

CHAPTER TWO:

PERSONAL PRESENCE, EMBODIED EMPIRICISM AND RESONANCE IN CONTEMPLATIVE WRITING



We teach in a culture that simultaneously obsesses about and disregards bodies and in an academic culture that still views teachers and students as ‘minds’ and ‘intellects’ only Our theories of pedagogy cannot afford to neglect the dancing bodies in our classrooms.

—Tina Kazan, *Dancing Bodies in the Classroom*

Tina Kazan’s reevaluation of “dancing bodies” in my epigraph is rooted in her visceral experience as a body who navigates the pedagogical spaces of both ballrooms and writing classrooms. Kazan bridges her embodied experiences as a writing teacher to hers as a student of ballroom dancing in order to illuminate how all writing teachers are dually implicated in a process of reading bodies and—because we maintain positions of power in the classroom however much we attempt to eschew our authority—sanctioning them. Like the dance instructor who (mistakenly) reads Kazan and her lesbian friend as a couple but cannot transcend the heteronormative ballroom dancing language on which she relies, teachers sanction how bodies are allowed to speak in the classroom. Sanctioning takes place via the ways teachers literally see the bodies before them and the corresponding ways they gesture to bodies in language.

Here, the eye confers location and space to the process of situating and reading embodied others. Indeed, Kazan uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the “surplus of seeing,” or the idea that because each body is necessarily opaque to itself, can literally only see outward, to argue for the relationality of bodies to each other and the need to understand situatedness as stemming literally from the point of view of the fleshy body. Understanding situatedness as arising not just from discursive placement but also from the “situated nature of perspective” (Kazan, 2005, p. 385) invites an understanding of how composition teachers “teach writers, bodies who aspire to write” (Kazan, 2005, p. 392). In ways akin

to contemplative writing pedagogy, Kazan defines the process of (teaching) writing as one that always already involves the body and therefore as one that could be strengthened if explicit attention were paid to material relations in teaching and learning.

In sharp contrast to Kazan's concept of dancing-writing bodies is what Worsham has termed the "wild subject," the prevalent constructivist concept used to denote the writing subject in composition studies (2001, p. 247). Worsham's term highlights a state of detachment that makes the subject unrestrained or "wild," as it is permitted and encouraged to rise above its body. The wild subject is a rhetorical subject, to be sure, making it highly useful for analysis, but this picture of subjectivity has come at the cost of valuing materiality in the ways both Worsham and Kazan hope we might. When given space in language as a subject and not approached as a writing body, the writer remains rhetorical because she can transcend her material composition, placing value on her consciousness over and above (as removable) from her flesh.¹² As this hierarchy is normalized in our pedagogical and professional writing, it follows that it becomes part of the hidden curriculum, or as Worsham might say, part of the dominant pedagogy, we teach our students. We need only to look as far as the students discussed in Interchapter One to see the consequences of this dominant pedagogy. Students there couldn't recognize the ironies of seeing writing only in terms of thinking, even when their bodies screamed for attention, because they were so well schooled to rise above the gross body when attending to matters of the mind. In dominant schooling systems, it is difficult to affirm the importance of the material relations between writing bodies, a difficulty my students had to confront in their body blogs outlined there.

This difficulty is what Kazan hopes to address. Her article can be placed within a new wave of scholarship on what might be called "embodied writing pedagogy" which has begun to restore focus on the individual writer as a means of reclaiming her materiality. Despite developing interest in materiality (Hawhee, Fleckenstein) and positionality (Kazan), however, embodied writing remains a somewhat scattered approach. I argue in this chapter that contemplative writing represents a more sustainable and interdisciplinary (and, therefore, writing-across-the-curriculum friendly) learning approach and praxis that captures the importance of our felt experiences without denying the responsibility of critically investigating our embodiment and connecting with others in ways responsible to our (and their) flesh.

As previous chapters have illustrated, I seek to maximize the coherence between the feminist and the contemplative in my work. Giving contemplative writing studies a feminist edge through the feminist epistemology theorized by

Haraway, in particular, adds to its strengths and provides a different method of knowing for our field—and, therein, a different picture of subjectivity. The union also generates a new means of writing instruction, what I’ve been referring to as feminist contemplative writing pedagogy. If my last chapter explored how a writing subject might reconnect her “wild” mind with her organic, intelligent body by understanding herself as a writing yogi, a body-heart-mind, then this chapter will follow the consequences of this shift for the meaning-making process of writing itself and the knowledge construction that occurs as a result of this process; both are consciously located within their material contexts in contemplative pedagogy. Rather than valuing third-person knowing to the effect of erasing the knower’s body, contemplative pedagogies work to better understand the dynamics of first-person knowing and seek to find resonance between varied sources of embodied, felt knowledge. They forward a picture of knowing as advanced by the skill of embodied imagining, as outlined in my introduction.

This is a view of knowledge as local and embodied that contemporary cognitive neuroscience has begun to validate. Neurophenomenology, a new, integrative branch of neuroscience, has sought to theorize consciousness from a paradigm of embodiment. Coined by the late scientist Francisco Varela, neurophenomenology argues for an enactive or embedded approach to cognition, one that seeks to position experience as embodied and intersubjective and to understand cognition as including factors such as the body and the world and not just the brain (Rudrauf, Lutz, Cosmelli, Lachaux, & Le Van Quyen, 2003, p. 33). Two main consequences of this scientific approach include a valuation of our flesh, now seen as “the root of our experience” as well as a valorization of first-person, subjective knowledge (Rudrauf et al., 2003, pp. 33; 37). These reclamations of the individual have recently led Cooper to argue that neurophenomenology can help us navigate responsible rhetorical agency (2011, p. 420). As intimately tied to neuroscience, contemplative pedagogy presents us with the opportunity to explore these developments within our field, giving us new means to explore the embodied and experiential nature of writing and writers, and Haraway gives us a feminist topos from which to do this work.

Contemplative embodiment might yet remain an underexplored paradigm for knowing and writing in our field (though not others), but the experiential has a long history within our scholarship: most notably, through its entanglement with expressivist approaches. As a learning methodology geared to the whole person, it’s (too) easy to read contemplative pedagogy as *nouveau-expressivism*. Expressivism, understood as a pedagogy of “the personal,” shares with contemplative writing pedagogy a desire to centrally locate the writer and to validate her experiences. The advantage of such a reading is its effect: how the

contemplative is thusly brought into the historical fold of composition studies and into dialogue with existing approaches to the personal and the experiential. The disadvantage is that to engage with expressivism at all is to risk assuming its massive emotional and historical baggage. However, dialoguing contemplative pedagogical approaches with others more established in our field is important work if we hope to establish a lasting place for the contemplative in our theory and practice—exactly why I briefly go to expressivist theory in the pages that follow. Even so, while the dialogue is useful, the comparison between these two pedagogical approaches reveals more crucial differences than similarities. Contemplative writing pedagogy, with its focus on lived, social responsibility and embodied situatedness doesn't entertain expressivism's perceived solipsism or its essentialist conception of the autonomous self understood outside of the community; it exchanges the closed system of meaning within Romanticism for more worldly, connected systems within contemplative theory, such as the Eastern philosophies of yoga, which balance inner- and outer-directedness.

Contemplative writing reanimates the personal by keeping the embodied presence of the writer visible at all times while simultaneously attending to a corporeal-cultural situatedness that accounts for resonant connections with embodied others and a larger material world of which we are a part. Additionally, contemplative pedagogies expand our learning approaches to include:

- “an *epistemology of presence* that moves past conditioned habits of mind to stay awake in the here and now.
- a *pedagogy of resonance* that shapes our graciousness and spaciousness toward meeting and receiving the world nondefensively.
- a *more intimate and integral empiricism* that includes in the consideration of the question a reflection on ourselves and on the question itself” (Hart, 2008, p. 237).

All together, these approaches and corresponding skills, outlined by contemplative educator Hart, assert the materiality of the knower, of knowledge and of the meaning-making process of writing. With Hart, I approach contemplative pedagogy through the three lenses of presence, resonance and embodied-connected empiricism by asking three corollary questions, pertinent to the field of rhetoric and composition studies, in particular:

- *Presence*: How do we understand the “personal” in written texts and in relation to the embodied writer in feminist contemplative writing pedagogy? How exactly do we validate her presence and agency?
- *Resonance*: How might the contemplative writer mindfully approach and receive her attachments and connections to the world of matter, including her physical environments, her material writing process and

habits and other bodies in the world?

- *Embodied Empiricism*: While maintaining the need for outer-directedness, how can we simultaneously validate lived experience as a form of local knowledge and a valuable source of evidence for writing produced within contemplative pedagogies?

In what follows, I bring these three queries of contemplative learning to bear on our field by exploring the cost of denying the writing body as an epistemic origin and by addressing the benefits of situating the *person* and her experiences at the center of our theories of writing within contemplative pedagogy.

THE PRESENCE OF THE PERSON(AL)

Advocate of embodied writing Hindman uses an expressivist notion of the personal subject to drive her essay, *Making Writing Matter: Using “The Personal” to Recover[y] an Essential[ist] Tension in Academic Discourse*. She highlights for me both the strengths of an epistemology of presence as well as the reasons why expressivist paradigms cannot fully support the requisite attention to matter. In her essay, Hindman attempts to show how the authority of the expressivist personal self must be reclaimed for embodied rhetorics. Hindman does not suggest we naively return to any essentialized notions of the self that are not aware of our social or linguistic construction—this is an attachment she does not want to lose. Rather, Hindman notes that we need to better hold tension between an expressive, personal self and a cultural, socially-constructed self in order to attend to our materiality as writers (2001, p. 89). Essentially, she argues for a double gesture, claiming that neither subject position alone will work; our attempt to move *from* one *to* another evades the real issue of our corporeality. Because she is interested in reclaiming the material person behind the personal, Hindman outlines the consequences of adopting a contemplative approach to composing, one that reattaches the corporeal presence of the writer to her writing.

To be attentive to matter, Hindman advocates writing our experiences and bodies into our prose as impetus and evidence for our arguments. In this way, our writing becomes personal, or evidentially full of its fleshy author. It’s the claiming and self-awareness of this fullness—a fullness that upends a habitual tendency to write over the material—that contemplative pedagogy calls presence. Using her experience to navigate the theoretically thorny issue of subjectivity, Hindman’s main objective is to consider “how [her] personal experience with alcoholism and with the discourse of recovery demonstrates to [her] the

futility—indeed, the conceit—of trying to dispel the tension between competing versions of how the self is constructed” (2001, p. 92). Hindman believes that holding onto the expressivist self, because it accounts for personal experience, will invite the body that poststructuralist constructivism has overwritten back “in,” allowing it to count in our writerly quest for understanding and meaning. The expressivist self gives Hindman hope for reclaiming presence.

While I agree with the spirit of Hindman’s struggle, another way of looking at her attempt to resolve expressivist and constructivist notions of subjectivity with each other is to see both as fatally flawed. To follow Hindman, we must see our field as coalescing still around two pedagogical touchstones, that of expressivism and constructivism. That’s an argument I don’t take on here, since many others have, but I do want to address the irony of this pedagogical configuration: it hides the implicit agreement between these two approaches that we earn presence as writers by *transcending* our flesh, not mindfully claiming it. A careful look at some foundational texts that outline the differences of these approaches shows how the Western tradition of downplaying the body for the mind is evidenced in contemporary constructivist and expressivist pedagogies as *both* work to detach us from the materiality of our lived bodies and experiences. If critical constructivism promises transcendence from the body through theories of discursive production wherein the subject is always interpolated by a discourse that precedes it, an essentialist-leaning expressivism¹³ does no better as it promises transcendence through an individual mind that can rise above its social environment as well as the limitations of the body (Crick, 2003, p. 257), negating the role of materiality. If nature, and the body in turn, can never be known in itself because culture is always mediating it, then nature is just another word for culture, and our only agency lies in constructivist narratives (Berlin, 2003, p. 76). In both, the only presence writers can fully claim is linguistic.

Bordo names this kind of faith in the rhetoric of linguistic construction to make us “present” the “epistemological fantasy of *becoming* multiplicity” (1993, p. 145). It is this dream of limitless multiplicity and rhetoricity that Hindman argues against, which is why she places more—perhaps too much—hope in the material attachments of expressivism. For her, constructivist approaches lose the real, even biological ways her body is already an alcoholic prior to the discursive tag and the corresponding rhetoric surrounding this label. Denied matter(ing), the body has no real presence in this dominant pedagogical approach; it becomes the “no body” of postmodernism that Bordo challenges.

Offering something akin to a Platonic “fantasy of authenticity,” expressivism unfortunately gets us no closer to claiming the material presence of the writer despite Hindman’s hope that it might. Expressivist attention to the self

has been thoroughly critiqued for forwarding a romantic notion of the mind/soul because this is an essentialist view of the subject; this view provides the tension Hindman wants in her double gesture. Yet from the perspective of the contemplative, expressivist subjectivity is problematic because it forwards a disembodied notion of the self as reducible to the free floating mind/soul. Despite their focus on experience, expressivists have not only promoted ideas of students rising above the collective in order to express an ineffable personal self, they have also equated this self with the individual's mind, ignoring the weight of corporeality. A contemplative-minded fullness of presence is denied: the expressivist mind/soul is often identified *as* the person(al), so that the concrete body becomes a mere fleshy vehicle for the psyche and not an origin of presence for our writing and identity.

The expressive transcendent mind as divorceable from the flesh is a conception that enforces the separation of a consciousness from the body that acts primarily as a vehicle and/or extension of its internal thoughts. In turn, experience is emptied of its materiality, valued as an effect or a memory contained by the intellect and as fodder for personal reflection. Elbow's classic "movies of the mind" metaphor highlights the way meaning in expressivist epistemology is often seen as removed from the experiencing body. Elbow locates meaning in the individual's consciousness with his "movies of the mind:"

Meaning is like movies inside the head. I've got movies in my head. I want to put them inside yours. Only I can't do that because our heads are opaque. All I can do is try to be clever about sending you a sound track and hope I've done it in such a way as to make you construct the right movies in your head. (1973, p. 152)

In this iconic Western formulation, meaning from experience is something shaped by the mind and remains something that wishes to "get out" through language expression. Like in constructivist pedagogy, presence remains linguistic not material. On both accounts, thoughts exist unchained to bodies. Enacted through our writing, the "I" of expressivist personal writing seems to be more an individual mind's expression of itself than an embodied "I" that expresses the real presence of a writing body, how we might approach the personal within feminist-contemplative writing pedagogy.

Elbow's "movies of the mind" may be an older configuration of expressivist meaning making systems, which expand beyond Elbow himself, but it remains a classic feature of expressivist thinking. Earlier talk of "movies of the mind" has now shifted to talk of language itself, in part due to contemporary efforts to

bring this pedagogy in dialogue with social constructionist pedagogy. Developing what has been called social expressivism (Gradin), compositionists such as Ann Berthoff have moved expressivist meaning into the paradigm of social constructionism. Yet, new versions are still rooted in a basic, untenable relationship to matter that overwrites it with language, even if they now find meaning in the interaction of a social language and the individual psyche and not the latter alone. Berthoff's discussion of how meaning is made in this relational process may mediate tension between the individual and the cultural, but it does little to alleviate tension between the body and mind: "By naming the world, we hold images in mind; we remember; we can return to our experience and reflect on it. In reflecting, we can change, we can transform, we can envisage. Language thus becomes the very type of social activity by which we might move towards changing our lives" (Berthoff p. 751; quoted in Gradin, 1995, p. 115). Her explanation shows how social expressivism still supports a devaluation of matter by advancing a dichotomy between body and mind that draws on the immaterialism of both traditional expressivism and constructivism. Echoing back to Elbow's movies of the mind, the embodiment of experience in Berthoff's explanation seems to matter much less, if at all, than the way language is used to shape it or memory is used to store/ configure it. Expressivism remains largely disembodied—surprising for a pedagogy based in experience.

As Berthoff shows, the power of personal experience in classic and contemporary expressivism rests neither with having the experience nor the physicality of our meaning making in writing; instead it rests with the power of naming or intellectualizing experience through language. Contemplative pedagogy would agree that naming experience is indeed a shaping activity, an important one at that, but would argue that it isn't the end, or isn't exhaustive of meaning and that we mustn't ignore the fullness of embodied presence. Whether viewed through classic formations or new ones indebted to constructionist understandings of the self as socially written through language, expressivism empties experience of its material connection—why updated notions of the personal plucked from expressivist theory have not yet claimed the material body's presence. Extending Berthoff's work in new directions, Candace Spigelman seems to recognize this dilemma. She attempts to move the personal out from the jurisdiction of expressivism in order to give it viability and show how it can be a social concept and not just a synonym for the psyche. In *Personally Speaking*, her book-length treatment of this complex term, Spigelman states, the "personal involves a particular way of conveying information that seems to represent an autonomous writer's unmediated reflection on his or her 'authentic' lived experience" (2004, p. 30). This is the essence of the critique against expressivist pedagogy. Her effort

in reclaiming the personal is to “detach” it from these limited conceptions by understanding it instead as a rhetorical construct, as fully mediated by a social language (2004, p. 30). Spigelman’s move to rhetoricize the personal is one that could finally bring it under the postmodern rubric by questioning its autonomy and the “free” or “private” space this concept seems to invite.

Spigelman does realize that such a move necessarily cuts the personal away from the fabric of the material. But, she is committed to rhetoricizing the personal in order to give it new viability, so this author notes her choice to table a discussion of materiality (2004, p. 33). She doesn’t linger over corporeality lost in her model because she sees no way of asserting material presence without engaging in the binary between matter and discourse and ultimately supporting one term over the other. In refusing to engage the complexity, however, Spigelman may implicate herself in those discussions of materiality she claims to find inherently reductive (2004, p. 33). Her concern over binaries, along with the “anxiety” (2004, p. 60) that she claims accompanies the debate over the personal, leads her to see this epistemological term as a representative label within her pedagogy, valued for the space in language it guarantees. This semiotic space allows her to reassert the academic value of personal writing within a field turned largely constructivist; personal writing as argument is her focus. But, embracing the personal as more than a discursive label neither means necessarily unmooring it from its anchorage in the body nor does attention to materiality need to be reductive. In a professional environment that has moved closer to addressing the importance of the material than it had when Spigelman was writing, we have more options than this.

Offering a hopeful alternative, feminist contemplative writing pedagogy restores our focus on experience while attending to the personal body not as ineffable but as embedded and present. The body is what gives us an anchor through “subjective factual truth while the mind generat[es] imaginative ideas” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 162). Here, the embodied imagination shapes experience into knowledge by helping to construct meaning and to stretch it in new directions. Contemplative practices like *asana* teach writers the skill of embodied imagining, or how to balance having the experience with processing it because “it is the precise, thorough measuring and adjustment of a pose [or action], bringing balance, stability and equal extension everywhere that hones this faculty of discrimination Intelligence ... becomes muscular”; imagination becomes embodied (Iyengar, 2005, pp. 162-163). Indeed, the agency of the writing yogi who exercises her embodied imagination is tied up with her ability to put thoughts into action: *tapas*, such as the physical action of *asana*, is key to embody the imagination and “transfor[m] the shapes of mind into reality” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 157).

This is a discerning action, one that moves mindfully in directions dictated by our intentions and not reactive habit. Actions and agency, therefore, rest on presence in contemplative writing pedagogy.

MATERIAL RESONANCE THROUGH PERSONAL PRESENCE

In contemplative practice, learning to be fully present (presence) is a practice mastered by learning to find our center as well as to recognize our integration within a larger world of material others (resonance). The yogi practices moving meditations, *asana*, and breathing meditations, *pranayama*, to develop her skills as an embodied imager. These practices help her to experience herself holistically as mind, physical body and emotional body and to see herself as embedded within a larger community through which she finds resonance by virtue of her shared materiality. Similarly, within feminist contemplative writing pedagogy, a fullness of personal presence must include both the social and the material. Because presence is both embodied and enacted, it is a skill that can be developed by contemplative writing and learning practices which train writers to both respect their inner lives and (in doing so) their connection to an external world that enfolds them. The heuristic for this kind of writing-learning is attachment. That is, the contemplative relates the embodied personal and the culturally enacted, *which come together under the full rubric of embodiment*, and requires us to leave behind both the wild subject of postmodernism as well as the personal subjectivity embraced by early expressivism. It is no coincidence that the contemplative leads us to a fuller, more incorporative understanding of the personal by way of its emphasis on resonance.

Haraway theorizes a notion of the personal that presents the possibilities inherent in the integration of the contemplative with the feminist; at the same time, she underscores for me the importance of resonant attachment central to both epistemological viewpoints. Her notion of the personal presents itself as one that can be used within feminist-contemplative writing pedagogy to denote presence. Specifically, Haraway supports an understanding of the person(al) *as* the “particular and specific embodiment” (1991c, p. 190) that makes meaning-making possible. As its etymology suggests, the personal in contemplative pedagogy is about the fleshy person, relating to one’s body, which is understood within language but maintains presence beyond it as more than the simple object of our inquiry. By learning to accept our bodies as agentive and resistant to our attempts to overpower them with mental directives, yoga teaches us to

approach ourselves as embodied and to be self-aware of the consequences of our materiality. Respect for and awareness of our materiality are equally important. A contemplative notion of the personal is therefore opposed to the expressivist notion of the personal as the psyche as well as the postmodern notion of the “personal” as an epiphenomenon or rhetorical construct, indicated by the offset quotations. The body, and so the personal, is always mediated by language but never overwritten by it.

Incorporating notions of the personal as embodied presence into composition pedagogy means accepting our students as “bodies who aspire to write” (Kazan, 2005, p. 392), or as writing yogis who use the skill of the embodied imagination to create a diverse body of knowledge that integrates the intelligence of the material. I use the term, “writing yogis,” to press the similarities between the process of writing and yoga and to stress the usefulness in integrating these processes. I present the characteristic skill of writing yogis as the “embodied imagination” to forward a notion of how the writer becomes part of her text as she both writes herself into being by reflecting, reliving and rewriting her experience—we are written through language—and also finds lived reality and material meaning in the experiences that bring her to the act of composing—our bodies press language into shape.

Presence, or a materially-inclusive sense of situatedness, places us in the physical body as much as it situates us in discourse communities and social, ideological systems. The conception of resonant presence upon which contemplative writing rests thus refigures agency as a product of the harmonious interaction and co-constitution of the person and her environment—without losing the person to this environment through a diffusion into it. As such, contemplative writing is embedded in a figuration of agency as springing from our material attachments and the body’s status as agentive in forming these. The knower-writer’s material placement, her “specific and particular” body in relation to other bodies, guarantees her epistemic potential; without it, she could neither connect to others nor create meaning. This notion of embodied agency as stemming from a fullness of presence stands in stark contrast to standard performative definitions of agency wherein agency is seen as an extension of our social situatedness, disconnected from the material and completely discursive.

The movement toward integration here is harmonious with the practice of yoga, since the meditative moments of *asana* and *pranayama* teach the yogi to “transcend duality” and “to live with equanimity” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 16). Our attempts to understand the categories of writing-language and bodies-matter separately within our pedagogical practices tells us more about ourselves and our preference for “the politics of closure” instead of “differential positioning”

than the nature of cultural construction or things themselves (1991c, p. 196). Closure is the opposite of presence, since presence necessitates openness to our environment, its changes and our dynamic position within it. Bodies become more than mere texts in contemplative approaches and material experiences literally matter even as they are also (re)written in the act of language expression. Corporeality is therefore neither “about fixed location in a reified body,” challenging notions of authentic embodiment, but nor is it about “the body as anything but a blank page for social inscriptions” (1991c, pp. 195-197). Our fleshiness instead points to a material presence existing both within and beyond our linguistic representations and rules, primarily accessible to us via our linguistic mapping practices but also materially-situated and located within a larger world of matter to which we are accountable in the flesh. Understanding comes just as much from the body as the mind, since they are companionate composers in this epistemological picture. And because we can never experience the world from another’s exact location, in another’s body, the personal highlights a felt material integrity that even language cannot supersede, even if we can only make “sense” of this through language, and, through language, share our embodied experience with others. Contemplative writing pedagogies exchange words like “unique” and “authentic,” which have previously tagged along with the personal, for words like “located,” “mindful,” “flexible” and “responsible.” These are words that invite resonance and connection.

Once we view the personal as an expression of our bodies as well as our minds, we are dually required to rethink and expand our notions of situatedness. Because it views the body as more than a house for the mind or empty stage on which cultural scripts can be performed, the full (material-discursive) presence called for in contemplative writing differs from the more popular postmodern versions of social situatedness that constructivist writing pedagogies typically promote. No more can we simply refer to situatedness as a metaphor for socio-cultural placement; now we must also see it as about specific embodiment, about presence.

Butler’s notion of the “constitutive outside” is an example of how situatedness and thus agency is typically construed through language, rather than through matter, and represents the limits of this view. Butler’s construal is significant within composition studies since her theories of performativity, which rest on this notion, have been normalized within our disciplinary scholarship. Of the constitutive outside, Butler states,

[t]here is an “outside” to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute “outside,” an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive “outside” it is that which can only be thought—when it

can—in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders. (1993, p. 8)

The constitutive outside carves out a space for excess within language by way of marking the unintelligible against the intelligible, bringing the other about. Importantly, this theorization allows Butler to argue for the social construction of gender while also questioning the inherent tie between sex and gender. The result, however, is that “[s]ex is resourced for its representation as gender, which ‘we’ can control” (Haraway, 1991c, p. 198). To take this to writing itself, the writing body is resourced as subject, which teachers can similarly control.

While it may initially seem to be a liberating deconstruction, dismantling the biological category of sex (synecdoche for the writing body) forces the body to be the handmaiden of culture, or worse yet, an empty puppet waiting to be controlled by cultural, historical and semiotic forces. This view of language’s total encapsulation of reality limits the potential *for* change and our potential *to* change as Fleckenstein remarks. For,

[w]ithout bodies—those instances of flesh that disrupt the consistency of style and that point to a signification before and beyond language (Gallop 14-20)—no resistance of systemic transformation can be effected ... nor can individuals cast themselves as agents of change because the uncertainty of deconstructed positioning erodes the embodiment necessary for agency. (Fleckenstein, 1999, pp. 284-285)

Agency and situatedness are recursively linked. We fundamentally change the notion of what it means to be agentive when we remove it from the body, and this change renders great losses. Fleckenstein urges us to refuse the disconnection of agency from the body by theorizing embodied writing as entailing both immersion and emergence, two techniques of situating ourselves. Immersion requires us to attend to the particularity of bodies, remembering that we experience our cultural placement materially, and emergence means we also accept the ways we are culturally constructed (1999, p. 297). Together, these orientations help us to construct a fuller conception of agency as it relates to contemplative writing practices.

Kazan illustrates how these paired acts of immersion and emergence can be mapped onto our classrooms. She claims the necessity of exploring how bodies *mean* in educational spaces like the writing classroom. If we think of immersion as “feeling out” bodies, we begin to see how this is pedagogical work we always do but rarely reflect upon as teachers. Kazan urges us to recognize these immersive practices and argues that as different bodies come together to comprise the

corporeal text of the classroom, they begin to appropriate meaning in particular ways based on how their embodiments play off one another. The writing classroom is a situated space of learning because of the ways bodies are physically related to each other, meaning that bodies emerge in particular ways because of the social space of the classroom itself. For instance, the physical placement of the teacher at the front of her classroom materializes her authority and differentially positions her as removed from her students even if her body shares certain physical characteristics with those students, such as young age or popular dress (Kazan, 2005, pp. 380-381). Embodied writing pedagogy is always a mix of language and matter interacting together, meaning together. Contemplative writing pedagogy asks us to be mindful of this mix.

EMBODIED EMPIRICISM AND CONNECTION

Without attention to presence, it is easy to ignore our students' embodied differences. If we expect non-defensive openness from our students as they stretch their learning in our classrooms and begin to question the knowledge claims they import, we must meet them with a flexible mind and also a willingness to be changed by *their* inquiry. Contemplative knowledge by presence requires this flexibility in the face of change and within the presence of another. What the contemplative suspends, then, is the default move to see students' personal experiences as reducible to constructions able to be mapped onto cultural grids and chalked up to ideological saturation.

An example of how the refusal of the embodied and situated dimension of personal experience might work in a standard classroom guided by the tenants of social constructivist pedagogy is present in Karen Paley's analysis of Patricia Bizzell's writing classroom. Paley sits in on an undergraduate writing class dedicated to training peer tutors. While Paley remarks that the overall tone of the class was warm with "no evidence of confrontational pedagogy," she does conclude that Bizzell works to reframe students' comments so as to minimize the importance of personal attachments and maximize the cultural import. She states that Bizzell "welcomed personal commentary [from her students] only when it was explicitly linked to social, 'representative' issues" (2001, p. 187). This is evident in an example of the ways Bizzell validates students' readings of Patricia Williams' essay *Crimes without Passion*. Paley transcribes a students' response to Williams' essay and then Bizzell's response to the student during a classroom discussion:

Sarah: I think there's a connection between all the stories that she tells, a lot of them have ... the issues she's proposing, how

those issues came about as part of her development. So there's a personal aspect of why she's so engaged in these issues.

Bizzell: I think this is a really important point, that she relates her personal story and the issues; and Sarah's quite right that one way of doing that is by developing it over time, showing that it's something that has been an issue for her since she was young. So the stories that she tells about herself are not just personal stories, they are representative ... and I think that's very important. (quoted in Paley, 2001, p. 185)

There is a "submerged disagreement" during this class that remains unnoticed and/ or unacknowledged by the teacher, according to Paley (2001, p. 185). As her quote indicates, Sarah thinks there is a connection between a person's individual "development" and his/her engagement with certain ideas and this likely is rooted in the ways Sarah experiences the impact of her material reality on her process of making meaning. Paley notes that the subtle disagreement between Bizzell and her student, Sarah, is indicative of the ways in which personal experience tends to be subsumed under the label of "socially representative" in order to stress how the self is a social construct and therefore not *personal* in the ways students like Sarah might articulate; it contains no material presence and can thusly be linguistically explained away through categorization. As with Kazan's dance teacher, the method of instruction sanctions rather homogenous writing subjects, not writing bodies with difference.

Bizzell's treatment of the personal demonstrates the ways student experience becomes interchangeable when it is divorced from material agency and when students are not allowed to claim interiority through presence. It's in this context that Spigelman writes *Personally Speaking* as an attempt to allow students like Sarah a relative hold on their experiences while addressing a general anxiety over experience, displayed by Bizzell in Paley's study. But, as I indicated earlier, Spigelman's project purposely emphasizes "the *construct* that is personal experience" (2004, p. 60), and doesn't go far enough to reclaim the materiality of experience, and therein, embodied presence. This isn't Spigelman's aim anyway, as she is more interested in addressing the potential of personal writing to be a rhetorically-valid form of argument and not a mutt-breed of the writing classroom. But, it is mine. So while I do not take issue with Bizzell's attempt to teach her students the ways personal stories have cultural resonance, I do count as a pedagogical loss the implicit hierarchy between the social and the individual body as well as the flattening of all individual student bodies that her comments normalize.

Contemplative pedagogy dismantles this hierarchy; it focuses on the relationships between the personal and the cultural in ways that allow the person to stand *with* and not *for* the social by calling upon the critical power of his/her embodied experiences, refusing, as well, to ignore the embodied differences of varied bodies. Contemplative writing focuses on the process of knowledge-making as reflecting and analyzing a series of material experiences that reveal the complex construction of the individual as she takes shape in a cultural and social environment, but also as she marks that environment by means of her material embodiment and interconnectedness. It exchanges narratives of authenticity for those of situated positioning and humility. Engaging in contemplative writing practices means that we accept positioning as that which grounds knowledge claims and reclaims the body of the author. The personal is more than representative; it reveals the author's lived material investments and full corporeal presence. The classroom as well as the page should reflect this.

Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, or the material-discursive meanings we create from our experience, gives feminist contemplative writing pedagogies a means of articulating the importance of presence for embodied empiricism. Contemplative pedagogies forward a view of experience as much a material reality as a narrative construct. It is true that "experience is not—indeed, cannot be—reproduced in speech or writing, and must instead be narrated" (Brodkey, 1987, 26, as quoted in Spigelman, 2004, p. 11), but the process of shaping goes both ways, and so needs to include the ways our bodies and experiences beget our interpretations. I believe a feminist attitude of humility is best when approaching these issues in order to counter the tendency to mastery which often leaves us illogically claiming that our narration of experience somehow voids its materiality or that the sharing of emotion or agency disallows the intent of either (Amhed, 2004; Cooper, 2011). In order to realize fully contemplative writing, we need to see it as engaging in situated knowing and thus producing situated knowledge. If knowledge is always attached to the knower, we need to be wary of deeming the narration-reflection of experience a ventriloquizing act on students' or author's parts, one that is merely representative of the social. Indeed, the practice of material mapping is arguably a more responsible practice of viewing knowledge-making as it does not elide difference at the level of our bodies.

Situated knowledge is a feminist epistemology based on "particular and specific embodiment" (Haraway, 1991c, p. 190) which produces "partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connection" (Haraway, 1991c, p. 191). These webs privilege attachment through "passionate construction" and "resonance, not ... dichotomy" (Haraway, 1991c, pp. 194-195). Based on these definitions, we can first see how situated knowledge highlights the ways

materiality and discursivity are tangled in our webs of meaning, making it impossible and particularly senseless to separate them. Nor does it behoove us to overwrite matter as a function of the social insofar as it is reduced to nothing more. Situated knowledge consequently places the writing yogi in the center of the meaning-making process and refuses to ignore how her body is implicated in her knowing as materially placed and connected to her experiences. These experiences spatialize the writer in the world, literally positioning her in definite yet dynamic ways. And, “[s]ince yoga means integration, bringing together, it follows that bringing body and mind together, bringing nature and the seer together, is yoga” (Iyengar, 2002, p. 48). Situated knowing is itself therefore an enactment of yoga.

Put differently, situated knowing within contemplative pedagogy is an epistemological practice that changes our understanding of *how* we come to know by locating knowing within individual, writing bodies not a transcendent realm of truth or a social “body” motored by language. Because experience is a product of this mutual, interdependent composition, and not just linguistic, writers “do not simply ‘reinterpret’ [their] experiences through a new discourse; experience also enables reinterpretation ... experiences are discursive, but they come, at least in part, from somewhere else, not ‘just’ from discourse in an endless devotion” (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 327). We accept the idea that experience can be understood entirely through discourse when we read it exclusively as a text. Taking on a contemplative viewpoint means we acknowledge that there is more to material reality than discourse and that a position of openness which validates our ultimate lack of mastery over a material world to which we belong but can in no way ever comprehensively view is a strength not a limitation. Contemplatively, language cannot fully capture our embodied realities even if we use it to explore our place in the world: “[t]hat such experience can only be shared *through* language is important to recognize. Indeed it may be a crucial dimension of the standpoint notion of shared experience that we communicate about it through language, but discourse cannot exhaust the ‘reality’ of experience” (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 327).

In other words, situated knowledge requires writers to exhibit mindfulness of themselves, others and their environments. When engaged in building situated knowledges, we are exercising mindfulness by contextualizing what we or others are experiencing within how and why we are experiencing it. That situated knowledge engages us in a practice of mindful knowing has a second implication: situated knowledge is metacognitive, asking us to be reflective of our thinking and to monitor it by investigating: 1) what we are experiencing; and 2) how we are experiencing it. This metacognitive process of investigating our thinking

about what we know and how we got to those knowledge claims is at the heart of contemplative mindfulness. In their operational definition of mindfulness, Bishop et al. agree that mindfulness is itself a metacognitive process and can be used to develop the practitioner's reflective skills: "the notion of mindfulness as a metacognitive process is implicit in the operational definition that we are proposing since its evocation would require both control of cognitive processes (i.e., attention self-regulation) and monitoring the stream of consciousness" (Bishop et al., n.d., 11). The following interchapter will take up these ideas and will explore this link between mindfulness and metacognition in greater detail. But, at present, it is important to recognize how metacognition through mindfulness necessarily entails acceptance of an interiority of thinking that invites acceptance of a writer's "center" in line with contemplative theory.

In sum, situated knowledge can be used to develop contemplative writing pedagogies to make them not only more theoretically sound but also more pedagogically generative when enacted in the classroom. This kind of knowledge rejects traditional modes of detachment and seeks to relate the material and discursive at the level of meaning and enact it at the level of our bodies. "To a yogi, the body is a laboratory for life, a field of experimentation and perpetual research" (Iyengar, 2005, p. 22). Situated knowledge is consequently what gets made on the page and in the classroom when we engage in contemplative writing and teaching practices.

Contemplatively, embodiment is a necessary condition of meaning making, fixing the body as the origin of knowledge. Its inseparable connection to the body is what makes this knowledge "partial" as well as "locatable." *What* we know accordingly changes too. If the process of knowing is primarily experiential, we must entertain seriously our personal experiences and work to interpret them critically without losing their embodied reality. In this feminist epistemology, "[d]iscourse and reality are in close relationship, but they are, nevertheless, distinct" (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 327). Indeed, we can understand the relationship between discourse and material reality as one of companionate composing. Understanding can come from *interpreting* an experience not just *having* it so that we can connect to each other even when we experience our embodiments and material-discursive worlds differently (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 329). In short, we can situate ourselves within the context of an experience through our imaginative interpretation of it without having experienced the actual context ourselves; the meeting of discourse and matter is a generative one that enforces the companionate relations between the two.

As such, situated knowledge is an interested practice of knowing through connection, partly because we use language to communicate with others and

partly because we are always connected to others through our shared materiality. The commonality of our materiality, which can be seen as a dynamic common ground even if it is experienced or embodied differently, gives situated knowledge a relational, “webbed” orientation that establishes it as a method of connected knowing. Connected knowing values the historical, social and experiential and is characterized by its stance of openness, a continuous deferral of closure, and by the recognition of our need to join with others (Belenky et al., 1973, pp. 113-123). It understands difference through connection, not distance. In contrast to separate knowers who experience the self as autonomous, connected knowers experience the self as always in relation in “webs of connection.” This is what Hart may mean when he argues that contemplative pedagogy is founded on a “more *intimate* and integral empiricism that includes in the consideration of the question a *reflection on ourselves* and on the question itself” (Hart, 2008, p. 237, emphasis added).

Intimacy easily gives way to loving care. The worldview of interrelatedness required by situated knowledge entails “the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view” (Haraway, 1991c, p. 190). The position of interrelatedness and attachment to other matter—people as well as other objects—is what makes this knowledge responsible where responsibility is seen to stem from a understanding both of the interest of all knowledge claims as well as the perspectival limits of personal, experiential knowledge. This notion of connected responsibility as giving weight to knowledge claims contrasts with the distance from the self other methods of knowing suggest. Here, one can be critical *and* personal *and* present at the same time since it is impossible to rise above the self. And neither does this connection to the knower invalidate the public use value of her knowledge claims: as stated above, the map cannot exist without the map maker, but it can be read and followed by others.

Situated knowledge is therefore not the same as subjective knowledge. It recognizes multiple standpoints and not just one. It is interested in a dialogue between the personal and the social that doesn’t collapse the integrity or importance of either. Situated knowledge accommodates a multiplicity of embodied standpoints since “differences in experiences produce differences in standpoints” (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 320). Recognizing difference is part of the contemplative knowing process for, “if knowledge is developed through experience rather than an abstract world of ‘Truth,’ then different experiences will yield different bodies of knowledge” (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 320) which can be strengthened by being placed in relation to each other—bodies mean in relation to other bodies even if they retain individual integrity. So even though lived moments are accessed through the social filters of language and cultural histories, the stories

we develop to explain and capture these moments are always threaded to the moments themselves and the “having” of the experience. Certainly “the stories we tell ourselves of our experiences come filtered through the collective subjectivities of our social and cultural relationships, so that our interpretations of experience are not simply individual” (Spigelman, 2004, p. 63) or personal, but they are also not simply social or textual—interpretations of material realities presuppose those lived realities without exhausting them. These material acknowledgements fly in the face of our pedagogical tendency, following from cultural studies theory, to discredit our students’ ordinary experiences as naïve or interchangeable. Experiences of the student (and teacher) instead need to be both validated and analyzed.

Outside the dance studio, Fleckenstein in her recent book, *Embodied Literacies*, similarly points out the way we neutralize student bodies in academic discourse and the resistance this promotes. In this book devoted to increasing the scope of literacy to include the embodied nature of imagery, Fleckenstein argues that teaching academic writing is not just about developing a successful psychological identification to a middle-class life and value system, as represented by Bartholomae’s discussions of appropriation, but is also about adopting a physiological identification since the act of writing “imposes on students the bodies of white, heterosexual, middle-class males,” (2003, p. 49) an argument well-made by feminists from Virginia Woolf to Helene Cixous and Jane Tompkins. The stakes are much higher than discursive reconstruction. Fleckenstein’s analysis is meant to give us a greater understanding of student resistance, but it also highlights how our narrow application of social situatedness tends to hide these embodied consequences of learning to write.

To authorize student experiences, we must explore how they come from a body self-reflexively affirmed and differentially positioned. This will be the subject of my next interchapter. Because our bodies as sites of knowing are embedded in culture and language, our experiences are not self-evident but they are where we must necessarily start. To ignore them is to “pretend to disengagement” (Haraway, 1991c, p. 196). To work toward engaged analysis, the situated knower is the first to examine how her experiences are not solely her own, and how she must accept her partiality and join with others through language; nonetheless, situated knowing does not reduce materiality to discourse since our materiality can actually function as a challenge to discourse (Hirschmann, 2004, p. 325) since it is agential. As a result, situated knowledge presents a third space of rhetoric-cum-referentiality.¹⁴

If we use situated knowledge as a guide, we begin to see the ways we can discuss personal stories and experiences that reveal writers’ attachments while

allowing them the material integrity they deserve. To promote critical thinking, we can teach writers to look for and analyze the incongruences that arise in these stories because writers are situated in ways they cannot fully recognize due to their embodiments, their specific placement and presence in the world. Students can begin to see dissonance as a result of not only competing worldviews but also different configurations of felt materiality. I explore in the next chapter the ways we can discuss how the writer is materially, culturally and ideologically situated and how we might approach these dynamics of being a body in the world simultaneously as strengths of writing and knowing and also signs of our need to join with others. I show how in strong contemplative writing, authors tend to recognize the partiality of their knowledge claims even as they validate them as a product of their experiences and feelings.

Teaching students to think critically about their embodied experiences typically presents a challenge. In contemplative writing pedagogies, this is a challenge that can be met at both the material and discursive levels through the lens of situated knowledge. Situated knowledge can be used to develop embodied pedagogies of writing to make them not only more theoretically sound but also more pedagogically generative when enacted in the classroom. Situated knowledge as an epistemology becomes a way to rethink our current writing approaches; situated knowing as the connected practice of generating meaning can help us to work toward changed writing practices—ones that recognize fully students' agentic embodiment as writers and the material weight of their experiences. As it rejects traditional modes of detachment, relates the material and discursive at the level of meaning, and enacts it at the level of our personal bodies, situated knowledge is what gets made on the page and in the classroom when we engage in contemplative writing and teaching practices.

The process of metacognitive reflection within feminist contemplative writing pedagogy also maintains connections between thinking and feeling. Writing yogis, who are situated, connected knowers, integrate personal knowledge with knowledge from others and weave together reason and emotion, using the insertion of the self in knowledge production as a way to generate reflection and analysis, a process I will show the workings of in the next interchapter. As a result of the complexity of this localized process of making knowledge, writing yogis who employ connected knowing with mindfulness have a high tolerance for openness and ambiguity (Belenky et al., 1973, p. 137). This is why situated knowers are after “resonance” and not hierarchy. Viewing situated knowledge through the lens of connected knowing allows us to see how it is both a process of situated knowing as well as situated feeling. This means we must begin to recognize the critical power of our feelings as they are a part of the knowledge

we create. I will turn to the ways contemplative writing suggests the futility of divorcing situated thinking and feeling in Chapter Three.