avoiding. I wanted to see how seeing my words emerge on the big projection AV screen might make my experience of drafting feel easier. But even more than these rich glimpses into how writing labor is differently staged or enacted, even more than voyeuristic insight or theft of a potentially helpful process hack, I want to end by emphasizing this important point: seeing the *wheres* and *with whats* of our students' processes also reveals exacting social, political, and economic pressures.

These kinds of material and environmental considerations come to light in Anne Aronson's 1999 study of seven adult undergraduate women writers who are also caretakers, parents, partners or spouses, and employees. Through interviews, Aronson shows especially the gendered constraints of "the concrete situations in which [these women] do their writing for college" (284). Situating her inquiry against Woolf's call for a room of one's own (with money to live and a lock on the door) and Ursula LeGuin's narrower material requirements of just a pencil and paper, Aronson reveals some of the conditions in which our students—especially those who are women, adults, and, to varying degrees, socio-economically disadvantaged—compose for us. Though their writing spaces vary, for all these women, space and time for writing is essentially inseparable from domestic space, with its attendant demands and gendered inequities. The women interviewed "write in cramped spaces that are subject to relentless trespassing" (296) and interruptions. Invoking Tillie Olsen's poetic and biting acerbic musing on all that goes unwritten in the world because women and others are saddled with competing impositions on their time and creativity, Aronson has us face how differing conditions—material, economic, political—might lead to different written results for these women and for others.

Aronson's study shows that writing processes in their everyday "concrete" conditions are never *just* about their immediate dynamics. Rather every "right here" of writing is shaped by bigger constraints, and broader inequities. "Private" or domestic material dynamics are public ones as the personal is the material is the political is the economic is the racialized is the gendered. Because she recognizes the strong imposition of these situational dynamics, Aronson is skeptical of LeGuin's belief that all writers require is bare minimum tools, as this

viewpoint suggests that assuming responsibility and control of one's writing is an act somehow separate from the material conditions of writing. It suggests that internal conviction is independent from external constraints, that our internal selves

can carry on lives of their own apart from the spatial, temporal, and other resources of the external environment. (298)

Aronson's point rings to me with devastating accuracy. Writers simply cannot bootstrap themselves beyond or outside of the material-social-economic conditions that shape lives and writing. Writing processes are always and all ways of their places, and of the world—never independent of it nor willed to transcendence.

Aronson's work leaves me feeling how important but overlooked writing is as a material practice. She leaves me concerned about space-making and the inhospitable designs of universities and colleges (Mauk). She leaves me thinking about silences precipitated by students' night shifts, single parenthood, depression, hunger, fear of violence, housing insecurity, intellectual difference, or other sociopolitical and systemic vulnerabilities, ones which we can see and those we may never. She reminds us of what we know, but that which nevertheless feels so far beyond our intervention: that literacy is largely determined by economics, access and privilege (and that it is less the bridge to mobility we might believe it could be). Aronson reminds us, as literacy teachers and as citizens, that we must continue to dismantle systemic disadvantage and inequities of all kinds.

She makes me think at the same time, though, that we should fight another familiar message, one that seems on its face less concerning, but one that is still insidious. We ought to kick around too that picture postcard myth that "real" writing is always cloistered, private, sustained. Writing processes are not just matters of cloistered focus, not just a set of somethings that "real writers" always do and have, not just or ever well-preened, disembodied, "photo-edited" writing desks. Privacy is also ideological, not an abstract good-in-itself but a small tyranny reproduced especially, as Kristie S. Fleckenstein has discussed, in the (re)production of academic spaces and the status imbued in the academic's closed private office door. But, Fleckenstein emphasizes, "The need to control the degree of disruption in a physical writing scene evolves with the belief that an academic must shut out life, must separate the life of the work from the life lived, the body from the mind" ("Writing" 300). This ideological network of seemingly commonsense assumptions in turn would devalue "the discourse (and knowledge) that evolves when scholars write standing in their kitchens or sitting by the kitty litter (Sommers; Bloom)" (300). While spatial norms are consequential, they are also not static nor categorically determinant. As Fleckenstein's concept of somatic mind suggests, we are "always placed; yet we are always on the verge of new placements that disrupt and reconfigure materiality and discourse" (303). That is, as women, who might be more "culturally predisposed to carry with them their peopled space" (Fleckenstein 303), continue to attain higher and more

conventionally cloistered academic offices or as increasingly unsteady markets of academic labor continue to undermine both spatio-economic privilege and security, the meanings and experiences of academic space too shifts. Ideologies around material conditions and knowledge always might be otherwise (and of course, not necessarily for the better or the more liberating).

Undoubtedly the experiences of the women writers in Aronson's study are constricted by the weight of gendered norms and the specifics of their material environments. We ought to fight still for Woolf's door lock for them and for all, for equities and access, for ever more equitable planes of discursive authority. At the same time, we can undermine the mythic ideology of the picture postcard of writing. Who says effective, impactful, beautiful writing can't be forged in the middle of, rather than separated or cloistered from, complex domestic lives and multiple social roles? In spite of the impossibilities and partialities, we should look for *all ways* writing unfolds *always* in excess of official spaces and sanctioned means. Multiplying images of processes shows writing as inseparably of the world. And by accruing images of processes' differences, the materialities of access and writing might be (re)cast differently.