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**THE ESSAY AND HOLISTIC INTEGRATION:
EMERGENCE OF THE MULTIFACETED
WRITER**

by

Leslie Ann Dupont

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

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In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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entitled The Essay and Holistic Integration: Emergence of the Multifaceted Writer

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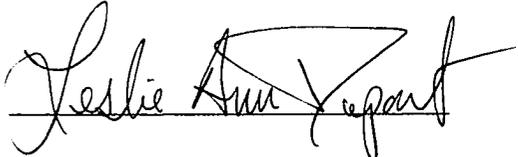
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SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Leslie Ann Yegor".

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I am particularly grateful for the guidance and patience of my committee, Professor Theresa Enos, chair, Dr. Thomas T. “Ty” Bouldin, and Professor Dana Fox. Professor Enos had the grace to encourage and support this project from its inception. Dr. Bouldin provided extensive commentary and moral support throughout the challenging processes of developing and organizing my thoughts. Professor Fox further validated the importance of integrating my personal stories.

Thank you all for comprising a committee that made this work a positive discovery process.

DEDICATION

To my soul sisters, Kate Oubre and Louise Rodríguez Connal, who walked with me through this sometimes grueling, sometimes wondrous process. And to Chris Hamel, a fellow supportive writer.

To my father, sister, step-mother, and brothers. Though we sometimes struggled, we have maintained our own unique and supportive family unit. To my step-father, who has remained a friend throughout many years and changes. And to my mother, whose death helped teach me the value of life.

All of you are part of my journey, without which I wouldn't have grown in the ways I needed to. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Defining a new kind of scholar, one who takes a holistic approach to his or her profession, involves examining models of writing that integrate personal and professional parts of one's life. As a vehicle towards holism, the essay is a superb model. It can integrate critical thought and personal expression organically and intelligently, inviting readers in rather than alienating all but a narrow readership. Because personal expression is integral to this model, I briefly examine a historical chronology of theories of epistemology and expressive discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Next, I look at other writing models—therapeutic, philosophical, journal-oriented, and spiritual—for their integration of formative experiences in the writing process. These two contextual explorations lead to a chapter in which I propose my theory of the critical/personal essay as a scholarly vehicle that integrates theory and lived experience. To demonstrate the essay's flexibility and power, I then examine the writing of Nancy Mairs and several nature, medical, spiritual, and pedagogical essayists. Throughout the dissertation, I interweave excerpts from personal experience. These sections anticipate the final chapter, which is a personal essay examining the role of expressive writing and the sacred in my teaching history.

Chapter 1

Mapping My Process

When I was ten, I entered an essay contest sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution in the little Connecticut town in which I lived. Tradition was very important, and celebrating our country's forefathers was the topic of the contest. I was nervous—no, terrified. I had written a lot since the age of six, but mostly poetry and personal journal writing. I was fascinated by stories with the honesty of a child; instinctively, I knew that stories were important, that they were what our myths spring from, our understanding of who we are, personally, culturally, even though I could not articulate this to anyone (including myself).

Ben Franklin was my topic of choice. He, too, fascinated me, and I wrote a rambling little essay about the baths he took in a small tub in his kitchen, the clothes he wore, the basic trappings of his everyday life. These were the things I saw as important as I read fearfully through the several books I had checked out from the library. It took me a long time to get down to writing the essay; in fact, I didn't put pen to paper until the weekend before the essay was due. It took hours. I felt in over my head—I'd never done this before: a movement beyond research that summarized the already summarized content of encyclopedias. The essay was tangled up in itself and in its small revelation—that the personal sphere is where we all begin. It wandered and I'm sure revealed my insecurity about what I was doing. I got frustrated finally, and froze, not knowing what to do with it.

With some trepidation I showed it to my father. He read through it and announced angrily that it was stupid. Who cared about how Ben Franklin took a bath, for Christ's sake?! He snatched up the book that I was working from and rewrote a coherent essay about Franklin's major accomplishments in about 20 minutes. I neatly copied it down, submitted it the next day, and it won first place in the essay contest.

There's an old newspaper snapshot of me knocking about my father's house somewhere—or perhaps it's gone now, mercifully offered to the nearest garbage can. I have a smile on my face and am accepting the \$10 first-prize check. The photo doesn't show my nausea and horror, not so much at winning first prize with my father's essay as with not having the courage to say, "It's not mine. I didn't write it. I wrote about Ben taking a bath."

Although I wouldn't know it for twenty more years, this was my first introduction to professional ethos. I realize now that my dad, recently divorced, strapped with debts that my mother had left him, raising two young daughters on his own, terrified of losing the house, his way, his mind, simply made a choice from stress. It's no longer about him or about being victimized. It's really about the choice I made, or rather didn't make. I was a good writer, an excellent writer sometimes, but I didn't believe that I had anything to say. In ninth grade, I wrote an essay that left my father stunned but that my teacher didn't believe I had written. Here I'd found the power of language on my own, and still it was discredited. Finally, at sixteen I had the opportunity to enter another essay contest—history again, ironically. I wrote one of the worst essays of my life, submitted it, and failed honestly. But none of this took away the sick feeling I had about professional

presentation. I knew I could do better, but somehow I didn't believe I could. I'd lost myself in the product instead of honoring the process.

Today I feel compassion for the pressure that ten-year-old me was under. She wanted to please her father, do the right thing, and somehow what she herself created wasn't right, wasn't acceptable. So, therefore, she said nothing and took 25 years to get back to the moment where she decided to be honestly unacceptable to others and acceptable to herself. I dropped out of high school at 17 yet have spent 17 more years in higher education—both for the same reason: I had to learn to honor my professional calling without dismissing its personal implications.

This dissertation will attempt to answer two questions that I believe are central to present academic concerns regarding the writing process. I am arguing that the personal and professional can be interconnected in scholarship. I argue that a gap exists between how people really think and the academic myth about how we think. In other words, thought, knowledge, and expression have other elements to them than purely left-brained reason. First, how can this gap be bridged pedagogically? Second, in terms of students' reading and writing personal essays, why is it important that they understand the intuitive, emotional, right-brained aspects of thought and expression in an academic setting? Clearly, I am arguing for the creation of a new kind of scholar, one who integrates traditional scientific conceptions of research and left-brained analysis with intuition, spirituality, and emotion.

Immediately, a problem arises in my use of the term *spirituality* to designate a component of thought because this term is so readily stereotyped as having religious

connotations. For the purpose of clarity, I will define the spiritual aspect of thought as the desire to connect personal experience with a larger sense of personal ethics—a way to integrate this experience as self-awareness in one's interactions with others. Spirituality is in the desire; rhetoric is in the act.

Voices from the Past: Expressive Discourse and Epistemological Theory

I will use several vehicles to answer these questions and argue my position. My second chapter will overview long-term and recent theories of knowledge/epistemology and of expressivism in both the essay and in lyric poetry. This will involve tracing two trends: expressivism and its failure to move beyond being used as an end in itself and philosophical explorations of language and epistemology, such as those by Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernst Cassirer, and Benedetto Croce. I will also look at Ralph Waldo Emerson's use of the personal essay as having social and democratic implications. Here is the first connection with the new scholar, one who begins with the self in writing but moves beyond this point of reference to how that self integrates with an academic setting.

Chapter Two argues that expressivism is contextualized in certain ways that make it difficult for academics to accept it as authentic scholarship because it courts the invisible. I will explore theories of epistemology and expressivism as they relate to personal writing. I look at how expressive discourse has “failed” in traditional American universities to become a strong contributor to academic writing. Expressivism has been used as a vehicle to express the individual, soul, calling, genius, and so forth, and it has

failed supposedly because it has not forged connections with contexts beyond the individual (when, in fact, it is forging connections to the invisible). But I propose that it has also failed because academia does not easily find room for the personal voice, whatever its purpose. This stems from the issue of ethos and tradition—of turf and presentation of authority based on a scientific model of writing and thought. Why, for example, are Peter Elbow's theories dismissed as too soft and fuzzy by so many yet his conference sessions so well attended?

Next, I will examine Nietzsche as an example of an expressive theorist and Emerson's modeling of the essay as a link between the intuitive and intellectual. Then I will look at the French lyricists—how lyricism achieves for theorists like Cassirer a blend of mythical and rational forms of thought, yet also how poetry stays separate from the essay. Poetry is authenticated as a sophisticated expressive form of writing whereas the essay is not given such authentication. Finally, I will present a historic overview of 1960's expressivism in universities and how it demonstrates the failure to authenticate the essay as an acceptable form of expressivism.

In the nineteenth century, writing was clearly being explored and used not only as a vehicle for self-expression but as a way in to the connections between reason and passion. The French lyrical poets Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, and Stéphane Mallarmé, used their words to fully express their passions and the turmoil, even horror, of the human experience. In their own lives these men were extremely dissociated, caught up in their addictions and misery and putting on a show of flamboyance. This very flamboyance creates a resistance to the reality of their

experience, a pretense that it does not really exist. Thus, their very expression is “sanitized” and dissociated from their experience. This was true also of 1960's expressivism, as will be discussed shortly.

James Berlin, however, argues that rhetoric can be romantic in that personal expression can have important links with social concerns. He cites Emerson as an example of this, stating that Emerson's essays have social and democratic implications as well as personal ones. For example, in “Self-Reliance,” Emerson does not mean *self-reliance* in a non-political sense. He is advocating original thought versus unthinking imitation of others, not just to become a better individual but to help create a better society and a personal ethos that considers its effects on the self and others. In other words, the personal can move beyond the self in useful ways. These writings were a vehicle not only for personal expression but for social and political connection.

Also in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche, through his philosophical yet lyrical writings, is consistently trying to resolve the split between logic/reason and passion. As an existential precursor, he theorizes that thought derives from and reflects the individual philosopher's (his own) life. His philosophy claims that the only real test of the validity of a morality is whether or not one can actually live it. This involves a consciousness of the formative experiences that influence each individual's morality/ethics and an ability to analyze and intuit the positive and negative effects of these influences. Both Emerson and Nietzsche are attempting fundamentally to resolve the split between the personal and the social that becomes in academic writing and pedagogy the split between reason/logic/analysis and emotion/intuition/spirituality.

In the twentieth century, Sartre's existential philosophy again takes up the issue of forming one's life and one's morality/ethics through one's own thought and actions. His systematic inquiry into conscious human action and ethics is in essence phenomenological in its attempts to methodically investigate the influences on and drives motivating human consciousness. James Kinneavy argues convincingly that aspects of Sartre's existentialist philosophy demonstrate expressive discourse in their valuative nature. Sartre's writing connects with Emerson's and Nietzsche's in its concern both with creating an ethics that lays all responsibility for thought and action at the individual's feet and in conscious awareness of the effects of one's behavior on others. Instead of dissociating logic and passion, he integrates them through his claim that they are all elements of our actions, and our actions are what make us and influence those around us.

In terms of pedagogy, Berlin's historical overview is useful. He traces varying manifestations of rhetoric in composition programs, looking closely at historical, philosophical, and theoretical influences. This includes discussions of expressivism and its various manifestations in and outside the academy.. He also demonstrates the influences of John Dewey's process model of education. In addition, Berlin parallels Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer with Emerson through their notions that truth exists at the intersection of subject and perceived object.

Other theorists are also influential to notions of epistemology that can relate to the academy. Cassirer's phenomenological approach to language, for example, influences Anne Berthoff's notion that rhetoric is socially transformative, which is a step beyond

saying that rhetoric is social. This connects with Emerson's use of rhetoric as a vehicle for social transformation. Cassirer disagrees with Croce's notion that all language is expressive; he claims that some but not all language has aesthetic (expressive) value. However, Croce's position opens the path to 1960's expressivism in academia. There is value in this expressivist effort in that it once again foregrounded the process aspects of writing (i.e., that writing first emerges within or from the individual). Unfortunately, as with the nineteenth-century French lyricists, expressivism once again becomes laughable because it does not move beyond the disordered and informal pure expression of emotion to an integration with thought and human experience.

Finally, Susanne Langer, a student of Cassirer, moves beyond strict symbolic logic (which again is dissociated from much human experience) and attempts to redefine psychological theories in terms of expression being central to all human cognitive experience. She creates an interesting balance between the extremes advocated by Cassirer (who remains highly rationalistic in his approach to language) and Croce, and her later theory forms a link to the next chapter.

Theoretical Bridges to Healing and Self-Awareness

Chapter Three argues that writing can be used as a healing medium to build a sense of community. It explores therapeutic models of writing, how writing can create a more conscious sense of holistic scholarship through self-awareness in various contexts. It demonstrates a spiritual, "soulful" ethos that sees the relevance of personal writing,

writing as process, messiness. However, before looking at spiritual theories of writing, I wish to explore spiritual theories of being.

In this chapter, therefore, I look at holistic models of self-discovery and the integration of self-discovery in positive ways. What I mean by *holistic* is a model of writing that addresses the whole self and all forms of thought, knowledge, and expression, with the aim to create an integrated writer and scholar. In order to do this, I examine brain theory, which tries to heal the split between right and left brain, such as the work of Alice Brand and Susanne Langer (who takes a philosophical approach to psychology). In both theorists, emotion takes a central role in cognition. In addition, I look at the spiritual/psychological works of Thomas Moore, James Hillman, and Viktor Frankl, all of whom are concerned with the idea of a fully integrated human being rather than one who is dissociated from his or her emotions, spirituality, intuition, or shadow side (the unpleasant parts of human experience).

Further, I explore works on writing and healing. In this context, writing is used as a vehicle to heal dissociative splits within us. In addition, awareness of authors' formative experiences can illuminate texts and their significance. This connects back to understanding the works of Sartre, Nietzsche, other theorists, expressivists, and essayists. This model reinforces a healing of the dissociative split I see in academia that can emphasize the left brain at the expense of the rest of cognition.

Academia is a marvelous place in which to explore all aspects of cognition rather than just left-brained elements. By advocating connections between the personal and the professional in their own writing, not simply as student exercises in composition classes,

academics can model the benefits of such an approach. These benefits include healthier and more realistic models of thought in all of its complexity; intellectual interactions with others that are clearly linked not only with personal experience but with a clearer awareness of the formative influences on personal and professional attitudes and behaviors; a professional ethos, emerging from the previous benefit, that incorporates wisdom as well as knowledge; a greater awareness of the process-related nature not only of writing but of learning; and a mode of learning (for both academics and their students) that is concrete and experiential as well as theoretical.

I will explore Alice Brand's discussion of feeling and knowing being integrated parts of cognition. "Feeling is inherent in knowing. Knowing is inherent in feeling" (*Psychology* 36). Brand sees writing and emotion as closely tied and emotion as being very much a part of long-term memory function, which connects with learning and education. She cites the socially formative years just following World War II and also the 1960's as times in which emotion was clearly integrated in education before being buried again. Why did this happen, and why was it buried? I will then move on to Langer's notions of expression lying at the root not only of cognition but of all life experience. How does this connect with other elements of cognition? Their theories of cognition as holistic imply that learning itself, and thus learners, would benefit from a more holistic approach.

Models of therapeutic self-integration taken from Moore, Hillman, Frankl, and others demonstrate the value of holism in a way that is related to brain theory. Acceptance of the self and psyche as naturally complex creates an opening for acceptance

of the frightening emotions and experiences that individuals are often socialized to resist and sanitize. They directly address social taboos that seek to invalidate the “powerful, invisible things” (to quote Gretchen Legler) that are ongoing aspects of human experience, including feelings such as depression, rage, anxiety, and alienation from others and experiences such as incest, traumatic loss, and mystical ecstasies. Their point is that the whole of our psyches and histories motivates and influences our behavior and perceptions, regardless of whether we accept all of it or not. However, coming to terms with this complexity can lead to more accurate and healthy responses to not only ourselves but to others. There are inherent parallels here to Nietzsche’s and Sartre’s notions of ethics and morality and to the difficulty of achieving full integration of self in any environment that advocates dissociation from the unpleasant aspects of human psyches.

These therapeutic models relate to the writing process. Moore writes of having to find a new language and psychology that are less sterile and compulsively intellectualized, and this metaphor creates a paradigm for the new academic:

Psychology and spirituality need to be seen as one. In my view, this new paradigm suggests the end of psychology as we have known it altogether because it is essentially modern, secular, and ego-centered. A new idea, a new language, and new traditions must be developed on which to base our theory and practice. (*Care xv*)

Writing can be modeled as a therapeutic act in the sense that formative experiences can be integrated into knowledge by being expressed through language. And the personal essay is a vehicle for this process. But this relationship moves beyond mere expressivism

as a dissociative act to integrating expression into the rest of thought. Here once again is brought up the issue of the “disciplined mind” vs. the merely explosive mind.

Moore’s concept of *story* as a paradigm to understanding this soulfulness or holism will be especially useful as I set out paradigmatic stories in the fourth chapter from my own life and the lives (essays) of others—such as Nancy Mairs, G. Douglas Atkins, Mary Rose O’Reilly, and Oliver Sacks—to explore how facets of life inform each other. In *Care of the Soul*, Moore writes:

Taking an interest in one’s own soul requires a certain amount of space for reflection and appreciation. Ordinarily we are so identified with movements of the psyche that we can’t stand back and take a good look at them. A little distance allows us to see the dynamics among the many elements that make up the life of the soul. By becoming interested in these phenomena, we begin to see our own complexity. Usually we feel that complexity as it hits us unawares from outside, in a multitude of problems and in confusion. If we knew the soul better, we might be ready for the conflicts of life. . . . Most of us bring to everyday life a somewhat naive psychological attitude in our expectations that our lives and relationships will be simple. Love of the soul asks for some appreciation for its complexity. (14)

What Moore implies is that becoming conscious of all the experiences that direct and influence us, and of our internal wrestling with them, creates a more fully integrated human being who is equipped to deal with life’s complexity. This demonstrates one way of bridging the gap between the intellect and the spirit without sanitizing or devaluing either. It does not describe the soul in a religious sense but rather as the seat of all inner experience before it becomes expressed, analyzed, deleted, interpreted, or invalidated. Conscious attention to this creates connections with others, as happened in my own experience. And this conscious attention creates a paradigm for education as an integrated and integrative process if one uses writing as a vehicle for understanding *from*

the self to *beyond* the self. Here is where I address the problems inherent in disallowing existence of the invisible things within and the very real spiritual healing that can occur when the invisible is acknowledged in writing. One cannot pretend to oneself when one is hit by such a calling, and writing becomes a vehicle for moving beyond pretense.

The Essay: From Self to Personal and Professional Communities

In Chapter Four I argue that personal writing can indeed represent a disciplined mind at work. I don't use the term *authoritative* because this term lies at the heart of the conflict. *Authoritative* with its connotations of “knowing it all” and “mastery” is exclusive, and I am advocating a more inclusive form of writing. In recent years I have heard the term *inquiry* used as a substitute for *research*. Inquiry speaks of questions, room for unknowns, a process that is continually ongoing rather than having one's findings wrapped up with a pretty bow and presented as finite and unchanging. Inquiry includes the writer's soul and also makes soulfulness accessible to the reader. Many methods exist to present intelligent discussion and criticism, and they create a new sense of academic ethos that respects the need for discipline but that does not dissociate the writer from him- or herself.

This chapter examines the literary nonfiction essay through which I model how specific texts embody the connections I've raised in the previous chapters. Writers such as Atkins, Mairs, Ehrlich, Terry Tempest Williams, Richard Selzer, and Sacks use their writing to initially express themselves and their own experiences but then connect their experiences with their professional and other communal relationships. The reason these

writers are such important models is that they find ways to forge connections between varieties of experiences, between worlds and contexts that are traditionally seen as exclusive of one another (the most important for my purposes being the professional and personal spheres of experience). In their writings, conscious effort forges a holistic perception, even if the authors do not word it this way.

I argue that the new scholar does not exist separately from writing/teaching/professional ethos. The “real” you is always present. The concern that personal writing does not demonstrate a disciplined mind not only fosters an extreme discomfort with such writing but fosters a false split between left and right brained cognition. My contention is that a disciplined mind can indeed be demonstrated in personal writing because the act of making writing public is in itself a discipline. Literary nonfiction, including paradigmatic excerpts from my own experience, is central to this chapter.

The work of G. Lynn Nelson, O’Reilly, and Atkins, among others, provide various theoretical viewpoints about writing in and around the academy. I explore the conflicted nature of the academic writer’s ethos when this writer seeks to bring in personal writing. The works of writers about writing, such as Mairs’ *Plaintext* and *Voice Lessons* and Legler’s *All the Powerful Invisible Things*, centralize writing not only as satisfying the intellect’s needs but the soul’s (as Moore defines *soul*). Mairs, for example, demonstrates writing used to connect the self and others. Other literary nonfiction also encourages this mind/soul link, such as Sacks’ more recent works. The authors are constantly creating spaces for connection between themselves and nature and/or other

people in order to broaden their understanding of the “soulful” human experience in general.

Pedagogically, these writers model in various ways the connections between self and society that make personal essays rhetorical. In addition, these essays model the actual process of integration between self, experience, others, and external environments. They also can act as vehicles for exploring various disciplines and how writing is used in various disciplines. Rhetorically, the implied holism of these essays bridges the splits between personal and professional writing and also between various disciplines and literature, all of which can contribute to splits within the self. They open the door also to an academic ethos that encourages the foundational ethic of academia which ideally would foster respectful attention to the learning process itself, a very non-linear experience that involves intuition and long silences as much as critical analysis and lively debate.

If one has a soul, then one has a soul in academia. My soul knows my holocaust, knows the intensity with which I struggle to remain connected to life. It contains yet transcends my history. My life was fractured at a very early age, and I need to incorporate the fragments back into my living. In early childhood, I was molested and terrorized by a priest and a nursery school teacher. I was also being raised by a mother who was institutionalized for electroshock therapy after several suicide attempts. This was my earliest spiritual and psychological foundation. I cannot ignore this. Trying to has almost killed me. These experiences underlie my need to write in a way that considers my soul. I am not talking of a religiously contrived soul that will someday

either have wings and harp attached to it or be burning in the pits of a manufactured hell. I am talking of the place that is the source of *calling*, of a sense of connection to or disconnection from life, of the part of each of us that takes our journey completely alone. Here is the deep, underlying purpose for this dissertation: It is about reclaiming the self. Part of this process is exceptionally painful because it involves an integration of the chaotic and damaged parts of one's nature to achieve a more complete inner balance. Soulful living is complex and does not exist separately from writing and teaching, from professional ethos. It moves me always from within, and this is the nature of the new scholar.

Modeling My Purpose: An Integrative Essay

Chapter Five is a short personal essay, the purpose of which is to model my own integration of formative experiences, scholarship, and pedagogy. This essay is not intended to be a full autobiography; rather, I weave in selected moments from my life that reflect or influence in some way my experiences in the classroom. Italicized passages throughout the dissertation, in which I interweave other formative experiences with more traditional academic prose, create links to this final essay. My purpose here is to carry the pre-existing synthesis of personal experience and scholarly inquiry into a work of expressive discourse. This piece is influenced by a number of experiences and perspectives, some explicitly stated and others influencing my writing from the sidelines.

The significance of a *soulful* (to use Moore and Hillman's term) teaching environment for students is multifaceted. Such an environment encourages more time

spent in interaction with students than in lecturing at them. It also encourages teacher silences, the “dramatic pauses” that facilitate students in more actively teaching themselves and respectfully engaging in their own learning processes. Finally, it facilitates in-depth writing, reading, and exploration of fewer texts instead of superficial survey approaches that often leave students befuddled and further alienated from writing and reading.

I argue that a soulful pedagogy allows teachers to interact with their students more, learning more about them and their learning styles. An open classroom environment is encouraged by the teacher’s willingness to be a facilitator rather than just a lecturer; to give the students time to analyze and talk about texts and learn how to give each other helpful critiques; to accept the experiences of each student even if he or she does not always respect or agree with the student's attitudes; but also to respect his or her own expertise and share it so that he or she does not unintentionally gatekeep through withholding from students the grounding they need in reading and writing to be successful in academia.

The significance of this dissertation for other academic writers is in its connection of professional ethos with not only left-brained analysis and language use but right-brained faculties to demonstrate intellectual rigor. Rhetoric as a discipline allows for a closing of the gaps between genres, but only if academics are willing to do more than philosophize about genre connections. A soulful approach to writing in academia discourages the separation of writing from art and the personal, emphasizing compassion and connection over competition; this approach encourages a reversal of the traditional

academic culture. In addition, an exploration of the formative experiences lying behind and within an author's texts can potentially illuminate readers' understanding of these texts.

In order to create a more fully integrated text, I merge excerpts in italics from my own experience as representative paradigms throughout the dissertation. The entry at the beginning of this chapter is one such example. This choice originates in my initial awareness that the reason the academic environment began to feel like it was working against me (or I against it) was because it resembled a dysfunctional family.

As I began to integrate my own formative experiences, I became less able to write in the dissociative academic model until I could no longer write at all (an example of critical writer's block). Models of academic writing did not work for me, and I would have left academia if I had not found other writing models (personal essays) that did work for me. But these writing models, I realized, could be incorporated into the academic writing model, which is what I am attempting to do. In advocating this new model, I come up against my dissociative training, which tells me that a professional academic ethos does not involve foregrounding formative experiences from my own life. However, this conflict can be resolved if such experiences are used as vehicles to blend self-examination and an examination of environments outside the self. But if I am going to advocate such a position, I must demonstrate it, which is the motivation behind incorporating excerpts from my own experience as archetypes: to actually do it rather than merely talk about it.

A central issue is linking ethos to spirit—a new form of professional academic ethos. I am interested in a different form of scholar who brings soul, as my friend Louise puts it, back into his or her professional life. *Soul* is a shaky term to academia: it denotes/connotes intangibles, just as personal writing denotes/connotes lack of discipline. The soul is hard to define, yet its being elusive to definition does not mean that it cannot be qualitatively intuited and experienced, even seen. Thomas Moore states the following about the soul:

It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine. We know intuitively that soul has to do with genuineness and depth, as when we say certain music has soul or a remarkable person is soulful. When you look closely at the image of soulfulness, you see that it is tied to life in all its particulars—good food, satisfying conversation, genuine friends, and experiences that stay in the memory and touch the heart. Soul is revealed in attachment, love, and community, as well as in retreat on behalf of inner communing and intimacy. (*Care xi-xii*).

Living from the soul is a complex act of acceptance, a very integrative, nonlinear process:

Care of the soul speaks to the longings we feel and to the symptoms that drive us crazy, but it is not a path away from shadow or death. A soulful personality is complicated, multifaceted, and shaped by both pain and pleasure, success and failure. Life lived soulfully is not without its moments of darkness and periods of foolishness. Dropping the salvational fantasy frees us up to the possibility of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are the very foundations of soul. (*Care xvi-xvii*)

A dark night of the soul is traditionally seen as a rite of passage—critical and bringing a person to the bare bones of self. Soul incorporates formative experience, and the issue of form in this sense underlies this dissertation. Formative experiences are really the foundations of any ethos and the choices that go into presenting an ethos.

Ethos springs from formative experience. Many academics, however, find that their formative experiences are dismissed as irrelevant to the development of their professional ethos. They learn to ignore them or keep them hidden, which creates the danger of internal conflict with professional choices and ethos. The professional ethos of an academic is traditionally one that uses intellectual discipline to analyze and support claims with a minimum of personal voice attached. But this ethos creates a dissociated academic: one who is intellectually refined with rapier-like precision but whose personal life stays outside the office/classroom/ library door. This is an illusion that can become incredibly toxic. I can no more leave my formative experiences outside any door than I can fly. This is not to say that I enter the professional world as an open book, revealing all of myself to anyone and everyone. On the contrary, with most people I am very private about who I am and where I come from. I protect myself sometimes to an inordinate degree from others, in fact. However, I remain aware of who I am; when I lose that awareness, I am lost.

I have frequently had to negotiate between the demands of my intellectual work and my personal history, and I finally realized that this act of negotiation creates a valuable place for integration of the personal and professional. Although my experiences cannot necessarily be “recollected in tranquility,” they can be presented as embodying archetypes for exploring myself in relation to larger contexts. I argue that this can be done effectively by moving personal writing from the margins to the center of professional writing without losing the theoretical and research groundings of academic

scholasticism. This will be my rhetorical stance in that it becomes a model for the kind of scholarship I am advocating.

My own academic writing froze when I experienced both a spiritual and professional crisis two years ago. I was unable to write effectively in any form (academic, journal, essay) until I began to merge my personal with my professional writing to create space for the way my life was impacting my work. This was a transformative process in which I learned how to integrate my personal and professional selves in a manner that allowed me once again to contribute to academia, but this time in a more honest and conscious way. I used my own writing to examine my formative experiences and why they, in their interaction with an academic environment, were creating an enormous internal conflict about remaining in academia. Through this kind of writing I was able to become the kind of academic I respect.

I integrate passages from my own formative experiences because these experiences are indeed part of who I am—I bring them with me everywhere simply because I bring myself with me everywhere. This is part of my professional ethos because it is part of my general ethos. When I could not write or breathe during my professionalization process, it was clearly at the times that I was attempting to dismiss my own complexity, deny my shadows and dragons, turn myself into a linear work machine who produced and only produced. Denial of self is denial of the basic foundations and tenets of one's own ethos; thus, one's ethos becomes a disembodied veneer that may be professionally acceptable but without integrity. There is a way to be an honest professional, honest in the sense that I remain completely aware of who I am in

all that human messiness without having to make everything in my life chaotic. This is not about chaos or creating chaos, something which academia fears, quite understandably.

A soulful ethos is complex rather than chaotic. It involves being able to say, “I know who I am, how I feel about this, what I think about this. . .” in any situation. It respects the criteria of its particular environment but still emerges from a center within self rather than being a mere drapery covering up the self. It is not self-centered; rather, it is centered within and from self—an enormous difference. It is the difference between oblivion to everything outside of the self and clear awareness of who one is in any given context. An ethos is not merely a representation or personification of who one is or of who one wants to present to the public. In the professional sphere, ethos becomes a way of living, of interacting with others; if one's ethos is simply the research with which one is identified, excluding the attitude with which one approaches one's research, then it is superficial. A soulful ethos is complex, representative of the real person within, and has consequences both within and without.

Each of us brings all of ourselves to every context in our lives, perhaps to different degrees and in different ways, but we are always “there” with ourselves. Doing so with consciousness is a spiritual approach, not only to academia but to the notion of any professional life. As a writer I am trying to integrate inner and outer worlds, and integration is not a linear process. How up front should I be about who I am? I am speaking of spirituality not in terms of whether or not you believe in God or follow a particular religion but in terms of ethos/ethics. Sartre, for example, was an atheist;

however, he framed through his existential philosophy a very ethical sense of self-responsibility: one is responsible for the consequences of one's behavior. Even philosophers like Croce and Cassirer refer to the spiritual/spirit, and here they are referring to the inner but not necessarily intuitive self. Spirituality is a term that can be intuitively understood yet remains elusive to rigid definition. Exposition is not its end any more than unrestrained self-disclosure is.

The point is to merge theory and practice very concretely in order to create very clear associations between the two. That is essentially the purpose of this dissertation. In discovering the connections between being an integrated human being and an integrated scholar/writer/teacher, I have found a potential vehicle for myself, and for others who might otherwise be discouraged, to remain successfully in academia.

Chapter 2

A Personal Space: Histories of Epistemology and Expressivism

. . . expressive discourse is, in a very important sense, psychologically prior to all the other uses of language. It is the expressive component which gives all discourse a personal significance to the speaker or listener.

James Kinneavy, 396

This chapter is not meant to be an argument for or against expressive discourse. Rather, I am attempting a chronology (admittedly sketchy) of representative scholars, essayists, and theorists to show that expressive discourse has a venerable history of at least two hundred years. I begin with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who each used the essay as a vehicle for integrating personal experience and philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche is another nineteenth-century representative of expressive discourse, abandoning a traditional scholarly style (and thus a scholarly reputation) for a personally created aphoristic approach to a philosophy of human beings and society (generally its ills). Finally, the nineteenth-century French symbolist writers Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Charles Baudelaire will be used to demonstrate expressive discourse that, though powerful in its imagery, remains abstracted from life experience on some levels.

Expressive discourse is often relegated to the lower (or lowest) forms of thinking, or it is perceived as a blanket way of writing and thinking that gives aesthetic value to all language. Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer in their philosophies of language and symbolism relegate expressivism to a “primitive” state of mind, undiscerning and undisciplined. Benedetto Croce, on the other hand, sees all language as not only

expressive but as having aesthetic value. He sees a quantitative rather than qualitative difference between writings, although his position can be oversimplified. 1960s expressive theory also tended to see expressive discourse as an end in itself, thus curtailing any connection with anything beyond the personal. The problem of doing as Cassirer and Langer do is that they represent knowledge and thought as a linear process, moving from “lower” primitive forms of reactive expression to “higher” reasoning and logic. This sets forms of thought apart from one another, reinforcing the traditional view that logic is more dependable than intuition, metaphor, expressivism, and so forth, that it is a higher form of thinking. The first section of this chapter, then, will examine various views of expressivism and their links both to theories of knowledge and to academic discourse.

The guiding metaphor for this chapter and from which I theorize about the need for personal and professional integration derives from Mary Rose O’Reilley, a teacher and writer who autobiographically leads her readers through her pedagogy. In her description of the “making” of her book, *The Peaceable Classroom*, O’Reilley writes:

I have made it out of my daily life as a teacher; indeed, I think writing can be rather like making a meal out of things you have in the kitchen. You don't have to go out for exotic ingredients. I've structured it chronologically and autobiographically so that you can enter into my life—should you choose to sit in this kitchen—and see why I think the things I do. Virginia Woolf calls this “developing in your presence a train of thought,” as opposed to defending a rhetorical position. (xvii)

To expand on this metaphor, the kitchen can be conceptualized as a place that combines lively discussion of both personal and professional issues as opposed to the formal front

parlor, an often sterile room because no personal messiness is allowed into it, and the bedroom, where the deeply personal and individual life is lived apart from the public.

The kitchen offers a strong metaphor for the academic environment that I and others advocate. The formal parlor is closest to academia at its most sterile. What I mean by *sterile* is theory that is disconnected from reality, that is nonintegrative and does not attempt to connect with or demonstrate the very changes that it advocates. Into this also falls the publish-or-perish syndrome in which writing is published for the sake of publication rather than because it stems from meaningful connections to academic experiences and the value of concerted thought. The bedroom, on the other hand, represents what personal academic writing can be misrepresented as. Here, the failure of much 1960s expressive pedagogy is a good example. By not moving beyond mere expression, it, too, created no link with larger human experience, no pathway to understanding self and others in various contexts.

As this overview will demonstrate, some of the problematic aspects of expressive discourse are flamboyance, dissociation, hyperbole, and disconnection from one's readers. However, strengths of expressive discourse include connection through personal experience to one's readers, links between self and community, socially transformative elements, and personal ethos as a vehicle for (1) moving self-expression to nonfiction (creative and theoretical) prose and (2) emphasizing personal responsibility and audience awareness. Pedagogically, expressive discourse allows the composing process its natural messiness and does not disorient students by admonishing them to listen to "Teacher" at the expense of their own experiences and perspectives. The difficulty in writing of

starting from the *I*, however, is that this approach more than any other provokes academic censorship, as becomes clearer in my later discussion of 1960s expressive theory.

The Nineteenth Century: Connections to Personal Expression

In the nineteenth century, writing was clearly being explored and used not only as a vehicle for self-expression but as a way into the connections between reason and passion and reason and intuition. With many nineteenth-century writers, we see the struggle to move beyond disordered and informal expression of emotion to an integration with thought and human experience. Writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Nietzsche used writing to be self-reflexive and order their philosophies in ways that would ideally provoke their readers to self-insight. French lyricists such as Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine poured passion onto paper, exploring the degrees to which personal experience could be expressed in lyric form.

Emerson and Thoreau: Merging Self and Community

Emerson was by no means the first essayist or expressive writer, but he offers a good starting point. In Julie Ellison's *Emerson's Romantic Style*, we are given an example of a formative experience in Emerson's youth that connects with his later writings on nature and the soul: "In his late teens and early twenties, he is plagued with uneasiness that leads eventually to the discovery of self-delighting powers" (4). Emerson is also at this time plagued with a variety of physical ailments, and his psychic distress apparently helps him discover an inner source of strength that de-emphasizes his lack of

physical strength. Ellison recounts from Stephen Whicher's *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* a transformative experience of Emerson's wherein "Whicher argues that it was the discovery of 'the god within' that decisively turned Emerson from anxious vacillation to exuberant self-confidence" (5). Whicher writes that "the rock on which [Emerson] thereafter based his life was the knowledge that the soul of man does not merely, as had long been taught, contain a spark or drop or breath or voice of God; it *is* God" (21). According to Ellison:

Conversion is an appropriate figure for the advent of Emerson's powers. But it is a metaphor that leads Whicher into difficulties. By describing Emerson's change of mind as a radical break with earlier doubts, Whicher is left with the problem of explaining why fate, necessity, and skepticism surface in Emerson's works later on. In fact, these anxieties never leave his consciousness for more than a few pages at a time, even in his earliest literary experiments. If we understand the breakthrough of the 1820s as the consequence of—for Emerson—a new way of interpreting threats to his imaginative well-being, we can make better sense of the persistence of negativity and the way it forces him continually to rediscover self-reliance. (5)

Ellison writes that Emerson's journals reveal doubt contrasting and wrestling with confidence and pushing him to the theories he expounds in his essays:

Readers of his journals know that statements of anxiety and self-enjoyment, doubt and pride alternate with each other for decades. His essays come to be organized by the repetition of these movements from deprivation to power. Once the strategy of egocentric interpretation is established, it is Emerson's pleasure to reenter the state of crisis that made it necessary. He celebrates his theory of criticism with narcissistic impudence because it has always just rescued him from a regressive susceptibility to great men. (10)

Ellison's interpretation of Emerson's philosophical/rhetorical approach to writing mirrors Nietzsche's struggles as a writer and philosopher who was also fighting his "susceptibility to great men."

In “Nature,” Emerson uses several meanings, often implied, of *nature*; this technique creates a correlation between human nature and material nature. According to him, our relationship with nature is greatly affected by our perception of it; thus, nature becomes a metaphor for human existence. Emerson writes about nature on a neo-platonic level, using nature to represent the ideal to which human beings should strive:

Nature stretches her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness. Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace to the decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. A virtuous man is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere. (Emerson 12)

But Emerson’s voice can sound distant to late twentieth-century ears. He often expresses his philosophy in a high-flown, pompous tone, typical of his role as a nineteenth-century minister; rarely does he write from actual personal experience. He is quotable but not entirely reachable. “Self-Reliance,” for example, is aphoristic, developing the nature of the Romantic genius through a variety of pronouncements. In this essay, however, Emerson does make one direct reference to personal experience. This event may be actual or may be a rhetorical device, but it connects him with his philosophy in a way that the reader can relate to:

I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, “What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?” my friend suggested—“But these impulses may be from below, not from above.” I replied, “They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil’s child, I will live then from the Devil.” No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it. (148)

The difficulty with Emerson, for modern readers, is that he generally does not tie his observations to personal experience. This gives his words a preaching tone rather than a sharing tone. Preaching can inspire, but it can also alienate, especially if the listener has no basis from which to relate to the message. Thoreau, too, tends to preach. Even though he shares personal experience (in a literary sense anyway), his tone can be pompous, delivering the message, “I did it, so you can, too!” Again, such a proclamation, whether direct or implied, will not reach someone whose experience does not touch on Thoreau’s.

Walter Harding’s foreword to *Walden* establishes several impressions. He sees Thoreau as an optimist, following nature’s cycles in his writing in a manner that will encourage people to introspection and self-/social change:

Walden can be read in an armchair, but it is not likely that the reader will remain there. He may start it as escape literature, but almost inevitably he becomes involved. He begins to think not in terms of escape but in terms of reform, and particularly of reform of himself. *Walden* is a book that impels its reader to action. (qtd. in Thoreau ix)

If we take Thoreau as an early example of expressive discourse, this “impelling of the reader to action” is a rhetorical device that creates a connection between the writer and his or her audience. This connection typifies expressive discourse. Thoreau uses nature and society as philosophical vehicles in *Walden* through which to share what Harding terms a “spiritual biography” (ix)—though not necessarily in the intimate terms of late twentieth-century writers such as Kathleen Norris—and to create “a subtle—and often not so subtle—satire on contemporary civilization” (ix). Harding describes *Walden* as a soul-full journey:

The predominant images throughout, starting with the epigraph on the title page, are those of rebirth, of morning, of spring, of the new life that is ahead. The whole book is shaped around the cycle of the seasons. . . . *Walden* is fundamentally an optimistic book. Thoreau feels no need of waiting to attain heaven in another world. He has high hopes of attaining his heaven right here on earth, and he does his level best to do so. (x)

In "Economy," Thoreau sets up his philosophical perspective before recounting the building of his cabin, growing crops, doing day labor, listing his household expenses vs. earnings, and so forth. He demonstrates an important rhetorical move from self to community using personal experience in relation to the analogy of outer (material) success and inner lack. He demonstrates through his own experience that self-sufficiency, simplicity, and common sense actually provide a good quality of life. The most important aspect of this essay for my purposes is that Thoreau, through his autobiographical approach, models the economy he advocates:

We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives. . . . (1)

To a twentieth-century readership, however, Thoreau's, like Emerson's, tone can sound pompous throughout *Walden*:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. . . . Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? . . . But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break

through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before. (3)

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," however, Thoreau focuses more exclusively on the personal reasons for his journey to Walden Pond. Here, more than in his social commentary and criticism, Thoreau touches the reader without threat or lecture or rhetorical pomposity. He writes about giving "a true account" of his experience, which is the underlying expressive connection that cuts through his early-nineteenth-century prose style and speaks to today's reader also:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. . . . (87)

Friedrich Nietzsche: The Struggle for Integrity Between Personal and Scholastic Expression

Friedrich Nietzsche's writings form a compelling paradigm for the value of expressive discourse. Nietzsche's life was a struggle to create and maintain an identity of genius separate from the influential figures in his life. His father's death when Nietzsche was only six created in him a longing for a father figure, whom he later found then passionately repudiated in Richard Wagner. Nietzsche's writings reveal a drive to maintain integrity with his own perspectives about society; his works blend impassioned

expression, pointed debate, philosophical musings, and highly organized logic in a frequently aphoristic style. He is presenting his findings rather than broaching them in studious, spare argument. In his writing, Nietzsche rarely cites outside sources because he is working from his own experience, intuition, and observations and wants his readers to know this. However, Nietzsche's rhetorical choices ruined his growing reputation as a respected philologist; he didn't follow approved convention—nor could he without compromising his corpus or his journey to self-discovery.

With his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche parts company with the traditional scholarship of his time. He footnotes almost nothing (an academic sin for philologists), choosing instead to write a philosophical essay of cultural criticism. He pulls in music, philosophy, and drama to round out his critique, committing yet another sin of using scattered referential material. The most significant aspect of this text, however, is that Nietzsche makes no attempt to hide his own voice, acting as a poet-critic rather than creating the illusion of studious objectivity (and lack of original thought). At this point, Nietzsche has not yet broken from Wagner (the second half of the book, in fact, is essentially an encomium to Wagner), nor has he discovered the aphoristic style that will mark his later writing (and indicate a French influence that would appall Wagner). However, he has taken an enormous step towards independence and the discovery and creation of his own genius.

In many ways, Nietzsche wrote himself into being; he certainly wrote himself into identity and the validation of his own genius. At least three of his works, for example, directly examine his fraught relationship (then non-relationship) with Wagner, revealing

a lifelong struggle to separate himself from Wagner's web of influence. Upon Nietzsche's realization that Wagner represented (and believed in, although he set himself above it) the crass middle-class herd mentality, he struggled between his desire for Wagner's approval and his need to speak and write of subjects that appalled Wagner. This process was painful and went on until Nietzsche died.

In *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Alexander Nehamas argues that Nietzsche is his own literary creation in his texts and that Nietzsche sees the world as a literary text. His writing style choices are as important, revealing, and paradoxical as the content of his writing, and "his stylistic variations play a crucial philosophical . . . role in his writing" (5). These multiple styles, according to Nehamas, are Nietzsche's way of philosophizing and creating a literary text. While Nehamas agrees with other scholars that much of Nietzsche's writing is aphoristic, he also sees styles such as the scholarly treatise (*The Birth of Tragedy; On the Genealogy of Morals; Beyond Good and Evil*), the classical essay (*Untimely Meditations* and other early works), sustained monologue that is conversational and classically dialectical (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra; The Gay Science*, 5th Book; *The Twilight of the Idols* to a degree), polemical pamphlet (*The Case of Wagner; Nietzsche Contra Wagner; The Antichrist*), autobiography (*Ecce Homo*), letters, and poetic forms such as lyric, epigrammatic, and dithyrambic (18-19).

In their introduction to *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, editors Michael Gillespie and Tracy Strong look at Nietzsche's styles and the structure of his writings to understand his meaning. Their claim is similar to Nehamas' in emphasizing the importance of the relationship between style and

content. Contributor Eugen Fink, in “Nietzsche’s New Experience of the World,” reinforces the claim that Nietzsche writes first from personal experience.

Carl Pletsch, in *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius*, parallels Fink’s claim in his notion of the importance of formative experiences to Nietzsche’s writing. The heart of this book is Pletsch’s claim that genius is created through formative experiences and that Nietzsche’s life clearly demonstrates this. Pletsch considers central formative experiences of Nietzsche’s life to be his father’s death when Nietzsche was five, being raised exclusively by women thereafter, the search for father figures such as Wagner and Schopenhauer to emulate, growing up in a time and culture that glorifies the myth of genius as innate, Nietzsche’s discipline and dependence, then his struggle and dark night of the soul, and finally the break into autonomy and from the myth of genius. Out of these experiences, Pletsch believes that Nietzsche came to the belief that life is a creation of the self as one wills the self to be. One’s existence (at least as a genius) mirrors one’s willing *to* genius; one’s texts do, too (in Nietzsche’s case). Genius is not separate from the man or his life. It does not reside merely in his texts; his texts are the product of his process of willing himself into genius and express this process and will-full creation.

The French Lyricists: Impassioned Sterility and Passionless Flamboyance

The French lyricists considered themselves symbolists. Symbolist poets like Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Charles Baudelaire emphasized using few words (minimalism) to express an image. They avoided Romantic and Naturalistic extremes and used many allusions in their work, sometimes leading to

obscurity. These writers' poems, essays, and letters connected with expressive discourse through the resolution of inner struggle often reflected there. One battle fought by all of these writers was their frustration with middle-class reading audiences:

Unable to accept the modes of thought and action of the smug prospering bourgeoisie, the creative artist was not yet ready or able to "go to the people" and find in them a congenial and stimulating audience. Hence tortured consciences, divided souls, the hunt for new thrills, and defiance of bourgeois moral and artistic standards. (Bernstein xxx)

Of particular significance, their works often created a transitional zone between concrete reality and abstract expression, and we see them living their lives' contrasts in their writing. We can also see solitude and ruthless self-reflection. However, also evident in these lyricists is an effort to transcend life experience, creating a dissociative split between their stories as lived and as written. Perhaps this is why the lyric is considered an acceptable discourse by theorists such as Cassirer. Its subjectivism is actually so abstracted from actual experience that the lyric in a sense honors the tenets of academic objectivity. The person is elided by his or her words.

Mallarmé lived from 1842-1898. In his commentary on Mallarmé's poetry, Charles Mauron finds central the idea that we know someone by his or her obsessions and preoccupations (14). To Mauron, we can move through Mallarmé's obscurity by looking at his obsessions: "sterility" (inability to write) in early poems, "musical sublimation" (*Après-Midi d'un Faun*), "poetic Eden" (*Toast Funèbre*), and "modulations, in either direction, between daily life and nothing" in his later poems (40). "Mallarmé's thought was at ease only in dream, in that intermediate region between reality and the void" (41). Mallarmé moved from being unable to write about reality to using reality

(through concrete images and events) as a springboard into poetry. “Anguish”

demonstrates the sterility theme, still caught in abstraction:

“Anguish”

I come not tonight to conquer your body, oh brute
 In whom course the sins of a people, nor hollow
 In your tresses’ impurity a dismal storm
 With the fatal ennui that my kisses pour out:

I ask of your bed heavy sleep without dreams
 Brooding in curtains unknown of remorse,
 Which you too can taste after your black deceits,
 You who of Zero know more than the dead:

For Vice, having gnawed by nobleness inborn,
 Has marked me like you with its sterility,
 But whilst in your breast of stone there is dwelling

A heart that the tooth of no crime can wound,
 I fly, plea, undone, and by my shroud haunted,
 And fearing to die if I but sleep alone. (51)

To Mauron, some of Mallarmé’s obscurity comes from his inability to recognize the wide differences between his and others’ thoughts and experiences (9-10). Mauron uses terms like *unmistakable sincerity* and *authentic pleasure* (2) to describe the effect of Mallarmé’s poetry, certainly on critic Roger Fry. The concern with honesty, which we can trace back to Emerson, Thoreau, and beyond, once more surfaces. Mauron describes this feeling in the reader on reading Mallarmé for the first time: “. . . that curious feeling of exclusion which put them . . . suddenly outside their own language” (6). “His experiences, which he puts into words with the scrupulous care of a man for whom writing is the essential act of life, simply do not, as a rule, correspond to our experiences” (9). “When men fail to understand each other, it is often simply for this reason: their

obsessions do not coincide” (15). While writing his earlier poems, Mallarmé “is living the drama of the artist who is at the same time a real being, and who has to establish between outer and inner a compromise . . .” (19). *Hérodiade* marks a several-year inner transition (21) through the 1860s and 1870s. When Mallarmé is finally happy, at inner peace, it is because, "He has learnt to use [reality's] support. . . . Henceforth [after 1873] all his poems have an extremely concrete starting-point: the furniture of a bedroom, the curtains of a window, a girl diving . . ." (31).

Purity is the central concept to Fry's reading of Mallarmé:

His poetry is the unfolding of something implicit in the theme. By the contemplation of the theme he discovers new and unsuspected relations. He is not concerned that the theme itself, or the objects it comprises, should already have poetical quality, nor does he seek to find relations with other things already charged with emotion. Mallarmé is in this respect singularly free from bias. His attitude is purely detached and objective and, as is natural to so pure a poet, the emotional quality of the theme is of no consequence to him so long as it provokes in him the impassioned contemplation of its poetical relations. (Mallarmé, 1951; 299-300)

Fry enjoys this sort of “purity,” finding it comforting that personal experience is subordinated to analysis and expression: “. . . with Mallarmé the theme is frequently as it were broken to pieces in the process of poetical analysis, and is reconstructed, not according to the relations of experience but of pure poetical necessity” (301). Fry himself seeks an alienation from personal experience and validates it in Mallarmé's work.

In contrast to Mauron and Fry's readings, Bradford Cook's introduction to *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters* reads like a soap opera:

Martyr to an absolute and mystic to a beauty which were perhaps no more than the extraordinarily abstractive power of his own thought (this was his tragedy), Stéphane Mallarmé endures in the chaste and

harrowing image of the poet met at midnight with his demon and tempted toward the re-creation of his universe: met—like the most reverent and aware of victims of the Word—with prescience of defeat which, nonetheless, he sometimes overcame and so composed a perfect poem. (qtd. in Mallarmé, 1956; xiii).

Cook's main contention, however, is that Mallarmé could never clearly articulate his aesthetic except through his style. What makes Cook's point problematic, though it might be true, is that he changes Mallarmé's style significantly in his translations because he feels that "the virtual power, passion, and beauty of his thought might elude the English-speaking reader whose eye and ear feel more at home with the linguistic sumptuousness of Shakespeare or Gerard Manley Hopkins than with the dry, tortured, or seemingly wordless aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld" (ix). Well, maybe so, but this is an arrogant assumption that undercuts Cook's most central point.

Cook does make an important observation that is reminiscent of the dark night of the soul, a theme that recurs incessantly in expressive writing. The dark night of the soul, in fact, stands for formative experiences that many of these writers appear to have to undergo in order to find their own voices:

Mallarmé saw nothingness. The restraint and distilled horror of his early letters establish the reality of that vision. But over against the saints, who travel their abyss with hopeful eyes turned ahead to heaven [faith], stands this figure of incredible loneliness—terrified, yet so inseparable from his source of terror that he takes it for the All and devotes the last thirty years of his life to its reconstruction through poetry. "After I found Nothingness," he writes in 1866, "I found Beauty." Which surely means that, in order to avoid suicide or madness, he was compelled to find beauty in that nothingness. Such is the heart of his metaphysic. Just how it preceded the esthetic, and whether it was to a degree suggested and intermittently revived by art, we cannot know. (xiii-xiv)

Excerpts of Mallarmé's letters reflect his experience and struggle. We see this experience in Nietzsche's writing, also. The main feeling they leave is that it is not easy to think about one's visions, experiences, ways of thinking. This can hurl us into the abyss. It is a self-consciousness that is somehow horrifying, perhaps because we see our struggle long before we sense a purpose for it (if we ever do). This can make one desperate for release, control, answers—for a theory about it all, a purpose for it. In a letter written to Henri Cazalis, May 14, 1867, Mallarmé writes:

These last months have been terrifying. My Thought has thought itself through and reached a Pure Idea. What the rest of me has suffered during that long agony, is indescribable. But, fortunately, I am quite dead now, and Eternity Itself is the least pure of all the regions where my Mind can wander—that Mind which is the abiding hermit of its own purity and untouched now even by the reflection of Time. . . . I floated downward until finally one day I looked again in my Venetian mirror and saw the person I had been several months before—the person I had forgotten. I should add—and you must say nothing of this—that the price of my victory is so high that I still need to see myself in this mirror in order to think; and that if it were not in front of me here on the table as I write you, I would become Nothingness again. Which means that I am impersonal now: not the Stéphane you once knew, but one of the ways the Spiritual Universe has found to see Itself, unfold Itself through what used to be me. (93-94)

In 1884, Mallarmé writes this to Léo d'Orfer: "Poetry, when human language has been reduced to its essential rhythm, is the expression of the mysterious meaning of the various aspects of our existence. It therefore gives true value to our life on earth and is the only duty of our soul" (99). He has found his answer.

In *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine: Selected Verse and Prose Poems*, Joseph M. Bernstein sees Baudelaire (1821-1867) as a twentieth-century poet because of his rejection of Romanticism:

Romanticism placed emphasis on sentimentality and wayward inspiration, on meetings in the moonlight, disappointed love, solitary walks in the woods, and nostalgic trysts by the shores of lonely lakes. There was in the poems of Romanticism a certain softness, a tendency to histrionics, self-pity, self-dramatization, and emotional over-indulgence. As a result, rhetoric was often substituted for emotional truth, tearfulness for tragedy. . . . Where [Romanticists] sentimentalized, [Baudelaire] was disciplined, rigorous, and astringent in his self-analysis. Where they dissolved into soft, loose, vaporous tears, he cut through to the hard core of things—the “tragic sense of life,” which great artists of all times have expressed. All through his *Flowers of Evil*, his prose-poems, and his *Intimate Journals*, this constant self-scrutiny and self-dissection have a “modern” ring. (xii-xiii)

Typical of what many readers may feel when reading the French Lyricists is Bernstein's description of Baudelaire as “a divided man often at odds with himself and with life but always striving to fuse these conflicting elements into a poetic synthesis” (xiii). “. . . Baudelaire explores the voluptuous in order to attain the spiritual” and “The sense of solitude is ever with him—but not in the blurred, misty manner so characteristic of the Romantics” (xv).

Baudelaire’s poetry is fraught with a bitter irony. In *Flowers of Evil*, his “To the Reader” begins with this stanza that puts emotions and memories into (rotting) flesh and blood terms:

Stinginess, sin, stupidity, shall determine
Our spirits’ fashion and travail our body’s forces,
And we shall feed on the corpses of our remorses
Like the beggars who nourish their own vermin.
(Bernstein 3)

The first stanza of “Correspondences” expresses the irony of living as sentient beings that miss most of what we pass through:

Nature is a Temple where we live ironically
In the midst of forests filled with dire confusions:

Man, hearing confused words, passes symbolically
 Under the eyes of the birds watching his illusions.
 (Bernstein 12)

“The Evil Monk” captures abject poverty of spirit in deeply emotive and visual terms, creating yet another paradox in its rich depiction of spiritual sterility:

The ancient cloisters on the altar-rails
 Exposed huge pictures of Saint Verity,
 Whose effect, warming their infamous entrails,
 Was to assuage their cold austerity.

When Christ’s seeds flourished, what then else avails,
 When illustrious Monks, famed for futurity,
 Painting graveyards, before which the spirit quails,
 Glorified Death's inevitable Irony?

My soul is a Tomb that, evil Cenobite,
 Since Eternity inhabits day and night;
 The walls of this cloister are odious as the skies.

O, idle monk! God! When shall I ever have finished
 This image of my soul's misery undiminished,
 The travail of my hands and the love of mine eyes?
 (Bernstein 14-15)

Paul Verlaine lived from 1844 to 1896. In *Selected Poems*, translator C. F. MacIntyre describes a fraught life for Verlaine, marked by and marking changes in his poetry. In brief, Verlaine falls in love and marries, but the marriage fails. He then descends into poverty, alcoholism, and psychosis. However, at his death he is still honored as a gifted poet. Like Mallarmé, Verlaine is influenced by Baudelaire. MacIntyre describes Verlaine’s poetry as reflecting his life changes, moving through “fantasy” and “whimsicality” to “strict” verse that “synthesizes the manners of the eighteenth-century nobility as seen in the paintings of Watteau, Fragonard, Boucher, etc.,” to “a rapturous, almost factual diary of his relations with Mathilde Maut, [his

wife]” moving more and more to a confessional style marked by bitterness and suffering, though interrupted, during his imprisonment at Mons, by a spiritual crisis written as “a spiritual history of his [temporary] conversion” (Verlaine ix-xi).

Verlaine is the easiest to read of the four French lyricists discussed in this chapter. Much of his poetry emphasizes unrequited love and a sense of exile from any lasting emotional connection with another. “My Familiar Dream” reflects this desire for connection clearly:

I often have this strange and piercing dream
of a nameless woman—that we love each other;
she loves and understands me; never the same
woman, nor yet at any time another.

She understands me, and my heart grows clear
for her alone—no problem; she knows how
to wipe away the sweat from my pale brow,
and only she can cool it with her tears.

Blonde, auburn, or brunette?—I do not know.
Her name? I remember it is sonorous
and sweet as the names of those loved long ago,

exiled by Life. And like a statue's wide
gaze is hers. Serene and grave, her voice
has the tone of those dear voices that have died.
(13)

“Autumn Song” expresses his sense of being tossed helplessly about by memories, a clarification of torment:

With long sobs
the violin-throbs
 of autumn wound
my heart languorous
and monotonous
 sound.

Choking and pale
 when I mind the tale
 the hours keep,
 my memory strays
 down other days
 and I weep:

and I let me go
 where ill winds blow,
 now here, now there,
 harried and sped,
 even as a dead
 leaf, anywhere. (27)

The interaction between writer and reader in expressive discourse is powerfully revealed in MacIntyre's conclusion to his preface. His heartfelt epitaph for Verlaine invites a personal response from the reader:

The proof sheets of this book reach me in Paris, and an emotion seizes me as when one feels like an iron filing under the magnetic great portal of a cathedral. I go up the hill of Clichy to the cemetery of the Batignolles, a small, cozy place surrounded by maples and chestnuts, the latter in full bloom. There is not a grave, however moss-grown and crumbled its stone, which the wind, less forgetful apparently than human beings, has not covered with the small white blossoms with rose-colored centers. It is a warm spring afternoon, and I read all the sheets—without benefit of the imagined ringdoves of Mallarmé, or of any revenant; but I get a vast feeling of satisfaction out of cleaning off the name PAUL VERLAINE, POETE, with some Armagnac: a more pleasing tribute, I dare say, to the old rascal's dust than a bouquet of flowers would be! Death may have been "a so thin stream calumniated" to Mallarmé; yet it seems a very permanent thing, that gray stone under the trees. But I know that under my arm I have a frail part of Verlaine's immortality. (Verlaines xv)

Rimbaud (1854-1891), the youngest of this quartet, wrote from 16 to 19 then never wrote again. He lived the life of a wanderer, was brilliant and restless, but Bernstein claims that Rimbaud's lifestyle choice was "not a flight to evade or escape reality but rather to confront and master it" (xxii). According to Bernstein, "Rimbaud

carries to its logical conclusion the Baudelairian preoccupation with the world of the Unconscious and with the concept of the poet as a magician or alchemist in words” (xxi).

Much of Rimbaud’s poetry suggests danger and sensuality lurking always just beneath the surface of human interaction. The first four stanzas of “The Hands of Jeanne-Marie,” begin a poem that suggests paradox in ugly-beautiful hands that give poison, break bones, murder:

The hands of Jeanne-Marie are strong,
 Dark as the hands of a Sultana,
 Yet pale as dead men’s hands: ‘twere wrong,
 Perhaps, to call them hands of Juana?

Have they collected the brown creams
 That float on tides of luxury?
 Or have they dabbled in moon-beams
 Upon pools of serenity?

Have they absorbed barbarian climes,
 Laid calmly on a charming knee?
 Can they have rolled cigars at times,
 Or been engaged in I.D.B.?

At the bright feet of the Madonnas
 Fading gold flowers did they once heap?
 It’s the black blood of belladonnas
 That in their palms flashes asleep. (Bernstein 238)

In “The Lice-Pickers” Rimbaud juxtaposes beauty and wretchedness with the image of beautiful women picking lice from a young boy’s head. He infuses pedestrian ugliness with sensual delight, and lice picking becomes a vehicle for sexual ecstasy:

When the child’s forehead, racked by torments hot and red,
 Begs the white benison of some vague, swarming dream,
 Two tall and charming sisters come close to his bed,
 Their fragile hands with silver finger-nails a gleam.

Beside a widely open window, where the blue
 Air bathes a tangled bunch of flowers, they set the child,
 And in his heavy hair besprinkled with the dew
 Their delicate fingers travel, terrible and mild.

He hears the singing of their breaths sharp with suspense.
 Flower-sweet with herbal, rosy honeys, that a kiss
 Interrupts now and then, saliva on the tense
 Lip suddenly caught back, or longing for a kiss.

Amid the perfumed silence he can hear their black
 Eyelashes beat; he lolls in drunken paradise,
 While 'neath their royal nails, with soft, electric crack,
 Their gentle fingers spell death to the little lice.

And now there mounts in him the wine of idleness,
 A concertina-sighing that is close to raving;
 And, while he palpitates beneath each slow caress,
 There falls and rises endlessly a tearful craving.
 (Bernstein 240-41)

The Twentieth Century: Disrupted Epistemologies and Expressive Wandering

Twentieth-century theories of epistemology explore links between language and knowledge and attempt to situate expressive discourse in relation to the conceptualization process. James Berlin defines epistemic rhetoric as a theory “that language is the key to understanding the dialectical process involved in the rhetorical act” (166). Language and knowledge are directly linked, and “language . . . embodies and generates knowledge” (167). However, many languages exist within a community, and each demands its own expertise, being both inclusive and exclusive. Meaning is generated externally rather than internally by one's understanding of the various discourse communities that one is a part of:

... meaning comes about as the external world, the conceptions the writer or speaker brings to the external worlds, and the audience the writer or speaker is addressing all simultaneously act on each other during the process of communicating. The result of this dialectic is unpredictable, providing for creativity and accounting for the inevitability of change. (166-67)

Cassirer and Epistemology: Reason Supersedes All

Ernst Cassirer is one proponent of epistemic rhetoric. *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945* reveals that he looks at language from the perspectives of linguistics, speech psychology, and psychopathology, but always with the underlying goal of identifying how language, feeling, and intellect are connected:

It is true that our ordinary speech has not only a conceptual but even an intuitive character and purport. Our common words are not mere semantic signs but they are charged with images and with specific emotions. They speak not only to the understanding but to our feeling and imagination. (153)

Cassirer believes, however, that people must develop what he calls a scientific language to contain sophisticated concepts that ordinary or mythological/expressive language cannot articulate: "In order to conceive the world, in order to unify and systematize his experience, man has to proceed from ordinary speech to scientific language—to the language of logic, of mathematics, of natural science" (153). His theory is predicated, however, on the assumption that scientific language is most articulate of the human experience.

Cassirer criticizes the expressive theorist Benedetto Croce for not recognizing this scientific stance and equating language and art as *liricita* (lyricism). The problem with this stance, according to Cassirer, is that verbal and lyrical expression significantly differ:

What impresses us in lyric is not only the meaning, the abstract significance of the words; it is the sound, the color, the melody, the harmony, the concord and consonance of the words. (158)

Cassirer does not dismiss the value of lyricism, however. In fact, he concludes *Language and Myth* (1946) with the intriguing claim that the lyric is an intellectual vehicle for the creative transformation of language from its mythic origins:

Among all types and forms of poetry, the lyric is the one which most clearly mirrors this ideal development. For lyric poetry is not only rooted in mythic motives as its beginning, but keeps its connection with myth even in its highest and purest products. The greatest lyric poets . . . are men in whom the mythic power of insight breaks forth again in its full intensity and objectifying power. But this objectivity has discarded all material constraints. The spirit lives in the word of language and in the mythical image without falling under the control of either. What poetry expresses is neither the mythic word-picture of gods and daemons, nor the logical truth of abstract determinations and relations. The world of poetry stands apart from both, as a world of illusion and fantasy—but it is just in this mode of illusion that the realm of pure feeling can find utterance, and can therewith attain its full and concrete actualization. . . . This liberation [of the spirit] is achieved not because the mind throws aside the sensuous forms of word and image, but in that it uses them both as organs of its own, and thereby recognizes them for what they really are: forms of its own self-revelation. (99)

Cassirer's primary contention in both works is that human thinking progressed over time from reactionary perceptions of and explanations for reality (expressive, mythological) to a logical, analytical way of conceptualizing (scientific) that categorically interprets reality, though still in terms of human experience.

His defense of the lyrical, then, comes as a bit of a surprise until one considers the great respect Cassirer has for language as a vehicle of knowledge. Lyricism, to Cassirer, balances itself between mythical and scientific thinking, abstracting experience from both and neither simultaneously, as is demonstrated by the French lyricists. Cassirer is by no means a believer in expressive discourse as a sophisticated means of communication unless it is in the form of lyricism.

Susanne Langer: The "Essential" Movement from Mythic to Rational Thought

In *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (originally published in 1942), Susanne Langer takes up Cassirer's claim that language as symbol must evolve from reactive/mythic to rational in order to effectively articulate reality. Langer, a student of Cassirer's, was greatly influenced by him in her early philosophy. She writes that "ritual is the most primitive reflection of serious thought, a slow deposit, as it were, of people's imaginative insight into life" (157). This emotionally based approach to reality is about keeping chaos at bay:

. . . the driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for security in the world's confusion: a demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite orientation amid the terrifying forces of nature and society. (158)

Such a fundamental belief clearly explains Langer's support of reason as a better vehicle than premythological—"fairytale" (180)—and mythological thinking for making sense of the world. She is operating under the assumption that expressive discourse emerges from fear and is no longer necessary with reason, which neutralizes fear. However, Langer does not believe there is no room for emotional or intuitive perception. She believes that

it is necessary to strike a balance between all forms of perception in order to maintain the equilibrium needed to navigate human experience in all its manifestations:

A mind that is oriented, no matter by what conscious or unconscious symbols, in material and social realities, can function freely and confidently even under great pressure of circumstance and in the face of hard problems. Its life is a smooth and skillful shuttling to and fro between sign-functions and symbolic functions [reaction and response], a steady interweaving of sensory interpretations, linguistic responses, inferences, memories, imaginative prevision, factual knowledge, and tacit appreciations. Dreams can possess it at night and work off the heaviest load of self-expressive needs, and evaporate before the light of day; its further self-expressions being woven intelligently into the nexus of practical behavior. Ritual comes to it as a natural response to the “holiness” or importance of real occasions. In such a mind, doubts of the “meaning of life” are *not apt to arise, for reality itself is intrinsically “meaningful”*: it incorporates the symbols of Life and Death, Sin and Salvation. For a balanced active intelligence, reality is historical fact and significant form, the all-inclusive realm of science, myth, art, and comfortable common sense. (289)

Benedetto Croce: An Aesthetics of Expression

When set against Cassirer’s and Langer’s theories, Croce’s are problematic. His *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1909) is based on the premise that all language expression has aesthetic value. For Croce, expressive differences are quantitative rather than qualitative, as he claims in this Emersonian sounding statement: “Nor can we admit that the word *genius* or artistic genius, as distinct from the non-genius of the ordinary man, possesses more than a quantitative signification. Great artists are said to reveal us to ourselves [final emphasis mine]” (14). Intuition is art to Croce:

The limits of the expression-intuitions that are called art, as opposed to those that are vulgarly called non-art, are empirical and impossible to define. If an epigram be art, why not a simple word? If a story, why not

the news-jottings of the journalist? If a landscape, why not a topographical sketch? (13-14)

Croce's theory can be oversimplified. He does recognize the differences in degree of artistic merit, but he chooses *quantitative* because he perceives art/expression as spiritual, originating or residing in every human spirit. In addition, Croce appears to define art as more generic and pedestrian than traditional (Western) social expectations would have it. He does not seem to perceive *pedestrian* to be a negative, trashy concept; rather, it is an implication of the general human condition. Therefore, *art* and *aesthetics*, as conceptual terms, contain connotations that imply the everyday human sphere rather than a condition that transcends such a sphere. Croce's idea of form's importance is central to this perspective:

. . . intuition or representation is distinguished as *form* from what is felt and suffered, from the flux or wave of sensation, or from psychic matter; and this form, this taking possession, is expression. To intuite [*sic*] is to express; and nothing else (nothing more, but nothing less) than to *express*. (11)

To Croce, intuition is an intelligent action that translates reactions into interpretations. And since this results in expression, intuition is integral to art and is therefore an element of aesthetics. Thus, no word-expression can be separated from aesthetics because of their common intuitive link:

The two forms of knowledge, aesthetic and intellectual or conceptual, are indeed different, but this does not altogether amount to separation and disjunction, as of two forces each pulling in its own direction. If we have shown that the aesthetic form is altogether independent of the intellectual and suffices to itself without external support, we have not said that the intellectual can stand without the aesthetic. . . . What is knowledge by concepts? It is knowledge of the relations of things, and things are intuitions. *Concepts are not possible without intuitions, just as intuition is itself impossible without the matter of impressions* [italics mine]. (22)

Form is inherent, according to Croce, to the conceptual and expressive process.

Mental actions are forms; this is the basis of Croce's epistemology:

Man understands things with the theoretical form, with the practical form he changes them; with the one he appropriates the universe, with the other he creates it. But the first form is the basis of the second; and the relation of *double degree*, which we have already found existing between aesthetic and logical activity, is repeated between these two on a larger scale. A knowing independent of the will is thinkable, at least in a certain sense; will independent of knowing is unthinkable. Blind will is not will; true will has eyes. (47-48)

John Dewey: The Beginnings of a Process-Oriented Pedagogy

John Dewey blends his epistemology into a pedagogy that to a degree influenced later expressive theorists, though his theory is far more pragmatic and scientifically focused on the concept of external objective reality. Central to Dewey's pedagogical theory is that all experience implies an evolutionary process, as stated in "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917):

Experience is primarily a process of undergoing: a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection, in the literal sense of these words. The organism has to endure, to undergo, the consequences of its own actions. Experience is no slipping along in a path fixed by inner consciousness. Private consciousness is an incidental outcome of experience of a vital objective sort; it is not its source. Undergoing, however, is never mere passivity. The most patient patient is more than a receptor. He is also an agent—a reactor, one trying experiments, one concerned with undergoing in a way which may influence what is still to happen. (10-11)

Process is all-important to expressive theory of the 1960s, as is the validation of emotions. Here, too, Dewey is influential. However, only one aspect of his idea about

emotions, that they are real and valid, is adopted; ignored is Dewey's Darwinian sense of objectivity over subjectivity. In *Art and Education* (1947), he states the following:

Emotions are involved in all genuine perception. But they are a factor in appreciation only when they are responses to objectively perceived elements and relationships progressively discovered in the object itself—whether a painting, a poem, a symphony or a so-called scientific object. (6)

This belief in the importance of external objective forces plays heavily into Dewey's pedagogy. The teacher is by no means a referee in the student's learning process but instead leads the student to new perceptions:

When the method of the teacher leads the pupil to see in the object features and relations he had not seen before, both teacher and pupil come into intellectual and emotional control of the situation. The habit of objective seeing is formed, and the habit operates in subsequent seeing. The information acquired, instead of being put into dead storage, becomes an active resource. Experience is immediately enriched, and the capacity for growth, for continuing experience, is expanded and directed. (7)

In *Education Today* (1940), Dewey discusses the school as a social institution and education as a process that takes place within a community. He is a firm believer in using social institutions to further the educational experience: "What is needed is not any radical revolution, but rather an organization of agencies already found in the schools. . . . All that is required is to gather these materials and forces together and unify their operation" (71). He advocates giving students concrete learning experiences, "taking the child out of doors, widening and organizing his experience with reference to the world in which he lives . . ." (71). The *institution* is a positive to Dewey, who sees social institutions as motivated by a concern for the public good:

In education meet the three most powerful motives of human activity. Here are found sympathy and affection, the going out of the

emotions to the most appealing and the most rewarding object of love—a little child. Here is found also the flowering of the social and institutional motive, interest in the welfare of society and in its progress and reform by the surest and shortest means. Here, too, is found the intellectual and scientific motive, the interest in knowledge, in scholarship, in truth for its own sake, unhampered and unmixed with any alien ideal. Copartnership of these three motives—of affection, of social growth, and of scientific inquiry—must prove as nearly irresistible as anything human when they are once united. And, above all else, recognition of the spiritual basis of democracy, the efficacy and responsibility of freed intelligence, is necessary to secure this union. (73)

James Kinneavy and Jean-Paul Sartre: The (Apparent) Paradox of Existential Expressivism

In *Theories of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*, James Kinneavy situates aspects of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy squarely in expressive discourse. He examines Sartre's term *For-Itself*, the aspect of human consciousness that desires to effect connection with the world (precisely because it senses its separateness from the world) and to initiate a variety of "projects" that affirm its presence in life. Kinneavy paraphrases from *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*: ". . . we are what we are conscious of being in the face of reality; we are, whether we like it or not, what we have made of ourselves in the past; finally, we are what we are striving to be" (398). In addition, *Being-for-Others* and *Being-in-the-World* are the aspects of consciousness that prevent an individual from objectifying the rest of the world and its inhabitants, thus creating the rest of the foundation for connection.

Kinneavy sees Sartre's aspects of existential consciousness as expressive:

For Sartre, the For-Itself is, both in its appraisal of its past and in its projections towards its future, fundamentally a value consciousness. As he says, "the for-itself cannot appear without being haunted by value and

projected toward its own possibles.” . . . Similarly, the Being-for-Others is fundamentally realized in the affective order—by pride, shame, and fear. . . . And finally, the attitude of consciousness to reality, Being-in-the-World, is also an emotional matter. . . . It is this emotional component, this value aspect, this drive which provides the basic impetus to the act of expression on the part of the self. For desire implies that the self is “involved” in its views of the world and the Other. (400-401)

This involvement with the world in order to achieve the self’s desires creates a complex series of relationships and communication situations between the self and others. To Sartre, the self’s *For-Itself* desires are fundamental acts of expression:

To attain selfhood . . . the For-Itself must necessarily involve itself with the world and with others in the process of working towards specific goals. . . . This carrying out of a project is the essence of the act of expression. Expression is therefore the structuring of a field of reality in order to realize a project, and this realization gives self-hood to the For-Itself. . . . Expression, therefore, involves some process of externalization or action dictated by the presence of a goal to be achieved. This notion of expression is not therefore a simple discharge of emotion or a relaying of impressions; the emotion must be directed to an aim. (401)

Where this translates to language, according to Kinneavy, is in language’s central role in conceptualizing self, Other, and the world:

Since it is by language that I discover the Other and the world, and since the discovery of the Other and the world are indispensable foundations of my own being, it is clear that language is the instrumental root of my being. . . . Since it is by language that man finds both his self and his thoughts, and since self is emotionally grounded, it follows that all discourse is emotionally grounded. The reason for this is that man uses language to achieve the projects which he values, and the desire for the project has an emotional component. (403)

Thus Sartre’s philosophy acts as a vehicle of expressive discourse but one with a specific aim in mind for the individual. Through Sartre, Kinneavy is justifying expressive discourse as a persuasive device rather than simply as a device for expelling emotions without restraint. However, as we will see, academia doesn’t cleanly translate aim-

oriented expressive discourse into its pedagogy, and once again expressivism is widely discounted as an inappropriate model for academic writing.

1960s Expressive Theory: The Struggle to Validate Expressive Discourse in Academia

In the 1960s a movement defending expressive discourse and its pedagogical value emerged in Anglo-American academia. Overall themes included self-reflection, responsible writing, ownership of one's writing, and the importance of viewing writing as a process that begins in the individual. Although shades of expressive discourse remain in the 1990s' notion of the process-oriented, student-centered classroom, many of these essays disappeared, as if they were innovative patents being bought and buried by major corporations:

The ignoring, by the disciplines of speech and English, of the very kind of discourse by which an individual or group can express his personal or its societal aspirations, is certainly a symptom, if not an effect, of the impersonality of the university machines of the present day. The high schools are probably even more culpable in this regard. If ignoring the study of persuasion begets a gullible populace, ignoring the study of expression begets rebellion, sometimes justified, sometimes irresponsible. A democracy which ignores expression has forgotten its own roots.
(Kinneavy 396)

Why was this traditional academia's approach to expressive discourse?

Laurence R. Veysey in *The Emergence of the American University* (1965)

provides one answer to the above question. In the mid-nineteenth century, American universities thought they were taking after German universities but instead reinterpreted the German ideal of research into a pure science model:

The German ideal of "pure" learning, largely unaffected by utilitarian demands, became for many Americans the notion of "pure" science, with

methodological connotations which the conception had often lacked in Germany. The larger, almost contemplative implications of *Wissenschaft* were missed by the Americans, who seem almost always to have assumed that “investigation” meant something specifically scientific. The continued lofty evocation by nearly all Germans of an underlying spiritual unity was ignored by research-minded Americans and instead appealed only to quite a different group of post-Civil War Transcendentalists, whose affinities lay with the American academic camp of liberal culture. Thus scientific Americans, unlike most scientific Germans, identified scientific specialization with the entire purpose of the university. (127)

This set the tone for a scientific model of inquiry that would influence twentieth-century research methods and writing styles in academia.

In *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987), Gerald Graff adds to this perspective in relation to composition:

Composition at Harvard [late 1880s], when taught in classes as large as five hundred students, was later described as a “huge concern which (despite many experiments) has never been carried on to anyone’s satisfaction.” But it also meant advanced courses similar to what would later be called “creative writing,” mixing essays and fiction, and pungently reflecting the personalities both of its instructors and that Harvard culture that [President] Eliot wanted to preserve. Harvard thus became the first great university to dramatize the split between scholarship and composition that would become so typical of English departments down to the present day. (66-67)

And in *Criticism in the University* (1985), Graff and Reginald Gibbons write that “the narrowing of ‘criticism’ to ‘academic criticism’ assumes that only the criticism written by academics within the prevailing academic methodologies and within academic intellectual society is worth talking about” (8). Expressive theory, though pedagogically successful in extraordinary ways, did not fit established standards of academic scholarship or credibility.

In 1985, however, Frank Lentricchia's essay, "On Behalf of Theory," strikes a needed balance for expressive theory. He describes a dark night of the soul experience that theorists go through, an experience rarely articulated and often felt in academia: *doubt*.

What anti-theorists leave out is the most interesting, productive and I think human moment in our work. It is the moment of unrestrained doubt, when we feel utterly *unjustified* in doing anything, when we question everything, when what we do seems to us to have unacceptable consequences or (horribly) no consequences at all for our lives as social beings, when we don't know what to put in the place of what we've been doing, when we come to distrust putting anything in place of our old habits—because we know that any set of answers will once again say that literature is. . . , and you fill in the blank. This moment of doubting is also a time of agony because it feels as though we have no well-grounded set of opinions (no theory) from which to criticize literature and society. Out of this moment of flux, of radical questioning of everything, and for reasons difficult to be precise about, we make a decision, we move toward opinion, but now chastened, understanding that what we profess "in theory" is always socially complicit and compromised because theory's real origin is not the free-floating history of ideas (Derrida talks to Hegel who talks to Kant) but ideas that are grounded in the history of our lives. (107-08)

Lentricchia believes that this critical moment allows theorists to reconceive theory as "primarily a *process* of discovery" grounded in social contexts (107-08).

Another potent commentary comes from Sandra Gilbert in Graff's "Feminist Criticism in the University: An Interview with Sandra M. Gilbert" (1985). Gilbert states early in the interview, "I can't see how writer and critic can disagree about the fact that what is finally written is, whether consciously or not, written by the whole person" (117), a fundamental working assumption of expressive theorists. Gilbert raises the issue of compartmentalization and its attendant problems in academia, citing the disappearance of the "poet-critic" (e.g., Kenneth Burke) and, at a conference, the insistence by one "well-

known theorist” that poets aren’t literary (121). Gilbert calls this attitude a “peculiar schizophrenia,” attributing it to “an intensification of professionalism”:

During the fifties and sixties, critic-poets were rapidly assimilated into American institutions of higher education, and as this happened they must have found it increasingly necessary to evolve in specialized ways in order to differentiate and define themselves for academic administrators. So—and I may as well just quote my American Book Review piece here—“the person-of-letters with a somewhat dominant left brain . . . became a professional critic. At the same time, the right-brain-dominant soul . . . became a professional poet. And now at last the university understood them both! Professor Left Brain was a theoretician; Professor Right Brain a technician. One belonged in an English department, the other in a creative writing workshop. . . .” (121)

James Berlin provides a good overview of rhetoric in American colleges and English programs in *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987). Of greatest relevance is his tracing of expressive and epistemic rhetorics, beginning with progressive education programs such as Dewey’s and the expressivism of the 1920s, epistemic theories, and the resurgence of expressivism in the 1960s.

The 1960s revealed extremes in expressive rhetoric. Anarchic expressivism was where everything goes and the student writes completely for him- or herself. It included happenings—shock value, the different experience, clear experiences to write about. This is one area where expressive theory ran into trouble in academia. Anarchic expressivism was “further encouraged by a popularized Freudianism,” a lifting of repression that “too often became a permissiveness that located the basis of education in the abandonment of repression” (74). More balanced approaches were advocated by people like Don Murray, W. E. Coles, Ken Macrorie, and Peter Elbow, who claimed that

a combination of discipline and freedom was crucial for a successful writing process. Some theorists believed that writing cannot be taught; even those who believed it can be taught, however, encouraged the teacher to stay in the background. Another commonality to expressive theorists is the belief that students should write copiously.

Berlin also discusses the essence of American romanticism in that writing is art and springs essentially from the individual, and it cannot be taught; the teacher is a guide only. He also brings in the notion of writing for self-awareness, self-knowledge (in a sense its *episteme*). Berlin highlights the major contributors to expressivism and also shows how elements of expressivism show up in epistemic rhetoric.

Berlin sets up his argument by introducing the notion of *rhetorics* instead of *rhetoric* in his discussion of how college writing courses respond to social changes (3-5). He states that he is working from epistemology rather than ideology because “it allows for a closer focus on the rhetorical properties—as distinct from the economic, social, or political properties—of the systems considered” (6). He cites as epistemic categories *objective*, *subjective*, and *transactional*, and states that the roles of “reality, interlocutor, audience, and language” in the rhetorical triangle shift as society shifts (4):

It is important to keep in mind that as the conception of the real alters—as a society or class or group moves from, say, a positivistic to a phenomenological orientation—the roles of interlocutor, audience, and language itself undergo a corresponding alteration. Furthermore, because societies are constantly changing it is common to find more than one rhetoric at any single moment—a simple result of there commonly being more than one epistemology competing for attention at any given time.
(4)

From 1900-1920, three rhetorical approaches were used: current-traditional (scientific, middle class, reality an objective factor of the outside world); liberal culture

(East, elitist but also of literature departments today in terms of poetics being favored—i.e., literary criticism); rhetoric of public discourse (Midwest, West, Southwest, democratic, epistemic rhetoric) (35-36). Transactional rhetoric for a democracy, for example, emerged from Dewey's progressive education ideas, primarily that learning is a process (50-51). According to Berlin, Scott's rhetoric was "an early approximation of an epistemic position" (47):

Scott saw reality as a social construction, a communal creation emerging from the dialectical interplay of individuals. While this social reality is bound by the material, it is everywhere immersed in language. Reality is thus neither objective and external, as current-traditionalists believed, nor subjective and internal, as the proponents of liberal culture held. It is instead the result of the interaction between the experience of the external world and what the perceiver brings to this experience. The transactional relationship that defines reality also includes the social, the interaction of humans. The medium of contact between perceiver and perceived is language. Language is not, however, conceived of as a simple sign system in which symbol and referent are perfectly matched. It is instead constitutive of reality, language being the very condition that makes thought possible. Language does not exist apart from thought, and thought does not exist apart from language; they are one and the same. Reality is the product of the interplay of observer (writer or speaker), other observers (audience), the material world, and, implicated in each, language. (47-48)

From approximately 1920 to 1940, progressive education was influential; however, people basically just picked and chose aspects of Dewey's philosophy that worked for them. This created quite an empirical and scientific current-traditional approach: "scientific precision in placement and grading" (67)—e.g., the Syracuse freshman writing program. Using this precision and approach "to democratize college" (68). Using progressive education notions through conferencing and "ability grouping" (levels A, B, C) revealed "progressive education's concern for individual differences"

(70). Jerome Bruner agreed that learning is a process, in cognitive rather than social terms, using Piaget. He influenced Gordon Rohman and others (122-23).

Berlin cites the following as foundational assumptions of expressive theory:

For expressionistic rhetoric . . . writing—all writing—is art. This means that writing can be learned but not taught. The work of the teacher is to provide an environment in which students can learn what cannot be directly imparted in instruction. That which the writer is trying to express—the content of knowledge—is the product of a private and personal vision that cannot be expressed in normal, everyday language. This language, after all, refers to the public world of sensory data. Instead, the writer, like the patient undergoing psychoanalysis, must learn to use metaphor in order to express this private realm.

For the romantic poet, nature had meaning because it pointed metaphorically to a higher, spiritual reality. For the Freudian, nature has significance because it can be used to express in metaphor the truths of the unconscious, truths that come to us only in metaphor—through displacement or condensation, for example. The writing teacher must therefore encourage the student to call on metaphor, to seek in sensory experience materials that can be used in suggesting the truths of the unconscious—the private, personal, visionary world of ultimate truth. Through writing, the student is thus getting in touch with the source of all human experience and shaping a new and better self. The product of this creative process is organic, representing the merger of form and content. Each grows out of the other; to change one is to change both. (74-75)

D. Gordon Rohman was a principle proponent of expressivism. In “Pre-Writing: the Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process” (1965), he presents a pedagogical theory that assumes prewriting to be an active discovery process beginning within the writer’s mind in a transformation of outer events to inner experiences. Rohman defines writing as “usefully described as a process, something which shows continuous change in time like growth in organic nature” (106). The writer’s personalization of experience is central to this concept. Rohman lists journaling and meditative and analogical heuristics as important tools for discovery and the transformative experience. He does not, however,

provide specific exercises or statistics to support his claims for the effectiveness of prewriting, which weakens his article as a traditional academic text by providing an unfortunate loophole for attack by other scholars.

The writer's ownership of his or her writing is also central to Rohman's theory. He pulls in psychological concepts: Maslow's [self-]actualization (108) and Erich Fromm's notions of discovery as experiencing something new from within (110). He also references Thoreau's journal entries on his writing process (109); Jerome Bruner's use of Weldon's concept of puzzle/form imposed by the individual on an event to make a new event familiar and thus be able to internalize it (109); and Dorothy Sayers' idea of the necessity of converting an event to an experience in order to internalize and express it effectively.

In "My Friend Henry" (1972), Rohman writes from the existentialist perspective of becoming yourself and taking responsibility for your actions. These issues play into Donald Hall's ethic of clarity, according to Rohman (374), and the importance of honesty in writing. Writing from this ethic/ethos reveals you not only to others but to yourself. Rohman cites Thoreau's *Walden* as an example of this. He uses the analogy of borrowing someone else's dream and improving on it/making it your own and cites his experience of borrowing and improving upon Thoreau's dream of conscious attention to expressing one's truth (in writing) (376). He also cites the Romantics: "So the romantics are half right when they say that the ethic of sincerity is important. They are wrong when they leave out the technique of being honest [Rohman's existentialist component]" (374).

Donald Murray is another proponent of expressive discourse. "The Interior View: One Writer's Philosophy of Composition" (1970) claims that the writer primarily writes solo, having to discover his or her meaning from within. Murray foregrounds an important self-community relationship in this article: "The process by which the publishing writer discovers what he has to say and says it has important implications for the student writer" (21). The student is a writer first; the teacher who writes is a writer first, also. Some of his terms and phrases overlap with Rohman's: *honest and illuminating; responsible writing; dream; choices; his own experience; reveal the writer's meaning to himself; and analogies* (23). Writing cannot be taught, according to Murray; it is a process each writer must experience individually. He sets up the following parallels: "A writer is an individual who uses language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it" to "A student writer is an individual who is learning to use language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it" (24).

In "Finding Your Own Voice: Teaching Composition in an Age of Dissent" (1969), Murray claims that students become effective writers by taking responsibility for their own writing and advocates a student-centered classroom. The student has four responsibilities/freedoms: ". . . the freedom to find his own subject, to find his own evidence, to find his own audience, and to find his own form" (120). The teacher also has four responsibilities: creating "a psychological and physical environment in which the student can fulfill his responsibilities," such as a writing lab context; creating and enforcing deadlines so students are always writing; encouraging "a climate of failure" and experimentation by grading student-selected papers at semester's end; and being a

listening diagnostician rather than a paper corrector (121-22). The responsibility of both students and teacher is to publish their writing by sharing it with each other (122). Here the teacher models the experimentation process in writing.

Peter Elbow, too, becomes a major supporter of expressive discourse. In “Exploring My Teaching” (1971), his basic premise is that he learned more about himself as a teacher and about what constrained him as a teacher by exploring from “an experiential and phenomenological point of view” (743). To Elbow, respecting the reality of the student’s experience is equally important, and doing one’s best to put oneself in the student’s shoes helps one to understand more clearly the experience the student is coming from. Student-centered teaching is difficult and frightening, according to Elbow, yet more learning and real writing occur in such an environment.

Elbow references an introductory literature course as the context where he first began applying a student-centered pedagogy. The need for this pedagogy grew out of Elbow’s reaction to teacher-centered teaching after eight years in the field:

I found I couldn’t stand to tell students things they hadn’t asked me to tell them. I knew I knew things that were both true and important, but that only made me feel all the more gagged and mute. I even found I couldn’t stand to ask questions—except the question, “What is your question?” Nothing seemed worth saying in a classroom till a student had a question he took seriously. (743).

So Elbow designed three rules for his literature course:

(1) The student must state on paper, for everyone to read: at the beginning, what he wants to get out of the course; at midterm and end of term, what he thinks he is getting and not getting. . . . (2) Each student must read something each week: either literature or about literature. . . . (3) Each student must put words on paper (even if only to say he does not wish to write) once a week and put it in a box in the reserve reading room where everyone can read everyone else’s and make comments. (744)

Elbow also writes about five beliefs he's come to in his inner exploration:

- (1) Much teaching behavior really stems from an unwarranted fear of things falling apart. . . . (2) An actual audience is crucial for writing. . . . (3) Students learn more about literature through writing than through reading. . . . (4) For learning, empirical feedback is a good thing and normative evaluation is a bad thing. . . . (5) It is good to separate constraints from freedoms with absolute clarity. (745-47)

Elbow claims in "A Method for Teaching Writing" (1968) that teachers create an artificial and ineffective learning situation when they ask writers/students to write "true" (i.e., "good reasoning" and "good ideas") and with "good style"—abstract concepts that mean nothing without a context (115). When students do not understand the criteria, they are lost. A way around this is a third criterion, Elbow suggests: writing to produce "the desired effect in the reader" (115). This, Elbow claims, is actually a rubric for learning the criteria of effective writing rather than an additional criterion (118). If students must create assignments that matter to them and read everyone else's papers, with the focus of creating an observable reaction in the reader, they begin internalizing the criteria for effective writing naturally. One aspect of this is *voice*: "When words carry the sound of a person—whether in fiction, poetry or an essay—they are alive. Without it they are dead" (120). Bringing the sense of a real person is not, however, about baring one's breast to all with all:

. . . I am not talking about intimate, autobiographical "self-exposure" when I talk of "revealing a self in words." Writing in words which "reveal the self" has nothing necessarily to do with exposing intimacies—undressing. For I am talking about the sound or feel of a believable person simply in the fabric of the words. (123)

Herein lies the difference between the bedroom and the kitchen as writing metaphors.

Expressive theory carried into the early 1970s. W. E. Coles, Jr., writes in “The Sense of Nonsense as a Design for Sequential Writing Assignments” (1970) that his central concern is “language: its relationship to experience and individual identity” (27-28). He, too, advocates writing profusely. In each class students are given a writing assignment to turn in at the next class. “We use no books of any sort. Our subject is writing, writing seen as an action” (27). Coles uses nonsense writing as an analogy for focusing on language to experience understanding in a new way:

In working to the release of a larger understanding, in moving to an awareness of the nonsense writer as performer, a reader moves also to a new awareness of the possibilities of language and of himself as a language user. Similarly, the purpose of my course is to dramatize the significance of seeing language as the basis of experience and identity as a reflex of the languages commanded, in such a way as to engender within the students a heightened self-consciousness of themselves as made by the languages they manipulate—or are manipulated by. (28)

In 1972 Ann Berthoff criticizes the 1966 Dartmouth Conference as separating intellect and creativity (“From Problem-Solving to the Theory of Imagination”). She claims this is an influence of behavioral psychology and general semantics creating the “unquestioned assumption . . . that language is a signal code” (639-40). Berthoff uses her criticism of the Dartmouth Conference as a vehicle to question faulty assumptions about what English is, assumptions that present English as a problem-solving-to-solution endeavor rather than as a way to connect language and knowing:

For those whose concern is reform in the teaching of English, the method of problem solving has little to offer. Indeed, it is dangerous because it actually requires a conception of language as signal code, a view which precludes an understanding of language as an instrument of knowing; and because it generally is allied with a theory of learning which premises learning as a function of a somewhat modified stimulus-response model. (637)

Berthoff advocates rhetoric as a basis for English/Composition/Literature pedagogy because it provides a connection between language and knowing. She criticizes James Moffett's reduction of literature to communication situations: "Moffett does not understand that plays and stories and lyrics and novels are all created in the mode called *poiesis*, that all literature—works of imagination—is 'poetic' with respect to its symbolic character" (642). Moffett's belief, Berthoff suggests, leads to the following:

. . . faulty premises: that composition is either self-expression or communication; that literature is either immediately "relevant" or a box of puzzles to be solved. And these premises . . . derive from the fundamental misconception which opposes the allegedly creative, personal, emotional [*sic*] charged, intuitively understood experiences to the supposedly intellectual, public, abstract, conceptual nonexperience. (646)

She believes that reality begins within: "When we begin with our students as *knowers*, we must include what happens 'inside': 'reality' is not something that happens to us from 'outside'" (646). Berthoff is leading to an argument for restoring rhetoric in the composition classroom:

Rhetoric reminds us that the function of language is not only to name but also to *formulate* and to *transform*—to give form to feeling, cogency to argument, shape to memory. Rhetoric leads us again and again to the discovery of that natural capacity for *symbolic transformation*. (647)

Lou Kelly's central concern in "Toward Competence and Creativity in an Open Class" (1973), is to make learning a personalized experience. Like the rest of life learning, academic learning happens through personal experience; thus it has more significance: ". . . learning to write at all educational levels should be an extension of that living-learning process" (645). The open class is a sort of writing lab where students in effect design their own curriculum and the teacher acts as a resource person. Students

first learn to talk comfortably with one another in small and large groups before sophisticated analysis is asked of them. The teacher must be demanding in the sense that all students must participate. However, Kelly argues that the teacher must shut up as students discover and discuss questions. Dialogue leads to improved writing and is the central structure of the open class.

Certain weaknesses exist, however, in this article. Kelly writes a lot about raising questions but unfortunately provides no examples of these questions. Furthermore, underlying Kelly's words is still the message that teacher knows best. Kelly suggests one of the teacher's roles as "citing periodicals and books [the students] can turn to for the information they need" (654), thus removing an important part of the inquiry process from the students' responsibility. Kelly also states that in "small task groups . . . , just as in class talk and writing, students move toward the kind of reading performance we hope for. . ." (654). Words like "reading performance" smack suspiciously of manipulation, although they may just be poor word choices, as Kelly goes on to argue that teachers must be "intent on *learning our students*" (646). "Instead of following the sequence of assignments that worked *last year*, we respond to the experiences—external and internal—that students talk about, in class and on paper, day by day, *this year*" (649).

Also in 1973 Jean Pumphrey emphasizes in "Teaching English Composition as a Creative Art" creating a safe environment for the personal-to-public writing process. Pumphrey begins the semester by discussing writing, forming the class in a circle, and writing along with the students (668). Pumphrey advocates lots of in-class writing, beginning with freewriting, to just get them writing and get them away from

“textbookeze” (666). After a while, the students generate their own writing assignments (669). The writing process moves in the following order: “. . . with *what* they have to say on a first draft, with the *order* in which they say it on a second draft, and with *how* they say it on a third draft” (669-70). This process parallels what I tell students, which is to get their ideas down first, then revise, then proofread—a very process-oriented concept.

Pumphrey feels that students are as open as the rest of us to order but are in a sense trained by their teachers to expect to produce final drafts as first drafts: “. . . I believe we are, unwittingly, teaching the style we then sit back and criticize. . . . Much of the graceless language we are confronted with comes as a direct result of student attempts to put together too much too soon, using someone else’s format” (666-67). She has her students move in increments from freewriting and discussing writing to writing for the public, just as Lynn Nelson focuses on the private to public movement in *Writing and Being*.

Turning Towards Holistic Models

Perhaps because of its anarchistic potential, expressive discourse theory appears to have disappeared from the academic agenda except in pedagogical terminology such as *student-centered teaching* and *process*. The overall emphasis in the composition classroom still appears to be to produce products reflective of scientific objectivity. The personal essay is often used only as a vehicle for discovering a research project, after which personal expression is essentially abandoned. Emphasis still appears to be placed

on knowing as a primarily logical/rational enterprise, knowledge to be “expressed” through logos—the writer’s ethos mainly a vehicle for “logical” thought and proof.

In subsequent chapters, however, we will see how some writers remain conscious of the role their personal experiences play in their intellectual expression. They retain the connection between self and writing. Mairs, for example, states that she writes to know who she is, writing herself into understanding. Atkins sees how his own awakenings help him to better understand the texts he reads. Brand sees writing as a therapeutic tool for self-awareness. Expressive theory is materializing in some nonfiction essays, demonstrating intellectual rigor in a rich, personal context—putting the soul back into writing. These models for theoretical discourse connect with community rather than distance from, alienate, or over-objectify.

Chapter 3

Holistic Models of Writing

When you start listening to the voices of your heart, they demand that you hear them all, and they have come to me all of a sudden now, asking me to attend to them.

Gretchen Legler, 72

Before moving to a definition of *holism*, I want to point out that outside of the academy are many writers who have much to teach those within the academy. The writers and writing modeled in this chapter demonstrate powerful and perceptive integrations of self, community, intellect, spirit, body, and emotion. These writers acknowledge the (often invisible and elided) play of the personal in writing, the complex webs of connections and experiences that all writers bring to their work—whether they acknowledge them or not. What I want to emphasize in this chapter are models of writing and teaching writing that not only can be used effectively in the classroom but that can aid scholars in healing the dissociative splits that traditional North American scholarship encourages.

Defining *Holism*

In beginning a discussion of holistic models of writing, one cannot just dash off into a description of such models without first defining *holism*. Holism involves the revelation of one's story—in *any* form, including academic writing. This revelation is simply an acknowledgment of what is already there but in part kept invisible. I am living my story every moment; it affects, influences, and is contained in everything that I do,

think, and feel. It is both part of and constitutive of my professional and personal ethos, and even though I may present each ethos in different ways, I still am presenting the story of who I am. In her essay “Some Thoughts on Narrative,” Ursula LeGuin states it eloquently: “Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origins, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story” (39).

Narrative is a stratagem of mortality. It is a means, a way of living. It does not seek immortality; it does not seek to triumph over or escape from time (as lyric poetry does). It asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful. If the human mind had a temporal spectrum, the nirvana of the physicist or the mystic would be way over in the ultraviolet, and at the opposite end, in the infrared, would be *Wuthering Heights*. (39)

The primary characteristic of *holism* as it is used here is *integration*, a blending and balance of all components of, in this case, a human being. Integration involves the following: thought and feeling, professional and personal, sacred and secular, visible and invisible. It is important to consider this a blending of many elements rather than a setting up of dichotomies; however, as is apparent from the preceding list, dichotomies are an institution of Western cultural thought and must be recognized before they are broken down.

Dichotomy implies separation and reliance on one component over another. This reliance implies a hierarchy, and herein lies the problem of dichotomies in Western thinking. Because hierarchies set one thing over another in terms of superiority, they tend to invalidate the importance and/or visibility of whatever is not at the top of the chain. Clearly, when one considers hierarchy in relation to the human being in

academia/writing, one then sees privileging thought over feeling, professional over personal, secular over sacred, and visible over invisible. The point here is not to preference feeling, personal, sacred, and invisible; it is to blend all of these aspects of the human condition, to acknowledge that they are all elements of life experience and that to dismiss one is to dismiss all. This dismissal creates a toxic buildup within oneself of all that is repressed because socially one has not been given room for its healthy expression and personally one has not given oneself permission for its acknowledgment and flow. James Hillman addresses Western society's attitude towards emotion as an example of such toxicity:

This refusal to meet the challenge of emotion, this *mauvaise foi* of consciousness is fundamental to our “age of anxiety.” It is characteristic of—even instrumental in—what has been called “the contemporary failure of nerve.” We do not face emotion in honesty and live it consciously. Instead emotion hangs as a negative background shadowing our age with anxiety and erupting in violence. A “therapy” of this condition depends altogether upon a change in the attitude of consciousness toward emotion—a change for which this work attempts to provide a ground. If there is anything novel in this synthesis of final causes it is this: *emotion is always to be valued more highly than the conscious system alone*. This tends to run counter to the mainstream of thinking about emotion in the psychology, philosophy, physiology and therapy [and academia] of today. (*Blue Fire* 274)

The Role of Story: Teaching Through Shared Experience

Story, or (for some) narrative, is so important to a holistic way of being (thus writing) because ideally it incorporates more than just one part of a picture or an experience. However, in academia, we create an illusion of story, a *reason-story* that is disbalanced toward objectivity. LeGuin describes such an illusory narrative:

To describe narrative as “rationalization” of the given or of events is a blind alley. In the telling of a story, reason is only a support system. It can provide causal connections; it can extrapolate; it can judge what is likely, plausible, possible. All this is crucial to the invention of a good story, a sane fantasy, a sound piece of fiction. But reason by itself cannot get from the crocodile to Cincinnati. It cannot see that Elizabeth is, in fact, going to marry Darcy, and why. It may not even ever quite understand who it was, exactly, that Oedipus did marry. We cannot ask reason to take us across the gulfs of the absurd. Only the imagination can get us out of the bind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesizing or pretending or discovering a way that reason can then follow into the infinity of options, a clue through the labyrinth of choice, a golden string, the story, leading us to the freedom that is properly human, the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality. (45)

Story is a holistic function when considered in the above light as a function of human experience and language. This holistic conceptualization of the human being in society is central, for instance, to texts like Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, wherein White is claiming that history is a narrational creation of human minds. Or Hillman’s criticism of psychological case histories: “I want the poetic mind applied to case histories so that we read them for what they are: modern forms of fiction, and not scientific reports” (*Soul’s Code* 33).

Even before there are life stories, lives display themselves as images. They ask first to be seen. Even if each image is indeed pregnant with meanings and subject to dissecting analysis, should we jump to the meanings without appreciating the image, we have lost a pleasure that cannot be recovered by the very best of interpretations. We have also taken the pleasure out of the life we are regarding; the display of its beauty has become irrelevant to its [intellectual] meaning. (36)

Story is certainly central to holistic models of writing in general. Another component of holism is the human being him- or herself: a complex amalgam of shadow, enlightenment, pathology, wisdom, stupidity, intellect, intuition, emotion, and so forth. Ignoring any part of one’s inner condition is again to ignore all.

Viktor Frankl and James Hillman: Connecting to a Life Purpose

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl reflects emotion faced honestly and lived consciously by connecting his therapeutic theory, *logotherapy*, to his experiences in Nazi concentration camps. Logotherapy is based on the tenet that human beings are primarily motivated by a will to meaning, in other words, a need to have a sense of meaning in their lives, regardless of the nature or circumstances of these lives. Frankl terms this need as the spiritual component of each human being, that humans are not merely environment, biology, psyche, etc. Essential also to his theory are humor and paradox. Logotherapy also links with existentialism in its contention that human beings are ultimately responsible for all choices made in the transitory moments in which fate steps into life and offers choice.

Frankl's conviction that each human being has a unique meaning towards which he or she is striving ties in with Hillman's "acorn theory," proposed in *The Soul's Code*. Hillman posits that within each human being is a mythical/metaphorical acorn that contains that person's entire character and calling. The acorn, Hillman states, has been called "image, character, fate, genius, calling, daimon, soul, destiny" (10), and he uses all these terms to refer to it. The most important points for my purposes are that Hillman, too, sees a spiritual dimension to this, as well as a mythical dimension. He sees in the acorn, the soul, a mythos for being that manifests itself as a strong sense of calling. By presenting the acorn mythologically, he opens the door to metaphor as a tool and imagination as a mode with which to see the very real invisibles of human existence. And we are very much concerned with invisibles here. They are the basis for respecting

the dark night of the soul or rite of passage that strips a person down to “naked existence” (Frankl 22) and the truth of who he or she is. In addition, such human complexity reinforces a need for a theory of personal writing.

Thomas Moore's Popular Nonfiction: The Importance of Living with Our Shadows

In most discussions of human beings in all their complexity, I've come across the notion of *soul*. *Soul* is used to define, intuit, or even reason out the human condition, and as such, it, too, is discussed as a holistic body. In *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore describes soul-acknowledgement in this manner:

Care of the soul speaks to the longings we feel and to the symptoms that drive us crazy, but it is not a path away from shadow or death. A soulful personality is complicated, multifaceted, and shaped by both pain and pleasure, success and failure. Life lived soulfully is not without its moments of darkness and periods of foolishness. Dropping the salvational fantasy frees us up to the possibility of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are the very foundation of soul. (xvi-xvii)

Moore is not the only psychologist/philosopher to present the soul this way. Hillman, in *Blue Fire*, presents soul as a sort of gathering in of all experience:

Soul involves us in the pack and welter of phenomena and the flow of impressions. It is the “patient” part of us. Soul is vulnerable and suffers; it is passive and remembers. It is water to the spirit's fire, like a mermaid who beckons the heroic spirit into the depths of passions to extinguish its certainty. Soul is imagination, a cavernous treasury—to use an image from St. Augustine—a confusion and richness, both. . . . The cooking vessel of the soul takes in everything, everything can become soul; and by taking into its imagination any and all events, psychic space grows. (122-23)

The central point of these discussions of soul is this: human beings are complex creatures, and some of us live in cultural arenas that deny this complexity and urge us to

do the same. Academia is one such arena. What happens is not a reduction of complexity; rather, it is a reduction of vision; of imagination; of psychic, spiritual, and intellectual health.

Moore, too, is concerned with myth, spirituality, and invisibles in *Care of the Soul*, *Soul Mates*, and *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*. As seen in his quotations above, he considers the soul a very complex entity at the heart of human *being*. He, too, values imagination and paradox as ways of being with our complexity rather than sanitizing or denying it. The approaches of Frankl, Hillman, and Moore validate the invisible; more than this, they emphasize the importance of learning to see the invisible because it undergirds human existence. Invisibles are difficult for academia to deal with, to fit into its traditional framework of research and validation by concrete proof. In the film *Contact*, Ellie, the main character, a scientist who relies only on concrete material proof for validity, is asked by a minister, “Do you love your father?” When she replies, “Yes,” he says, “Prove it.” Frankl, Hillman, Moore, and many others are claiming that evidence exists for the invisibles, but we must learn to see in a different way, with our imaginations, with what our myths (both personal and cultural) tell us, so that we can know our characters and callings in all of their complexity.

Other philosophers and theorists court the invisible as well. Alice Brand demonstrates that feeling underlies writing, and Susanne Langer also comes to this conclusion—that expression and feeling are at the root of human psychology. Langer’s conclusion is paradoxical to her initial theories that emphasize the healthy dominance of reason over myth and emotion (*Philosophy in a New Key*). This is not to say that there is

not value in reason or that Langer comes to such a belief. Rather, there is value in balance and in perceiving feeling, spirit, *soul*.

Philosophers such as Moore and Hillman emphasize the importance of the soul as the seat of all integration—the complexity of the soul. Joseph Campbell's theory of myth also plays an important role here, especially in his concept of the hero's journey (*The Power of Myth*), which Hillman, however, sees as fatalistic. But the hero's journey is not fatalistic in the sense that underlying this myth, from Campbell's perspective, is the message that our dragons are the fears and internalized conventions that hold us back from our callings, our bliss, and that we must see them and know them intimately in order to overcome them. Inherent in Campbell's philosophy is that each of us walks our journey alone in a certain sense, and that this loneliness is natural to being human, a point also made by Hillman and Moore. Instead of ignoring or denying or eradicating loneliness, it is essential within these mythic philosophies to enter the loneliness and embrace it so that it may show us who we are and the nature of our journeys. We can do this through writing that does not censor us. Self-censorship leads to self-abuse and loss of self in any context, but especially in the context of censoring our inherent loneliness and alienating ourselves into "Others."

I think I slipped so well initially into academia because I had learned to translate intuitive impressions into intellectual phraseology (I choose this word deliberately). This is a dance I've danced a long time—expressing my feelings and intuitions almost entirely out of the left brain. As I began connecting more and more again to my intuition, my academic writing felt increasingly dishonest.

I've lived a double life in academia. No room for complete relaxation, the pressure to perform and produce, the inability to feel grounded—creating a persona that publicly will get me through while privately I wonder when I'll crash and burn. I feel restless and irritated, like something's missing. I have intense discussions with friends, private dialogues in my head. I want to escape—feel imprisoned somehow in my fear. I have to pretend in order to show up, and yet there are real moments of connection, satisfaction, integration. I want to be held and protected, but I wonder if that would feed my fear. But this is another opportunity to look at my anxiety—that feeling of being displaced, spaced out, scared, and very young and unprepared. An intense need for comfort and escape. Escape from something that frightens me a great deal yet whose identity eludes me. What is it about academia that feels so wrong and teaching that feels so right?

Tomorrow morning, I will hike in the desert and carry that experience to the university. . . .

I am a nonacademic academic. What I mean by this is that I have the intelligence, training, and skills appropriate to upper academia and to demonstrating scholarly rigor, but I cannot live in the fragmented world of "intellect-only." I feel as if a part of my soul is being crushed every time I try to go back to "that kind" of writing. This was recently reinforced when I tried to write a paper that was solicited by a journal. As I wrote, I felt farther and farther away from myself until, as a writer, I shut down and no more words came.

Do people believe you when you tell them you can no longer do it? Not always. After all, you've demonstrated "appropriate" scholarly writing already; you've even been rewarded with scholarships and fellowships to continue your scholarly metamorphosis. Only, the metamorphosis that takes place removes you from the very end it was supposed to prepare you for. Like Kafka's cockroach (yes, I know, an obvious allusion), you have simultaneously become something familiar and alien—to yourself as well as to others. So at first you try to hide it by hiding yourself, only it bites you in the ass. Once a metamorphosis has occurred, it has occurred. At some point must come acceptance and revelation—and the vulnerability to destructive reactions (including your own). Fear is very much a part of this experience. So is despair. They are the result of an inner life lived in conflict with an outer life, of saying "No" to a soul that insists upon "Yes."

My dragon today is telling me to give up, to let despair take over. It takes advantage of the pain I've been in for several months, of the confusion I feel about my life as a nonacademic academic. More than ever I feel that this is a journey to save my soul, to claim it for myself so it doesn't get chewed up and permanently maimed. This is the level of importance I attach to this journey. I still feel the need to simplify, to back out of all the extras and start over.

Open and Closed Learners: The Art of Being Present to One's Creative Process

Another component of holism is the notion of being an open or a closed learner. By this I mean one who either uses all inner resources at his or her disposal to gather in

experiences (a soulful mindfulness), or one who is closed to all but certain forms of learning and mindfulness. Peter Vaill, in *Learning as a Way of Being*, describes closed learning as “institutional learning,” which “sanitizes and standardizes the learning environment, splitting the difference between the idiosyncracies [*sic*] of individual learners. It prescribes experiences and hopes that they will ‘take’” (96).

Vaill presents three of institutional learning’s “implicit principles” as the following: “that learning is painful, that learning goals are given to us, and that the person setting out to learn is much less admirable than the person who has completed a set amount of learning” (28-29). He finds institutional learning dysfunctional for what he terms “permanent white water” learning situations: “the complex, turbulent, changing environment in which we are all trying to operate” (4). To Vaill, learning as a way of being is about self-awareness—of how one learns, of what is meaningful. One must be a creative learner, an exploratory learner, for which institutional learning leaves no room:

Another word that captures creative learning is *exploration*. Exploratory learning cannot be sure exactly where it is going or how it will know when it has “gotten there,” and that experience captures the reality of the learning situation in permanent white water perfectly. Exploratory learning is in conflict with one of the central canons of the institutional learning model—that in order for effective learning to occur there must be clear learning goals whose degree of attainment can be measured. . . . In creative learning, exploration of the meaningfulness of the goal is *part of the learning itself*. (62)

Open learning involves messiness in connection with clarity, a willingness to be consciously “ignorant” for a while in order to blend thought, emotion, intuition, avocation, etc., in the learning process. Open learning is process rather than procedure,

and this involves a level of faith, another concept that is anathema to rationalism yet that is so central to learning and to holistic writing models:

The mistake we constantly make with creative products, especially as they are presented to us through institutional learning modes, is to assume that the creators had just these products in mind from the beginning. (62)

The faith is a faith in the very process itself; it is not a suspension of disbelief but a validation of the value of the unknown. It is a willingness to allow for all possibilities without preconceiving, and thus limiting, them. Vaill's discussion of the creative/exploratory learner is most valuable in this context because it is an image of holism in learning that can be transferred to writing.

Three themes/areas arise in holistic models of writing: the therapeutic, the journal-process, and the spiritual. All contain the elements discussed above. They demand a negation of dichotomies, a willingness to explore, and a faith in the process itself. Each is a slightly different paradigm from the others; however, they all strive to generate a sense of writing as a holistic process that gathers in and uses all of one's inner resources without devaluing any of them.

A Therapeutic Model of Writing: Alice Brand's Discovery of Healing Through Writing

Therapeutic models of writing emphasize writing's positive effects on emotional health and personal growth. A primary criterion of reaping benefits, however, is to write willingly and often.¹ A proponent of the therapeutic writing model is Alice Brand, who has conducted numerous studies with writers. Her belief is that thinking and feeling are both parts of writing. Her primary objective in *The Psychology of Writing* and "Writing

and Feelings” is to discover what emotions are linked with writing; however, the most important consequence of her research for my purposes is that it demonstrates that emotions are part of the writing process, connected with thought. The relevance of her work is its validation of the emotional (affective) experience related to both writing and thinking, and that if we dismiss the emotions, we dismiss a part of the mental process that goes into writing (or any other activity).

Brand is working in a cultural environment that views the affective experience as negligible, and she wants to correct this perspective. In his foreword to Brand’s *The Psychology of Writing*, Peter Elbow sums this cultural environment up quite well, clearly discussing the problems of the Western institutional learning model as damaging to the discovery aspect of writing:

... one of the important reasons why people are tempted to neglect both invention and feelings is that these two domains are both so messy: so hard to plan, to control, and above all to be *rational* about. In short, the neglect of both invention and feelings represent [*sic*] a bias toward order, control, planning, and system. Alice Brand helps us see this large cultural tilt behind the neglect of feelings: that “mental” *means* “cognitive”; and that when “cognition” *is* affected by feelings it means cognition has gone awry. (xv)

Western thought tends to put the cart before the horse when it denies emotional “messiness.” Within this conceptualization is the implication that emotions are destructive because they resist rational order; however, this is translated to mean that emotions should have no part in the thought or writing process rather than being a necessary part of creative endeavor. Brand expresses it this way:

Emotional origins are private and intangible. Emotions are difficult to isolate and rarely amenable to verification. Science is not applied easily to something so ephemeral and subtle. But the sheer complexity of inquiries

into emotion is not the only reason that such inquiries are without followers. The entire Western world view privileges the cognitive. We are accustomed to disguising, inhibiting, denying our feelings. Owning up to them, with their attendant pejorations is hard enough, much less studying them, the ultimate arrogance. (xx)

Brand claims that we bring an entire history to our writing: a history rich with positive and negative feelings in relation to past writing experiences. She is in effect saying that prior knowledge (a cognitive science term) has an affective as well as cognitive dimension:

In writing, long-term affective memory is composed of all the history of our feelings about writing in general, including feelings about our competence to perform certain writing tasks. The affective “mind-set” guides response to the immediate, idiosyncratic particulars: This three-page essay on *Native Son* at this very 8:07 a.m. in this very English 302 from this very Mr. Merrill smiling at a very tired me. (29-30)

In her earlier work, *Therapy in Writing*, Brand conducts a classroom study with a small group of eighth grade girls and boys. One of the most revealing aspects of this work, however, is not the study itself but the fact that her advisors insist that a narrative/qualitative analysis is not sufficient to report her findings. She is required to do a quantitative analysis, too, which elides discussion of much of the qualitative, affective benefits that certain of her students experienced. Here is the irony of believing that quantitative data are more trustworthy than qualitative. The implication for academics is that what they lose through quantitative expression is essentially immaterial. Where this becomes toxic is in its elision of felt human experience, and such experience is an essential component of humanness, whether in or out of academia. Such a dismissal of this sphere only serves to encourage dissociation of the scholar from his or her own

formative experiences; further, it denies that these experiences have any value in scholarly enterprises.

In her study Brand finds that prolific writing reaps therapeutic benefits, which also implies that the writer must be open and willing—ready to use writing to grow: “It is no coincidence that the students who wrote the most, regardless of occasion, tended to experience the most change” (175). She retains her qualitative analysis to explain this. Brand’s classroom experience reflects the need for an open, nonrigid environment when using writing therapeutically:

Personal-growth writing eludes programming, so I found it almost impossible to plan classes with any precision. It was clearly contrary to my objectives to attempt to predetermine or control the direction of prewriting stimulation, a single writing episode, or any sequence of episodes. Most often, themes that appeared in the students’ journals guided discussion and topic selection for the more formal writing. However, conversation and topics that I initiated frequently led into journal responses. In either direction, I tried to make available for students many avenues, levels of exploration, and forms of expression. . . . (98)

Some of Brand’s inspiration came from psychologists like Carl Rogers, but John Dewey also played an important role in Brand’s creation of her classroom environment. His philosophy of social reform played heavily into Brand’s concept of the open classroom:

Dewey’s theories were laced with notions of social reform with education considered the organic link between raw personal experience and socially responsible behavior. This implied that teachers were responsible for providing an environment rich with opportunities for a fuller, more balanced student growth. (30)

Dewey’s notions as expressed by Brand in no way suggest that “raw personal experience” should be ignored or undermined.

In presenting her theory, Brand confronts a long-standing assumption about writing and cognition: “A basic assumption [of education and cognitive theory] has been that writing in general, but expository discourse in particular, makes a major contribution to cognitive development” (1). Brand does not dismiss this assumption; instead, she advocates an awareness of the affective aspects of writing and mental activity. She also claims that writing has many therapeutic dimensions, including but not limited to catharsis, which is where she branches from expressive theory:

While the act of writing itself involves cognitive more than affective processes, it is generated by a profound network of feelings, urgencies, and impulses. But equally important are the affective ramifications of writing. That is, in the sense that individuals learn to do certain things through language, they acquire certain emotional skills and sensibilities. For example, it may be postulated that because writing refines cognition, the writer becomes more capable of enjoying subtle experiences. Problem solving on paper becomes salutary as writers learn methods that can be applied to the situations of daily living. Fluency in communication may facilitate equivalent gains in self-confidence. At a deeper level, writing enhances awareness; it helps individuals reorganize their inner selves; it contributes to personal integration and self-affirmation. And of course writing has its cathartic effects; it supplies emotional release. Indeed, in a very real way, it may be seen as creating and sustaining personal existence. . . . In truth then, the act of writing proffers broad therapeutic benefits. (1-2)

Writing, to Brand, is growth rather than simply catharsis. Her model conceptualizes writing as an agency of self-awareness/self-expansion instead of an end in itself. Writing in this perspective is always connected to personal development and is a vehicle to further experience rather than merely a result of experiences past.

Susanne Langer's Philosophy of Feeling: *Feeling at the Root of Expression*

Where Brand is working from a psychological base, Susanne Langer looks at the links between feeling and thought from a philosophical perspective with her aesthetic theory. In *Feeling and Form*, Langer clearly sees a connection between artistic forms and feelings, contrary to most aesthetic theories (and again to Western thought) that maintain form and feeling are separate entities:

Feeling is associated with spontaneity, spontaneity with informality or indifference to form, and thus (by slipshod thinking) with *absence* of form. On the other hand, form connotes formality, regulation, hence repression of feeling, and (by the same slipshodness) *absence* of feeling.
(17)

The idea of separation comes from the insistence that a form is simply an objective, external sign; it cannot contain or evoke of its own accord any sort of emotion. However, Langer insists that an artistic form in part contains objective feeling: "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling" (40). Langer is certainly not letting go of reason here, but she is creating a space for feeling that other aesthetic theorists (Northrop Frye, for example) have not. She is not, however, insisting like Croce that aesthetic expression is to be found everywhere. What differentiates artistic representation of feeling is that it is symbolic of feeling rather than merely a sign of feeling; it makes a deliberate attempt to symbolize a human emotional state from within itself. In the following rather lengthy passage, Langer asserts this position:

We may, of course, look for any kind of expression we like, and there is even a fair chance that, whatever it be, we shall find it. A work of art is often a spontaneous expression of feeling, i.e., a symptom of the artist's state of mind. If it represents human beings it is probably also a rendering of some sort of facial expression which suggests the feelings those beings are supposed to have. Moreover, it may be said to "express,"

in another sense, the life of the society from which it stems, namely to *indicate* customs, dress, behavior, and to reflect confusion or decorum, violence or peace. And besides all these things it is sure to express the unconscious wishes and nightmares of its author. All these things may be found in museums and galleries if we choose to note them.

But they may also be found in wastebaskets and in the margins of schoolbooks. This does not mean that someone has discarded a work of art, or produced one when he was bored with long division. It merely means that all drawings, utterances, gestures, or personal records of any sort express feelings, beliefs, social conditions, and interesting neuroses; “expression” in any of these sense is not peculiar to art, and consequently is not what makes for artistic value.

Artistic significance, or “expression of the Idea,” is “expression” in still a different sense and, indeed, a radically different one. In all the contexts mentioned above, the art work or other object functioned as a *sign* that pointed to some matter of fact—how someone felt, what he believed, when and where he lived, or what bedeviled his dreams. But *expression of an idea*, even in ordinary usage, where the “idea” has no capital *I*, does not refer to the signfic function, i.e. the indication of a fact by some natural symptom or invented signal. It usually refers to the prime purpose of language, which is discourse, the presentation of mere ideas. When we say that something is well expressed, we do not necessarily believe the expressed idea to refer to our present situation, or even to be true, but only to be given clearly and objectively for contemplation. Such “expression” is that function of symbols: articulation and presentation of *concepts*. Herein symbols differ radically from signals. A signal is comprehended if it serves to make us notice the object or situation it bespeaks. A symbol is understood when we conceive the idea it presents. (25-26)

One may also note in this passage another point of significant departure on Langer’s part from her older philosophy: She is now clearly asserting that feelings underlie a great deal of human signs and actions

In “Feeling” (from *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Vol. 1), Langer finally makes the claim that feeling is at the root of all human motivation and endeavor: “Feeling, in the broad sense of whatever is felt in any way, as sensory stimulus or inward tension, pain, emotion or intent, is the mark of mentality” (4). Mentality, according to

Langer, is what separates humans from all other life forms—a perceptual/conceptual process that only humans have. Through her philosophical journey in *Philosophy in a New Key*, *Feeling and Form*, and finally *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Langer has arrived at the conclusion that feeling is a literal part of a larger biological process, whether it can actually be quantified or not:

As soon as feeling is regarded as a phase of a physiological process instead of a product (perhaps a by-product) of it, a new entity metaphysically different from it, the paradox of the physical and psychical disappears; for the thesis I hope to substantiate here is that the entire psychological field—including human conception, responsible action, rationality, knowledge—is a vast and branching development of feeling. (23)

Langer delineates how she has found a way through the above paradox:

The question is not one of how a physical process can be transformed into something non-physical in a physical system, but how the phase of being felt is attained, and how the process may pass into unfelt phases again, and furthermore how an organic process in “psychical phase” may induce others which are unfelt. Such problems, even if far from solved, are at least coherent with the rest of biological inquiry and logically capable of solution. . . . The proposed new concept of feeling, furthermore, permits a new way of construing the greater concept of mind. Instead of accepting “mind” as a metaphysically ultimate reality, distinct from the physical reality which subsumes the brain, and asking how the two can “make liason,” one may hope to describe “mind” as a phenomenon in terms of the highest physiological processes, especially those which have psychical phases. That is the purpose of this book. (29)

Langer clearly has remained in the realm of biological materialism to produce this thesis, and the thesis has its limitations in its very need to justify feeling at all as part of the human condition. However, she sees no other option for validating human feeling, one of the ironic limitations of biological materialism (i.e., even though it's there in my own experience, if I cannot prove it as a physical entity of some sort, can it really

exist?—quite a quandary). In actuality, however, Langer is accurately assessing the rationalistic tenor of Western cognitive and epistemological theories. So much emphasis is placed on reason and intellect as the only truly valid aspects of human thought and knowledge that feeling does need to be proven as a necessary component thereof.

The Journal-Process Writing Model

What I term the *journal-process* writing model is most clearly represented by texts such as *Writing Down the Bones* and *The Artist's Way*. These works call on people to write for themselves by creating writers' journals of their own. Another quality of this model is that the writers of such texts offer tips to other writers to help them write. The emphasis is not on perfection of technique or on publication; rather, it is on getting stuck writers to simply get used to writing, to loosen up their rigidity and break through fear and writer's block. An essential function of both works is to compose without concern for quality of content or presentation.

Natalie Goldberg's Model: Trusting the Writing Process

In *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg emphasizes the importance of writing without the need for perfection. She tells a wonderful story about a conversation she has with her neighbor, whom she invites to read her old journals:

I pile them on her stairs . . . and leave for Norfolk, Nebraska, for four days to do a writing workshop. When I return she looks at me oddly, plunks herself down in the old pink chair in my bedroom: "I've been reading your notebooks all weekend. They are so intimate; so scared, insecure for pages, then suddenly they are not you—just raw energy and wild mind. And now here you are—Natalie—in the flesh, just a person. It

feels so funny.” I feel good because I don’t care that she sees how I really am. I’m glad. I want someone to know me. We walk through so many myths of each other and ourselves; we are so thankful when someone sees us for who we are and accepts us.

She said it was empowering to read my notebooks because she realized that I really did write “shit,” sometimes for whole notebooks. Often I tell my students, “Listen, I write and still write terrible self-pitying stuff for page after page.” They don’t believe me. Reading my notebooks is living proof of that. My upstairs neighbor said, “If you could write the junk you did then and write the stuff you do now, I realize I can do anything. There’s so much power in the mind. I feel like who knows what I can do!” She said the main thing she saw in the notebooks—whole notebooks of complaints, boring description, and flagrant anger—was an absolute trust in the process. “I saw that you kept on writing even when you wrote, ‘I must be nuts to do this.’” (16-17)

Goldberg’s point is that one writes to write, not to worry about how well or poorly one is conceptualizing, and this is what leads writers to effective public writing. Write freely, learning to let go of constraints on one’s process. Here are her “rules” for this way of writing:

1. *Keep your hand moving.* (Don’t pause to reread the line you have just written. That’s stalling and trying to get control of what you’re saying.)
2. *Don’t cross out.* (That is editing as you write. Even if you write something you didn’t mean to write, leave it.)
3. *Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar.* (Don’t even care about staying within the margins and lines on the page.)
4. *Lose control.*
5. *Don’t think. Don’t get logical.*
6. *Go for the jugular.* (If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.)

These are the rules. It is important to adhere to them because the aim is to burn through to first thoughts, to the place where energy is unobstructed by social politeness or the internal censor, to the place where you are writing what your mind actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see or feel. . . . (8)

Goldberg’s style is inviting, forthright, honest, creating a comfort zone for readers who want to write. This is an important element of journal-process texts. They invite the

reader in to participate as a writer in his or her own right. Goldberg's very unconcern with her journal writing's quality models to readers a way to approach their own writing without embarrassment. I have found that this works exceptionally well with my students, especially the ones who are highly fearful of writing. When they feel safe to risk and explore, their writing blossoms.

I have another journal in which I pour my feelings out—the struggle, the frustration, the fear—all the garbage that loads up in a depression. That is a separate and sacred space, in which I don't always try to be rational. Some of its pages I burn because they are only holding eruptions that live for a single moment—the words are bare and bladed, meant to carve and dice an experience or person into tiny pieces. This journal in which I now write is a sacred space, too. But here the object is to create the distance I need to express chronic depression in the context of my life. The audience for these words is more public. This is the irony of personal, even deeply personal, public writing. Although it is intimate, its intimacy is "publicly appropriate," like the difference between hugging and kissing my lover at the airport and making love with him later.

So the personal is multifaceted. I share my experience with you, but I don't make you watch it. I don't want you to watch it. When I am full of upheaval, I seek solitude. I don't want observers unless they are the few safe people to whom I can come regardless of how I feel. Yet I will acknowledge here that I experience upheaval, depression, anxiety, terror. These are not the only emotions I feel, but they have sometimes been frequent visitors.

I remember how writing was first, above all else, a mystical experience for me, how the edicts of my soul were honored in the words I placed upon the page. I will forever remember the first lines I wrote that kicked off an intense and lengthy period of journalistic poetry when I was 14:

*“Circles
lit with candles. . . .”*

I don't even know if I have the entire poem any longer, but those words have been with me for over 20 years. There is mysticism even in their image—ceremony, ritual, symbol, privacy—a private area somewhere of worship, of soul. I sustained myself through one of the darkest periods of my life, initiated the act of sustainment, with the words, “Circles / lit with candles.”

I have this image, this script, in my mind of a self who is mellow, peaceful, consistently centered, and my mind gets pissed at me when I'm not—or I get pissed at my mind when it's not. Semantics, but powerful semantics. My step-father suggests that there is a perfect “I” at the center of me, and that this “I” is always perfect. It's my mind and body that grow restless and frightened. So I honor that concept more as I talk with myself, but sometimes the semantics shut me down as I write. But it's helpful to write that my mind feels depressed or my body feels depressed because it moves away from the full identification with depression that occurs when I write “I feel depressed.”

I write all this and worry about the reactions of others—a habit that does my mind no good in its search for serenity. But there is much ostracism directed at personal writing. Ostracism from the academy that personal writing does not demonstrate a

disciplined mind—staunch left brain reining in the chaotic right like two platonic steeds. Although I have a strong and active mind, I have never claimed to have a consistently disciplined one. Every time I've tried to discipline it consistently, it has balked like an irate mule and refused to move. Ostracism from "society" at large—an over-generalization, since I know many people who read this stuff—for being "too confessional"—doing that nasty act of airing one's dirty laundry (or private undergarments). But it's either private undergarments or privation.

The subjective is uncomfortable, I think, to institutionalized thought of any kind. A metaphorical glass ceiling or wall exists between the self and the world of institutionalized thought; such thought is canned thought: it must fit the description of institutional reality and can only do this by staying out of contact with the real world outside the walls. Abstracted theory instead of blood, sweat, and tears. Exploring this issue in a dissertation, my academic mind tells me, is a contradiction in terms, yet I keep writing because I think my mind lies to me sometimes.

Julia Cameron's Way: Listening to Your Own Voice

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron offers other tips for beginning and blocked writers. The two most emphasized are "artists' dates" and "morning pages." The artist's date is simply making time for oneself each week to do something pleasurable alone, such as taking two hours to walk a beach or visit a museum. The main point is to learn to listen to yourself and to what inspires and delights you. Morning pages are simply three pages of freewriting that Cameron recommends writers do each day, first thing in the

morning (even if it involves getting up an hour earlier than they have been used to doing). Her theory is that this freewriting gets all the “junk” of our minds out on paper, freeing us for creativity:

The morning pages are the primary tool of creative recovery. As blocked artists, we tend to criticize ourselves mercilessly. Even if we look like functioning artists to the world, we feel we never do enough and what we do isn't right. We are victims of our own internalized perfectionist, a nasty internal and eternal critic, the Censor, who resides in our (left) brain and keeps up a constant stream of subversive remarks that are often disguised as the truth. The Censor says wonderful things like: “You call that writing? What a joke. You can't even punctuate. If you haven't done it by now you never will. You can't even spell. What makes you think you can be creative?” And on and on. (11)

I watch my developmental writing students agonize and obsess over their misspellings and grammatical errors. Yes, there are many, but they skip from composing (in pain) directly to proofreading without playing with their ideas at all. These high-school seniors have been well trained to consider themselves poor writers because they can't spell or punctuate; they don't understand that what has really crippled them as writers is that they've been driven to fear of putting anything on paper at all.

They look at me resentfully on the first day of class, tough expressions on their faces—toughing out their doubt, fear, boredom. The only thing that works is to stay present and patient and to let them write, and write, and write in a completely safe environment. Like Goldberg and Cameron, I tell them not to worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation when they first compose—to just get the words on paper. By the sixth week, many of them are spontaneously writing essays, and I feel awed by their creation.

Lynn Nelson and Process Pedagogy: Moving from Private to Public with Integrity

A text that takes the journal-process model directly into the classroom is G. Lynn Nelson's *Writing and Being*. Nelson shares pieces of his own and others' journal writing and again offers tips to writers to get them going. One of the more useful aspects of his model for the classroom is his discussion of the slow movement from private to public writing to encourage his students to begin from themselves, composing without concern for presentation, and gradually work their writing into public documents that have been revised and edited. What emerge from this process are powerful public pieces that still contain their authors' souls and stories. Nelson states up front that his book is "about *people writing*" rather than writing divorced from the human being who writes:

This is not a book about writing. This is a book about *people writing*. It is about writing as a tool for intellectual, psychological, and spiritual growth. It is about our language and our being and their powerful interconnectedness, which have often been taken away from us without our even knowing what we have lost. This book is about taking back the miraculous gift of our language and using it as "an instrument of creation." (8)

He continues by emphasizing the destructiveness of writing when it is divorced from writers in the classroom:

To talk about writing apart from the people who do it, apart from their being, is to put writing in a small box and remove the wonder and the magic and the power from it. For the instructor, it is to play sad little games with language—circling misspelled words and dangling participles, making students feel small and stupid, and turning them away from the power of their own words. (9)

Each of these writers is speaking from his or her experience, and they do this out of a conviction that such sharing creates a connection with their readers. Nelson, for example, writes of being a frustrated, controlling teacher until he and his wife were put

by life into a situation in which they took children with special needs into their home. What he learned from this formative experience was humility, that he always has more to learn. This taught him a great deal as a teacher, opening him up to ever new ways of seeing and being. Now, his first, most important message is that language is a gift. His experience has shaped his writing and teaching, and he remains aware of this.

Spiritual Models of Writing: Knowing Where We Come From

When speaking of the spiritual, I am referring to a person's inner landscape and how that interior responds to a sense of calling and interacts with self and community. My discussion of the spiritual is not about pulling church and state together; it's not about organized religion. The spiritual is an integral element of any human being's life. It is complex, with shadows and pathologies as well as enlightened awarenesses.

The spiritual is invisible but clearly manifests itself in our thoughts, feelings, actions, intuitions, and impulses. When we dismiss the spiritual, we dismiss a web of interiors from which we are motivated and from which we act. It is not the psyche, the emotions, or the intellect; it is the place of soul, far deeper and more complex than these other aspects of humanness. It is where we meet up with ourselves, stripped to the bone, affected and molded by our experiences, dreams, fears, insanities, strengths, and limitations: an uncomfortable area to roam around in at times, and one easily dismissed by a materialistic culture.

If one is looking for a "spiritual model" of writing, such a model evades clear categorization, and yet it is out there. Its elements include a sense of soul, connection

with community and place, a feeling of *calling*, a healthy respect for personal integrity and integration, a strong notion of story, and a validation of the meditative (i.e., standing still at the center of oneself). Many writers, such as Thomas Keating and G. Douglas Atkins, write about the dark night of the soul, following in the footsteps of writers such as seventeenth-century poet Andrew Marvel.

The Dark Night of the Soul: Self-Discovery Through Annihilation of the Familiar

As a formative experience, the dark night of the soul is perhaps the most profound yet difficult to articulate to those who have not yet walked through one. The term *night* is usually metaphorical, as such a passage is often a matter of years rather than hours.

I sit with one of my students, a handsome young man in his early twenties. He looks at me and apologizes before even beginning to explain why he disappeared for two weeks. Gradually, a story unfolds—a story that is now quite familiar to me. He tells me that about three weeks previously, everything in his life fell apart; there was no area untouched by massive and traumatic changes and endings. We talk about how it feels to have a tidal wave wash through our lives or the metaphorical carpet pulled from under our feet. He tells me, “I don’t know anything anymore,” and I understand and feel his fear.

His life and world are now gray, full of questions; his spirit still quakes from the relentless endings he has just walked through. We talk some more, about how not knowing is okay. I tell him that the first thing I needed to understand when I went through such an experience was that I no longer clearly understood anything, and that

that's okay. It's not a mark of insanity. He looks at me with relief and tells me that he was afraid he was going crazy, that something was wrong with him.

We discuss also the feeling of having a thin veil drawn between you and the rest of the world, as if, although you remain in the same world you are somehow separated from everything in it. You cannot simply sit down with someone and talk about it, or that person might look askance at you, not understanding what you mean. He speaks of the irony of having commented to a friend just a month before how lucky he had been not to have to experience any major trauma in his life, that things were flowing smoothly. His face is both awed and horrified at how quickly that changed and at how unprepared he feels for dealing with it.

How does one deal with no longer knowing anything clearly? All I can really tell him is that he's not alone; he's not the only person who has gone through this. I tell him also that he will meet up with other people who have experienced a dark night of the soul; I'm speaking from faith and experience, but my faith is strong, and my experience I cannot dismiss. I've walked that dark passage; the walk is long, and I never would have volunteered for it, though I no longer regret it.

Such a deepening of who one is is not without its terror. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian priest, monk, and abbot, writes in *Invitation to Love* about the dark night of the soul from a Christian point of view. However, the experiences he describes apply universally. Keating's message is that one must meet oneself honestly in order to shed the trappings and expectations of the ego that can actually limit one's growth:

The direction [of a personal spiritual journey], at least initially, is toward a confrontation with our motivations and unconscious emotional programs

and responses. Our spiritual journey does not start with a clean slate. We carry with us a prepackaged set of values and preconceived ideas which, unless confronted and redirected, will soon scuttle our journey, or else turn it into pharisaism, the occupational hazard of religious and spiritual people. (5)

Keating describes this “prepackaged” self as the “false self,” one that is distracted, ego-directed, and caught within many constraints. The dark night of the soul, as described here, has two stages: the night of sense and the night of spirit. In the night of sense, what we see ourselves and our lives as is directly shattered. In the night of spirit, our feeling of god-connectedness disappears, removing the last residue of the ego-based false self as we are forced into faith that a spiritual connection still exists. We are faced with many temptations, which Keating universalizes as fear, envy, anger, and so forth. This is not literally a journey about refusing to walk on water in order to prove oneself, and yet metaphorically it is. We are asked to stand still in the present with, for example, our fears, and learn what they are. It is a sort of “purification”:

In religious circles there is a cliché, that describes the divine purification as “a battering from without and a boring from within.” God goes after our accumulated junk with something equivalent to a compressor and starts digging through our defense mechanisms, revealing the secret corners that hide the unacceptable parts of ourselves. We may think it is the end of our relationship with God. Actually, it is an invitation to a new depth of relationship with God. A lot of emptying and healing has to take place if we are to be responsive to the sublime communications of God. The full transmission of divine life cannot come through and be fully heard if the static of the false self is too loud. (17)

From the religious, we can move to the secular with G. Douglas Atkins, who describes in *Estranging the Familiar* his dark night of the soul as a man and a teacher. He relates his experience to *The Odyssey*:

Understanding *The Odyssey* as the story of interior life, of suffering and change wrought by that suffering, makes it difficult to keep it at arm's length, safely distanced from your own life. I am suggesting how the story has provided a structure for shaping events in one person's life, helping me to understand myself better. My own experience, in turn, helps me better to understand *The Odyssey*. (138)

On one level, Atkins, throughout his entire text, is making the point that literature, essays, theories—stories—can connect reciprocally with personal experience. This is primarily through the formative experiences that take place as revelatory awareness, often painful and terrifying. Atkins describes himself as, for many years, a man focused only on his work, at the expense of his family relationships and personal life in general. He formed no relationships with self or community, preferring to distance himself from any personal involvement—even in his work with literature. In fact, his scholarly work allowed him to split himself in a very toxic way: he focused only on the intellectual and was therefore unprepared for the personal trauma that finally beset his life.

Atkins relates his dark night experience with suicidal despair the week before Christmas 1982. He had been accused by another scholar of plagiarizing in his first book and was up on charges. The trauma that this induced was in part so profound because he was not yet connected to anything but his work; he had to “lose” his work to gain his life. Again, in retrospect he relates himself to Odysseus:

For some of us, less proud and egoistic, an encounter with death and nothingness may be unnecessary. But others of us, less fortunate, like Odysseus and me, seem unable to respect and love before and apart from some such transformative encounter. I think of G.K. Chesterton: you know nothing until you know *nothing*. Odysseus emerges from his encounter with nothingness a changed man. So did I. (138)

One night, Atkins is sitting as usual alone in his study. His marriage is, in essence, over; he has no one to turn to and is struck with despair until a transforming moment occurs:

Face to face with nothingness, I drew back, wet with sweat, terrified, aware as never before of both vulnerability and emptiness. And at that moment, I *let go*, releasing my death grip on the idol I had worshiped. I faced, and fully admitted, the possibility of failure. I think I was then born as a person, no longer first and foremost a scholar, critic, professor. . . . I have never before or since felt such a strong sense of self-worth, accompanied by humility, a combination almost mystical in formula. (143-44)

The power of this experience has a quality of ineffability: not literally quantifiable, yet certain and immediate enough to transform a person's identity and approach to life.

Soul Stories: Connection to Sacred Work

Some stories reveal a person's sense of soul through their connection to work and the stories they tell of their work. Mary Rose O'Reilley and Parker J. Palmer write spiritual-autobiographical stories of teaching. Matthew J. Fox writes about work as needing to be central to one's calling, integrated wholly with one's life. These writers do not offer writing tips; instead, they model spiritual writing through their own writing.

Mary Rose O'Reilley: Learning the Value of Silence in Teaching

In "Silence and Slow Time," O'Reilley emphasizes the importance of listening and being present for inner insights. She is asking, ". . . how do we teach people who are profoundly, and even stubbornly, spiritual beings? I think we assume that spiritual beings is the last thing they are (because it is perhaps the last thing they will let us

know)” (135). Later in the article, she tells a beautiful story that helps answer this question:

I heard a student talking the other day about the difference between two sociology professors. “I love Professor Jones. He lectures from the moment he enters the room, without ever looking at his notes. You really get your money’s worth in there. I don’t know about Professor Smith. Sometimes you ask him a question and he looks out the window for awhile before he answers.”

I think this student has confused education with the drive-through line at McDonald’s but can you blame him? For so has Professor Jones.

Yesterday, by contrast, I was sitting in the twilight, staring out my window, hoping for spiders, when it slowly dawned on me that a student was standing in the doorway, and that she had been standing there for quite some time. She knew precisely the moment when I became aware of her and how much time to let pass before crossing the threshold. She wanted to talk about poetry. I think she already knew a lot about it. (138-39)

In *The Peaceable Classroom*, O’Reilly weaves her and others’ stories into a spiritual narrative of teaching. She begins by relating personal writing to choosing the stories one wants to live by, the various realities one uses to order existence:

There was a country-western song that went, “We live in a two-story house / She has her story and I have mine.” Personal writing leads us to see multiple levels in the house of truth: we deal in versions of reality. We settle on a story we can live with, not only because it’s hard to be honest but also because our minds keep trying to create order. Order, as any freshman writer knows, requires us to craft a beginning, middle, and end, with transitional devices in place to ensure coherence. Organization, then, always violates, to some degree, the Real. Any version—any story, poem, or argument—frames reality in its own terms, and they are likely to be terms that serve our ego—or terms that save our sanity. (10)

O’Reilly’s purpose with this book is to offer up the experience of creating a classroom situation in which community can be peacefully formed. Such a community incorporates differences as natural to itself. This begins with inner awareness, on the part

of teachers and students, and it must be encouraged in a classroom setting that permits honest connection:

First of all, as teachers in the humanities, we encourage students to explore the inner life. . . . At what point do they stumble on an inner life? When do they discover the questions of the heart and the leadings of the intuition? . . . Our second goal should be to help the student bring his subjective vision into community. . . . The classroom, then, must be a meeting place for both silent meditation and verbal witness, of interplay between interiority and community. (32)

What O'Reilley has discovered is that "good teaching is, in the classical sense, therapy: good teaching involves reweaving the spirit. (Bad teaching, by contrast, is soul murder)" (47). She came to a critical moment in her teaching career that began an uncomfortable exploration of herself: "One year, I discovered that I had begun to hate students" (64). Her despair taught her to listen and think carefully about why she was a teacher, to discover the spiritual centrality of teaching:

. . . I stay in teaching because all the models we have for spiritual process—religious, mythic, what have you—tell us that it doesn't matter whether we are right or wrong or successful but merely that we remain faithful to a vision. And that when it's easy, it isn't worth much. Let me repeat and rephrase: because teaching is some kind of spiritual inquiry, what we learn is more important than what *they* learn. (72)

However, in this spiritual process, she also comes to respect her students' places (inner and outer) of spirituality. She relates such a learning situation that takes place with one of her students:

I once taught a gifted young writer who lived in the Milwaukee inner city. He wrote as precisely and enchantedly about grass and bugs as does Annie Dillard. "How do you know these things?" I asked him one day. "Oh, there was a freeway overpass near my house, with this little patch of grass . . . I would lie there day after day. . . ." Whatever spiritual sites our students visit are worthy of respect, though their choices might differ from

ours. . . . The inner world is what literature is all about. Why have we forgotten that? (79)

Parker J. Palmer: The Teacher Is Taught by the Teaching Process

Palmer connects spirituality with teaching in ways similar to O'Reilly. He, too, writes of beginning to understand how important self-knowledge is before one can be an honest teacher, encouraging self-discovery in others. He also feels himself a part of many communities wherein he is always learning through teaching. *To Know as We Are Known*, Palmer's first book, though written from an admittedly Christian perspective, initiates his insistence on integration of one's whole self in one's teaching and work, a complex undertaking. He tells us that his first perspective of thinking was a violent approach to learning: "For many years I regarded thinking as a kind of board game in which we move the pieces around until we have solved the problem, placing the pieces in patterns that allow us to 'win'" (3). He continues, "I was distanced and alienated from the world around me; too many parts of it became pawns in my game, valued only for how they might help me win" (4). Here, dispassionate knowledge is the culprit; dispassion is too neutral and uninvolved to empathize with the consequences of one's discoveries and actions, disturbingly pathological.

Palmer is almost killed in a car accident one day. He has stopped to change a flat tire, and a car hits the car he's working on, pinning him beneath it. His wife asks for strength and somehow lifts the car from his body, saving his life. This brush not so much with death as with faith causes him to begin to open up to a way of learning based on

love and connection, a spiritual, communal way of knowing, even containing biblical connotations:

The goal of a knowledge arising from love is the reunification of broken selves and worlds. A knowledge born of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world to itself. The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds. (8)

Admitting our “brokenness” can be extremely threatening for most of us.

Western society does not easily allow room for any inward searching that may disrupt production; this is apparent in academia. Yet academia can be a context rich with self-discovery as one discovers a variety of perspectives and approaches to life (much like Atkins finally experienced with *The Odyssey*). But such a context needs to be far more holistic than it usually is, a notion Palmer explores when he relates his sense of spirituality to education:

Education would not be necessary if things were as they seem. To go beyond appearances, education relies on fact and reason—on the capacity of science to dissect the world into its component parts, on the capacity of the mind to see the relation of these parts in rational orders. Prayer and analysis do not end up at the same point; where analysis aims at breaking the world into its elements, prayer aims at seeing beyond the elements into their underlying relatedness. But both prayer and analysis seek to make the world transparent. In this sense the school as well as the monastery engages in a contemplative discipline of formation.

Finally, educational institutions have a clear counterpart to the communal discipline of spiritual life. The whole culture of the academic community with its system of rewards and punishments works to shape our views of self and world. In fact, the rules and relationships of a school comprise a “hidden curriculum” which can have greater formative power over the lives of learners than the curriculum advertised in the catalogue. A business school may offer courses in team management and collective

work styles, but if the culture of that school requires students to survive those courses through competition, then competition and not cooperation is the real lesson taught and learned. (19-20)

Palmer is not trying to advertise education as a churchly enterprise in terms of separation of church and state; however, he is drawing correlations that are not easily dismissed. His point is epistemological, that “the shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living; the relation of the knower to the known becomes the relation of the living self to the larger world” (21). He further develops this into the later statement that “the ethic of Christian personalism becomes an epistemology of participation and accountability” (51). Palmer’s Christian context does not have to threaten academic notions of inquiry and integrity when it is understood as a part of his story from which valuable insights stem. He is really discussing a sense of knowing and truth that is reciprocal and relational, based on opening oneself to “otherness”:

Personal truth applies to the study of nature and inanimate objects as well. Do I mean that earth and rocks and trees and animals are persons themselves, capable of speaking to us? Of course not—when we approach them with our senses and logic alone. Then they are only things. But when we approach them in awareness of ourselves as whole persons who are communally implicated with soil and squirrels and such, then we are able to know these nonhuman beings as co-participants in the community of truth. By relating to them in the fullness of our own personhood we allow them in all their muteness to speak to us as persons, to “discover and plumb” us in a knowing that makes us accountable to their interests and needs. (62-63)

Matthew Fox and Sacred Work: How to Connect with Community

Matthew Fox’s *The Reinvention of Work* is centered within what he terms “creation spirituality,” involving a self-responsibility that generates communal

responsibility. His main point is that work is (or should be) sacred; it should not be a job separate from the rest of one's life, or it will be toxic. Good work, according to Fox, emerges from a soul-sense of calling and gives back to one's community:

Good living and good working go together. Life and livelihood ought not to be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of contributing to the greater community. A spirituality of work is about bringing life and livelihood back together again. And Spirit with them. . . . Work is a part of our display, part of the parading of our beauty. It is the way we return our beauty to the community, and this is important both to the individual and to the community. (1-2)

Healing is also a part of this, as is mysticism, and we can look to artists as today's "radical thinkers" (mystics), who pull in intuition and a cosmological world view through their responses to callings. Fox explains what he means by mystics who can teach us about integrating work and the rest of our lives:

Mystics constitute some of the most radical thinkers we have. Why is this? Because they think in a context of awe and wonder, out of the experiential and right hemisphere of the brain and not just in terms of analysis and utilitarianism. They think in the context of a living cosmology and not merely from an anthropocentric, psychological, or sociological perspective. (11-12)

Fox also addresses unhappiness with work in a sobering way: "There must be a reason more heart attacks occur between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. on Monday mornings than at any other time during the week. There is; it is returning to work that one hates" (14). He suggests that we can find a way to connect our inner calling with external work demands through creativity, "working for the sake of working." By this he does not mean working ourselves to death in meaningless endeavors to earn a paycheck; what he does mean is

working with creative joy, finding fulfillment in the work itself rather than in its end-product—and thereby often creating wondrous end-products:

The *via creativa* . . . teaches us that work is indeed our way of creating, of birthing our deepest images. Our deepest contribution to the community lies in that to which we give birth. Along with its anti-mystical bias, the machine-dominated civilization has denigrated the value of creativity. We valued only what could be done by the eyes—quantifying and reading and writing. But we undervalued the things the heart can know and do, including the work of creativity that emerges from the heart's experiences of both awe and ecstasy, grief and nothingness. . . . (117)

The *via creativa* that Fox describes emerges from our complex interiors as a coalescence of each individual. In such a context, according to Fox, work can be simultaneously a serious and playful engagement of the whole self.

All This and Writing, Too

As a process that can represent either self-integration or fragmentation, writing fits the bill. The models and theories discussed in this chapter show how connections can be created within the self and between self and community. In any public writing situation, including academia, these connections are essential for the production of intelligent, insightful, and meaningful written works.

If we can validate and bring to writing feelings, thoughts, spiritual underpinnings, analysis, and intuitiveness, we can create rich, integrated writing that speaks to the whole person rather than only to a fragment of the person. A holistic approach to writing encourages the release of and from dichotomies that create the illusion that only one form of expression or writing is appropriate in the academic context. Intelligent perception,

then, becomes organic, alive, concrete even in its abstractions instead of bound to one rigid form. And the forms appreciated in academia do not have to be discarded; rather, they can be integrated into a fuller pattern of expression.

Many writers of literary nonfiction attest through their work to a notion of holism in writing, combining professional and personal insights and experiences. They create places of connection for their readers, and they show how intellectual, emotional, and spiritual insights can be blended to represent a number of environments, scenarios, and experiences. In the next chapter, I will discuss some essayists and their representative texts in order to show how the essayistic tradition can be a model of holism.

Notes

¹Expressive writing, as seen in the last chapter, was perceived by its advocates to have therapeutic effects and can be viewed as a therapeutic model of writing.

Chapter 4

The Essay as a Site for Integration

By keeping the stories fresh, I keep the places themselves alive in my imagination.
Scott Russell Sanders, 4

Expressive discourse has an important place inside academia as well as outside of it. It offers a new language for academics about the use of story: myth and metaphor—connection. Writing in its expressive form can bridge intuition, intellect, and soul (calling). The seeds of a spiritual discourse are born here. Writing as process and as container can flexibly integrate right- and left-brained perception (Brand, Elbow, Hillman). Spiritual-therapeutic models of writing bridge to formal academic models of writing and create an integrated form of writing that avoids dissociation. I use the terms *dissociate* and *dissociative* frequently and with great seriousness. They designate for me the split between the right and left brain, between thought and writing as they really take place and as they are “professionally” presented in academia. But it goes deeper: the terms represent for me the separation of personal from professional that is perceived as effective functioning in one's professional context, the split between visible and invisible, between perceptions of myth and reason. This split ties in with the notion of scientific approaches to academic professionalism.

A Theory of the Essay

The essay eludes conclusive categorization, sometimes diagnosed like an illness, showing symptoms of a variety of genres; this may be part of its allure. It can be referred to as a component of literary nonfiction:

Carl Klaus points out . . . that *essay* is a very slippery term historically and theoretically, but we might say in general . . . that the essay is reflective and exploratory and essentially personal. Its purpose is not to convey information, although it may do that as well, but rather to tell the story of the author's thinking and experience. (Anderson ix-x)

It can also be defined metaphorically:

. . . it resists easy definition (of itself, its subject matter, its “conclusions”), avoids coming to rest in some positive truth or absolute knowledge, remains wary of systems and systematizing, and not only acknowledges but also embraces and even celebrates the uncertainty and ambiguity that deconstruction tirelessly reveals all about us. (Atkins 10)

One of the issues that comes out of the dissociative split between objective and subjective is the distancing that often occurs between the scholarly writer and his/her readership (even fellow experts). Often, a highly objective tone can completely dehumanize the writer, which is particularly senseless in the humanities. What is the point of studying expressions of being human when one completely separates one's own humanness from the process? In such an atmosphere:

Impersonal force replaces creative personality. The fallible, fumbling, bungling, engaged human voice gives way to the “beauty” of conceptual design. And crabbed sentences, made of barely legible phrases and awkward neologisms, yet somehow reflective of “syntax that forms a solid and respectably sane frame around a verbal lunacy”—these now draw the praise once reserved for grace, elegance, and eloquence. (Atkins 66)

G. Douglas Atkins provides an important theoretical model because his theorizing comes from his experience, and he sees the connection between his professional and

personal life. He maintains that it is not theory that is sterile and lifeless but the form in which it is often presented:

It is not, in any case, my professional life on which I wish to dwell but the “interior life,” which in my case has been deeply affected and shaped by theory. Here the professional and the personal come together, as feminists insist they always should. To a large degree, theory deserves credit for significant changes in the person I am. It has altered the way I perceive and respond to people and events, the way I comport myself, the values I hold, the truths I give myself to, my very reasons for living. Theory has, in short, taught me what it is often thought to deny, threaten, and even to destroy: what it means to be human. (149)

An important aspect of the essay is its organic nature. The organic connectedness of the essay “is, as a matter of fact, as respectful of the reader, language, and form as it is of the earth and the creatures that populate it. There is, in other words, represented in much of this writing stewardship of both land and language” (Atkins 23). Atkins’ words imply the inquiry process when he states that the essay is “more interested . . . in the journey, in journeying, than in any destination finally reached” (24). The importance of this *journey* metaphor is that it reflects the idea of *process*, lending the essay further value to writers who are experiencing the messiness of their own process.

W. Ross Winterowd defines some essays as presentational literature, their persuasive nature having “a formative effect on attitude. Three reasons for this potency are the presence that characterizes presentational texts, the form that predominates in them, and their ability to create identification” (45). Presentational essays are closest in form to the type of essay I advocate for academia. Herein lie the seeds for the essay’s connection to community as well as to self-understanding. By its nature, the essay is

holistic and important to a holistic approach to personal/community integration in writing. It does this partly through what Winterowd calls *presence*:

Presence, that property that gives arguments status, vividness, and “extralogical” power, seems to have three aspects. First, the act of attention confers presence; that is, whatever we pay attention to in a text gains presence. Second, images create presence. Third, presence is conferred by holism. (45-46)

This is not to say that the informal essay is carelessly put together; on the contrary, it can be astonishingly lyrical, informative, and persuasive, particularly from the stances of ethos and pathos, complementing the traditional academic focus on logos. “To fault the essays because their author follows leads other than the logical is to miss the whole point of these prose lyrics, which advance by what might be called anecdotal progression” (Winterowd 112).

Versatility can make the essay anathema to academic notions of scholarship, yet the same characteristic models the nature of true inquiry. Not being able to separate the essay from life forces the writer to see the connections between his or her experiences and conceptual expressions. It creates a political act of integration. Herein lies one irony of the essay’s role as academic “stepchild,” used as a stylistic model in freshman composition classrooms but rarely found in academic journals (more is the shame). Yet it has a place in academic criticism:

. . . the essay provides the form, as well as the history and so the encouragement, for the practice of a criticism culturally engaged as well as socially and politically responsible. It is as hard to refrain from cultural critique as from personal expression when one writes an essay. (Atkins 14-15)

Atkins sees the essay as combining the personal and the aesthetic: “restoring, or returning to, the personal without sacrificing artistic control” (xi). His perspective expands beyond Chris Anderson’s and Winterrowd’s to create a more holistic context: “You can’t separate the essay from life. . .” (xii). The essay, within this context, can close gaps between genres through its “protean and loose character” (5). It models a *process of discovery and integration through invention, and academia's privileging the article over the essay* creates a loss. “The essay not merely allows for but actually celebrates—indeed is characterized by—surprise, interruption, meandering, and slow discovery” (6). And it shows “a dialectical spirit of inquiry and exploration” (6), aspects also central to a rich and meaningful learning process. The essay is flexible and versatile:

. . . the essay, historically and generically . . . has opposed . . . all forms of packaged thinking. . . . In its resistance to forms of totalitarianism, its respect for diversity, heterogeneity, and impurity, the essay can represent a significant critique of what Adorno calls administrative thinking. It also (thereby?) offers an implicit critique of professionalism. (Atkins 15)

A further value of the essay is its connection to everyday life in a manner that maintains integrity between the writer and his or her words. In becoming public, the essay becomes a political act of integration between writer and community. The personal essay doesn't usually end up in the bedroom, even if people fear it will; even if the deeply personal is shared:

[The essayist] speaks to you . . . as someone known, recognized, familiar. The familiarity bred is, however, neither quick nor vampish: as in all good, effective, loving relationships the essayist preserves an identity while allowing you yours; the essayist engages in conversation with you and though . . . he or she can be open, candid, and at times brutally frank, there is usually no lust for intimacy. If it comes, fine, but only after you've gotten to know each other. Rather than in bed, you feel more like in a garden, walking and talking with someone you know, like, and

respect, teasing a little, perhaps flirting some, but also discussing situations and ideas and perhaps admitting emotions that matter to you in both your everyday and your inner life. (Atkins 27)

As Atkins uses *garden* as a metaphor, I use *kitchen*; however, the meaning is the same: an intent to share experience but not to be invasive. Because the “familiar” essay often incorporates literary, cultural, ecological, and other thoughtful criticism with personal experience, it is accessible to a general readership. All of these qualities can appear to threaten traditional academic scholarship, with its notions of objectivity and territorial elitism. In this context, Atkins asks (35), “Why shouldn't criticism be of general, rather than merely professional, interest?” An astute question indeed, and one that confronts the issue of territorial expertise so rampant in academia. It emphasizes that “the idea of the essay is simply inseparable from that of personal engagement” (37), rather than, like the article, isolated in its imagined supremacy (a “dumbing down” of both essay reader and writer):

The ascendancy of the article coincides, of course, with the professionalization of literary studies, which began late in the last century and which enthroned the professor as savant and high priest, keeper of the keys to the kingdom of those masterworks before which “ordinary” readers are supposed to (can merely?) genuflect. Professionals are engaged, of course, but their commitment is more to a discipline than to literature or criticism, their stance and tone analytical rather than passionate. (40)

According to Atkins, “Not to engage the personal . . . consigns critical writing to a narrow, professional audience and assures it of merely academic interest” (74).

However, simply using *I* is not to engage in the personal. The use of first person by itself is simply a rhetorical device that can create an illusion of speaking from the self but not necessarily share anything that a wide readership can connect with. As Atkins states, the

sense of personal story shows up in a lot of writing; however, it doesn't always really happen, or personal story/narration is only briefly related then abandoned (81-83).

Atkins makes a powerful statement as to why he wants to appeal to a broader readership:

I'm not at all sure we need any explications or interpretations. The question, that is, is not of need, though professional pride has long led us to suppose or dream of a public deficit that we as critics would address and fill. Instead of a lack in the addressed public, I propose that we think of exciting an interest, whetting an appetite. Such a (changed) perspective would shift emphasis from their lack or need to our responsibility to interest and engage, perhaps to create (rather than to fill). (86)

A solution for academia is the critical essay, in which theory and personal voice intermingle intelligently. The strength of such a form is in its approachability (which some academics will have problems with); a relationship can be set up between writer and reader where the reader feels invited in, even if he or she is not a member of the elite expertise:

Unlike . . . the (old-fashioned) familiar or personal essay, the one I am proposing for criticism would include otherness, theory, history, and mystery, but unlike the article and the various kinds of commentary—formalist, historical, and poststructuralist—that embrace it, it would not cease being personal. It would be neither merely personal nor merely critical-theoretical. (Atkins 41)

Such an essay enlivens critical theory, in as well as out of academic scholarship, without diminishing the essay's substance and character. In this type of critical essay, the writer and words are integrated (and thus theory becomes integrated with practice). The critical essay can be informative but also teach us about the writer (critic), rather than alienating us from her or him.

Nancy Mairs: Words That Shape Self and Community

A contemporary essayist and poet, Nancy Mairs models all of the above theoretical approaches to the essay. Her writing creates spaces both for understanding life in terms of her personal experiences and for connecting with community through the process of her sharing. Her work reflects an honesty that is intimidating as well as awe-inspiring, as she reflects on the positive and negative aspects of learning to live with relative serenity in her own body.

Mairs' essays model how formative experiences inform the personal and professional work we do. Each piece takes the shape of its own narrative woven around a particular experience or set of related experiences. Most of her collections are thematic. *Remembering the Bone House* is about growing up; *Plain Text*, her revised dissertation, and *Voice Lessons* are about finding her own writer's voice and critically analyzing the various writers whose writing inadvertently helped her through this process; *Ordinary Time* is a reflection on her spirituality and conversion to Catholicism; and *Waist-High in the World* is about living from the perspective of a wheelchair. *Carnal Acts* is a nonthematic collection of various pieces she has published separately; however, it primarily concerns her experience of MS and her struggle to accept life from a crippled body.

Writing One's Way into Self-Awareness

Mairs writes herself constantly, "learning line by line as the words compose me" (*Ordinary* 1). She discovered that no one but she could give herself permission to simply

be and began finding out what that being was through writing. Her essays not only model self-integration and communal connection, they also model a theory about the role writing plays in her life. She writes to learn who she is and states that “in order to know anything at all, I have to write a book” (1). Mairs means this literally, as the metaphors her words create enlighten her about who she is and the life she lives. She has chosen the personal essay as her primary writing vehicle because it allows exploration to take place, much like the meandering Atkins writes about; however, she has also had to struggle to allow herself this flexibility.

Much of *Ordinary Time*, for instance, is about Mairs’ experience(s) of God, a subject she recognizes as touchy among many academics and intellectuals. Her concern with responses to her discussion of spirituality has much to do with professional ethos and the problematics of who defines it:

. . . I have spent most of my career, and all my academic career, among secular humanists for whom God is a marker in a literary text, in the same way that whale is, or Friday, or a room of one's own. These are not things in which one believes. They may be objects of analysis, of interpretation, of appreciation, but certainly not of faith. Belief in a holy being would strike the people I'm thinking of as naive, even primitive, and public profession of it as therefore at least faintly embarrassing. And I share that embarrassment. So heavily have I bought into the intellectual establishment that I dread being judged simple-minded, even though simplicity of mind is, in several senses, precisely the quality I seek. (4)

This passage returns to the issue of being taught what is and is not appropriate to share in public writing. The answer to this question, however, is not to define appropriateness by external academic standards but by the integrity with which an essay reflects the writer's experience and purpose for writing. An essay, as Mairs clearly shows us, can model intellectual rigor and emotional/spiritual/intuitive perspectives simultaneously. In fact, I

argue that such an essay is far more lively, honest, and engaging than a written work coming entirely out of logos or pathos.

However, as Mairs states,

The desire for expertise and the power of proof tempts me more deeply than anything else, because my whole life has trained me to feel it. To consult all the sources. To stack and sort the index cards. To arrive at the correct understanding of every term I use, every point I interpret. The thought of error makes me feel genuinely ill, queasy and feverish and unable to swallow. (Ordinary 4-5)

But she sees a limitation for herself in the type of authority that has “achieved a certain mastery over their subject matter which they can assume their audience lacks but desires” (5). She wants to share her life experiences with others, seeking connection rather than isolation or supremacy: “Instead of this authority, which establishes a distance from both self and other, I’ve chosen exploration and its attendant risks” (5).

A formative experience that appears in almost every one of Mairs’ essay collections is being admitted to a state mental institution in 1967. A young mother just four years married, Mairs became caught in the abyss of anxiety and depression and entered “Metropolitan State Hospital” for psychological evaluation and electroconvulsive therapy. Instead of healing and self-integration, however, she found that “my treatment at Met State aimed at returning me, not so much transformed as resigned, to precisely the context in which I’d cracked up in the first place” (109). Here is one underlying reason for the essays that Mairs later began writing, essays that incorporated the Met State experience among many others: they created a space where she could begin the move away from passive resignation and reinvent her life (including her personal history) for herself.

Five years old in Jacksonville, Florida. I remember pecan trees and disruption. Mommy is inside a brick building that I see only from the outside. Red bricks through green foliage. Exploring the grass for nutty fallen fruits, not able to understand the hole where my mother used to be. I don't know this at the time, and wouldn't understand it if I were told, but Mom is getting electroshock "therapy" because she tried to kill herself—again.

Years later, she'll tell me that the treatment left nothing but more holes in her own memories. But this is long after she makes yet another suicide attempt, fighting the suffocation of her life; house bound, screaming for mental stimulation; raising two little girls and a husband who is still a boy. I feel frightened even now, not at peace with any of this, remembering how family connection triggers the terror of breathlessness and slow death. At one point, as she lay there on the treatment table, I, too, became a hole in my mother's memories.

In *Voice Lessons*, Mairs gets down to the serious business of constructing and sharing her own identity through writing. She integrates the writing of other women and men, such as Virginia Woolf, Montaigne, Alice Walker, and Hélène Cixous, with her own words:

The essays I've included in this volume illustrate the process whereby I've constructed myself as a writer in relation to some of the (m)others whose writing has aroused me and nurtured and chastised me, each one drawing me on, teaching me to love her, to love myself in her, to love myself, to love: To write. . . . My purpose in this book, then, is to reflect the ways in which certain voices . . . trained me and continue to modulate and refine my own. (7)

One aspect of this training and modulation is Mairs' desire to use the essay as a place in which to explore across professional lines and boundaries. She recounts her frustration with one reader who claimed that Mairs is not cut out to be an academic because "she is a real writer":

I could have wept, if frustration any longer had the power to elicit the tears reserved now for anguish unspeakably deeper. In a single sentence she reimposed the very dichotomies I had constructed the book in order to call into question, putting electrified fences around the categories "academy," "criticism," and "writing" to keep the various critters from intermingling, maybe interbreeding to create some nameless monster very like the one I aspire to be. (3)

Mairs' anger and dissatisfaction comes in part from a desire to hear and be heard without having categorizations and constraints imposed on her. She writes, "In the ivory phallus [academia], I had found, where poets hardly speak even to fiction writers (let alone to essayists, literary critics, and the like), the genres are like armed camps, and transgressing their boundaries can result in swift expulsion" (24). The writing model Mairs seeks evades genre and involves presence within an accepting community of individual writers revealing and sharing their experiences in writing:

For myself, I want another model. I want to hear this poem by this person on this muggy August morning under the pear trees. I want to know what it is doing in the life of her work, and in my life as well. I want to give her the courage to say the next hard thing, without fear of ridicule or expulsion if she strays across the borders of good taste, good sense, or good judgment demarcated by a tradition she has had no part in forming. I want her to do the same for me.

This is what we can all do to nourish and strengthen one another: listen to one another very hard, ask hard questions, too, send one another away to work again, and laugh in all the right places. (24-25)

This is a holistic model, holistic not only in its participants but in what is written. It is a model of self-integration and creates the context in which such integration can be

inspired and nurtured. It allows one to be a beginner, an explorer, and a risk-taker without threat of punishment or exile, something that territorial warfare does not provide.

Four of us sit at a local coffee house, papers scattered across the table. We have come together simply to read and honestly respond to each other's writing. Two of us are working on dissertations; one is writing a novel; and one is fashioning a series of essays on nature. For several months we meet every other Friday, and I discover that I am no longer afraid to share my written words, even in rough form. No one is trying to compartmentalize me or my writing; we simply read and ask questions or tell each other what inspires us in the others' words. This is a place to grow as a writer, and I do. It is a first step to revealing my written words to an audience of unknowns—to remaining centered even as my words are read by those who do not know me.

Memories: Connecting Body to Community

Remembering the Bone House is Mairs' process of returning to her own memories to reintegrate herself, torn apart after many years of "invisible" but powerful social buffeting:

Once I began to suspect that social forces had torn and scattered me like Ezekiel's dry bones—severing mind from body and spirit from them both, eroticizing some parts (not necessarily the ones I was fondest of) and tossing others into a vat of offal, as if I'd gotten trapped in some macabre abattoir—I knew that I had to remember my self before I could go on with my life/work. I fled the slaughterhouse into the houses of my past, spaces that, because they are at once "inside" and "outside," most nearly approximate the way I experience my own body. Revisiting them in memory enabled me to examine, and often to restructure, the foundation and frame of my life. (xi-xii)

Bone House is in part a process of learning to write beyond self-censorship, which is how Mairs reclaims her history, once censored, as she was: “The capacity to dream beyond the facts of existence into their significance enables us to remember a true past, one that simultaneously reflects and illuminates experience” (13). The past, to Mairs, is rebuilt every time we look at it from a new age, a new perspective—a new self. It cannot be relived; it no longer exists. However, Mairs says, it can be lived—from the perspective of this particular moment:

Because of the experiences you think of as in the “past,” the person of the past has been transformed into you, knowing what you know. The past exiles you from itself. You may live the past, however, even though you can't relive it. You may live it as often as you like, but only as your present self, the one sitting (comfortably, I hope) right where you are. The one who knows what you know. Each time you enter it, you build it anew. (14)

Mairs takes herself and us through a series of houses in this collection of essays. Each house is a part of her formative development, from early childhood to the first years of her marriage, all contextualized by who she is today (or each “today” in which the essays are written). But the true “bone house” is the body—her body, with its acute sensitivities, biochemical depressions and anxieties, sexuality, sensuality, periods of ignorance, naivete, recognition, and renewal. All of these and other experiences take place from within her body, and she is writing herself back into this body that at times she has rejected (a common experience, whether or not one suffers from a crippling disease).

The act of writing herself back into her body is transformative on many levels. Chronologically, it recalls the transitions from childhood to young adulthood. Physically,

it lies in healthy limbs that begin losing their strength and reliability to a failing nervous system. Emotionally, it shows in the sensitivity and depression that are misinterpreted (by herself as well as others) as moral issues until Mairs (and an insightful doctor) see their biochemical origins. Spiritually, it is the process of becoming a writer, slowly shedding internal and external constraints and acquiring a freer expression and understanding of herself.

Essentially, though, each volume of Mairs' essays recounts this journey, and there are many overlaps as she revisits experiences from a variety of times and perspectives. *Remembering the Bone House*, *Carnal Acts* and *Waist-High in the World* situate this process in her body. *Plain Text* and *Voice Lessons* situate the process within a literary context. *Ordinary Time* situates it in her spiritual discoveries. All of her essays interweave discovery and transformation, not mystical transformation but actual flesh-and-blood transformation in the process of living a human life from the ever-changing (if one is willing) mind, body and soul.

The importance of these essays is that they share this human experience with other human beings. "On Uttering the Unspeakable," one of the essays in *Carnal Acts*, centralizes the issues Mairs feels underlie social censorship of certain experiences. She comments, for example, that "for a number of people . . . my writing appears to function as the verbal equivalent of sprawling with my legs spread or exposing my bosom (if only I had such a thing) in a tight, low-cut black sweater" (55). Many readers have had trouble with Mairs' honest recounting of her infidelities; however, she does not deliver her accounts apologetically, even though she remains very aware of the social sanctions

against them. She writes about growing up in a time when the “ideal woman” was blonde, buxom, and “perky,” an appearance that Mairs did not fit. However, this ideal shifted in the 1960s and 1970s:

Ten years or so later, when I first noticed the symptoms that would be diagnosed as MS, I was probably looking my best. Not beautiful still, but the ideal had shifted enough so that my flat chest and narrow hips gave me an elegantly attenuated shape, set off by a thick mass of long, straight, shining hair. I had terrific legs, long and shapely, revealed nearly to the pudendum by the fashionable miniskirts and hot pants I adopted with more enthusiasm than delicacy of taste. Not surprisingly, I suppose, during this time I involved myself in several pretty torrid love affairs. (87-88)

About her experience in a creative writing workshop, where she was told that, though her technique was great, what she wrote about (the quotidian details of her life) was not interesting, she says, “Beneath questions of ‘technique’ and ‘interest,’ I think, lies a deeper issue: control. Don’t construct with your language a version of reality that doesn’t square with mine, the critic is saying” (59).

Mairs finds in writing the opportunity to create “a whole story,” as she is trying to do: “What I think the woman writer should do is the same as what I think the man writer (doesn’t that phrase sound funny?) should: make literature, constellations of language that make sense of, and celebrate, what it is to be human” (62). The whole story does not censor itself, it, in essence, says, this is the holism of a life lived.

In “Ups and Downs,” from *Waist-High in the World*, Mairs writes about the importance of connecting social elision of one’s body with her own long-term unwillingness to write about her MS-ridden body in any depth: “Our society promotes a kind of magical thinking, whereby some personal peculiarities, especially those implying dysfunction, can be effaced through studied inattention. In fact, I had been doing a fine

job of ignoring my symptoms on my own” (24). She writes earlier that “writing has always formed the core of my identity, the means whereby I have saved and shaped my life” (“Plunging In” 9), always reminding her reader of the role writing plays for her.

The importance of writing about MS now is that it is an embedded part of her identity, not something that can be cut out and thrown away:

MS is as much the essence of my “I” as my father’s death and my mother’s remarriage, my Yankee girlhood, my conversion to Roman Catholicism, my doctorate in English literature—some of these elements chosen, some arbitrarily handed to me. It can’t be stripped away without mutilating the being who bears it. (10)

Her main point throughout her essays, though articulated beautifully in this particular work is, “I’m living the life. I can tell them” (11). This is what the essay does for her; it says, here I am—an individual sharing my experiences and providing a place for connection if you want or need one. More than merely a stylistic writing model, Mairs’ (and others’) essays reveal ways in which to integrate all aspects of the complicated human individual into a real, holistic self:

I suppose you might call this . . . a “feel-real” book, and reality has never been high on any popular list. I ask you to read this book, then, not to be uplifted, but to be lowered and steadied into what may be unfamiliar but is not inhospitable, space. Sink down beside me, take my hand, and together we’ll watch the waists of the world drift past. (18)

Mairs models beautifully how essays can act as invitations into humanity, self-understanding and acceptance, a broadening of perspective, and a format for conceptual explorations that are not bloodless. She does this by blending concrete experiences with the awarenesses she has gained about them and herself over time and with a philosophy of writing that incorporates the whole being. When she writes, in “Ups and Downs,”

about growing steadily into a wheelchair and certain levels of physical immobility, she also writes about what this has given her in terms of a new perspective:

The languid, pensive state in which I now live much of the time has claimed me and expanded my contentment immeasurably. Because my slightest gesture requires effort now, I must focus on each moment, without much regard for past mistakes or the future's threats or blandishments. Over the years, I have grown accustomed to performing every action as if for the last time. Of course, it may not truly be the last time; and when it is, I won't know so for sure until later, so I assuage regret by saying farewell as I go. (37)

Her writing is a strikingly effective model of spiritual holism for the composition classroom and the general reader; it creates a bridge to the writing experience that reveals writing as a meaningful, intelligent, intuitive enterprise regardless of the context in which it is done. Mairs never leaves her body behind in her essays, nor does she dissociate from the experiences she writes about and reflects. She honors the weight of her human form by incorporating it into her essays' forms. When she states that she writes to know herself—writes herself—she is offering a clue to the scholar who wishes to avoid the fragmentation of intellect, soul, and feeling. Her sharp and shapely metaphors, literary allusions and interpretations, and narratives blend ethos, pathos, and logos in a way that reclaims the balance lost in a logos-heavy academic tradition. Intelligence and intellectual rigor are not lost in her essays, they are enriched, as Atkins says, with the personal.

Other essayists, too, create various bridges with their writing and demonstrate philosophies of writing that integrate the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical facets of their experiences. Their and Mairs' work present the rhetorical and stylistic rigor that Anderson and Winterowd emphasize and also create spaces for holistic critical

explorations that Atkins promotes. These essays connect the aesthetic, intellectual, and personal in ways that invite readers in rather than alienating them. Such engagement of the reader creates a meaningful bridge to learning as a safe place to challenge oneself and take risks. Mairs parallels Atkins in describing the essay as “contemplative, exploratory, even equivocal, not definitive” (*Waist-High* 17), a definition that can validly be applied to the true learning experience as well.

Descending Slightly from the Iceberg’s Tip

Many essayists find ways to blend formative experiences with their written insights and observations. In order to demonstrate this, I will look at a sampling of essays from nature, science, and spiritual writers. Nature writers such as Gretel Ehrlich, Gretchen Legler, and Terry Tempest Williams frequently observe the parallels between their experiences and emotional landscapes with the landscapes in which they live, play, and work. Science writers such as Richard Selzer and Oliver Sacks explore metaphorical relationships between their professional/personal experiences and the personal experiences of the people they work with. Spiritual writer Kathleen Norris looks at the intersections between her own and monastic lives. This is only a minute sampling, not meant to be comprehensive; however, it shows the various approaches essay writers may take to spirituality in the sense of integrating the self and creating points of connection for their readership communities.

Gretel Ehrlich: Blending Inside Places and Outside Places

Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces* grows directly from journal notes she took during and after the death of her partner from cancer. She had come to Wyoming from an urban setting to create a film documentary (originally intending to work with her partner on this), and she stayed on after his death. In her preface Ehrlich writes:

It is impossible to speak of writing this book without mentioning the circumstances and transitions taking place in my life at the time. Beginning in 1976, when I went to Wyoming to make a film, I had the experience of waking up not knowing where I was, whether I was a man or a woman, or which toothbrush was mine. I had suffered a tragedy and made a drastic geographical and cultural move fairly baggageless, but I wasn't losing my grip. (ix)

Her essays grow out of this transitional period, reflecting her own adaptation to this new land, the parallel between her feeling of inner aridity and the arid Wyoming landscape, and her desire to write these landscapes into a personal series of word-images:

The truest art I would strive for in any work would be to give the page the same qualities as earth: weather would land on it harshly; light would elucidate the most difficult truths; wind would sweep away obtuse padding. Finally, the lessons of impermanence taught me this: loss constitutes an odd kind of fullness; despair empties out into an unquenchable appetite for life. (x)

Ehrlich's title essay, "The Solace of Open Spaces," clearly shows the mirroring of land and people (including herself), and then neatly transitions to a description of the arid landscape that she now lives in. She begins by describing her initial reasons for remaining in Wyoming and the inner shift that she experienced through interacting with the land and its people:

I came here four years ago. I had not planned to stay, but I couldn't make myself leave. John, the sheepman, put me to work immediately. It was spring, and shearing time. For fourteen days of

fourteen hours each, we moved thousands of sheep through sorting corrals to be sheared, branded, and deloused. I suspect that my original motive for coming here was to “lose myself” in new and unpopulated territory. Instead of producing the numbness I thought I wanted, life on the sheep ranch woke me up. The vitality of the people I was working with flushed out what had become a hallucinatory rawness inside me. I threw away my clothes and bought new ones; I cut my hair. The arid country was a clean slate. Its absolute indifference steadied me. (3-4)

Following this paragraph is a beautiful passage in which she transitions to a discussion of the land itself, connecting the “clean slate” metaphor with the clean slate of the Wyoming countryside:

Sagebrush covers 58,000 square miles of Wyoming. The biggest city has a population of fifty thousand, and there are only five settlements that could be called cities in the whole state. The rest are towns, scattered across the expanse with as much as sixty miles between them, their populations two thousand, fifty, or ten. They are fugitive-looking, perched on a barren, windblown bench, or tagged onto a river or a railroad, or laid out straight in a farming valley with implement stores and a block-long Mormon church. In the eastern part of the state, which slides down into the Great Plains, the new mining settlements are boomtowns, trailer cities, metal knots on flat land. (4)

“Other Lives” circles around again to her arrival to film: “I had come alone because my partner in the project—also the man I loved—had just been told he was dying. He was not quite thirty” (34). After a month, John, the sheepman, offers her the guest room in his trailer. She comes with her pain and is thrown into a world of communication and human interaction simultaneously rich and spare:

That night one of the would-be “stars” of the film stumbled into John's trailer at two in the morning drunk and on a binge. “Wake up, Hollywood,” he yelled into John's bedroom, then ran outside to where his horse was tied to the door handle of a car and threw up. “Don't you get sick in there or I'll take you so far out in them hills you'll never find your way back,” John said in his mock-stern voice. The more brusque he sounded, the more affectionate the message he was sending. At three-thirty the coffeepot started perking, waking us by four. (35)

“Just Married” hilariously yet mindfully relates the account of Ehrlich’s engagement and wedding to her first husband, again blending her experience of the land and its people:

He had planned to propose while we were crossing Cougar Pass—a bald, ten-thousand-foot dome—with twenty-two head of loose horses, but a front was moving through, and in the commotion, he forgot. Another day he loped up to me: “Want to get hitched?” he said. Before I could respond there was horse-trouble ahead and he loped away. To make up for the unceremonious interruption, he serenaded me that night with the wistful calls sandhill cranes make. A cow elk wandered into the meadow and mingled with the horses. It snowed and in the morning a choir of coyotes howled, “Yes.” (86)

The wedding ceremony continues this theme of integrating inner and outer landscapes:

In the one hushed moment before the ceremony started, Rusty, my dog, walked through the small crowd of well wishers and lay down at my feet. On his wolfish-wise face was a look that said, “What about me?” So the three of us were married that day. Afterward we skated on the small pond in front of the house and drank from open bottles of champagne stuck in the snow. (87)

The integration of inner and outer landscapes is another model for academics seeking holism, integration of self and work. Ehrlich does not lose herself in her descriptions of Wyoming land and life, nor does she lose Wyoming land and life in her descriptions of self. She blends the two, showing how each enriches the other. Her interactions with Wyoming, in person and on the page, mirror in some ways Atkins’ interaction with *The Odyssey*.

Gretchen Legler: Making the Invisible Visible

Ehrlich’s invitation to connect with her experience is paralleled by the essays in Legler’s *All the Powerful Invisible Things*. Legler’s collection of essays recounts her

acceptance of lesbianism and the end of her marriage in the context of hunting and close bonds with the Minnesota landscape. “Gooseberry Marsh: Part Two” describes a painful, frustrating duck-hunting trip, the first hunt she and her ex-husband have gone on together since separating. They return to a place where they have hunted together annually, but their pain and anger, lying just below the surface, disrupt any potential serenity. The ruined hunt mirrors the sense of wrongness between them: “We try in a polite and partly exhausted way to pretend that nothing is different, that we still love each other, but something subtle has shifted beneath us” (75).

The struggle and loss Legler experiences on this hunt reflect the hard work of change, of being separately together. They snap at each other and struggle to manage the canoe. At one point Legler shoots a mallard hen, but the duck disappears into a stand of reeds before they can get her. Legler knows that this duck’s body will feed another animal, but she feels this experience as “a waste”:

My heart cramps up as we follow this bird in our canoe, chasing her, paddling fast, trying to mark where she entered the reeds. We look for her for nearly an hour, straining our eyes for curls of soft breast feathers on the water among the reed stems, standing high up on the bow, one foot on each gunnel, looking down from above. I engage in this search with a kind of desperation. I must find her. I must. But she is gone. (77)

Later, they shoot two wood ducks and go to gather them into the boat. When Legler reaches for hers, she is appalled to find that his breast has been blown completely away. She takes the bird gently from the water and rests his body on her lap, letting the blood soak into her slacks and crying at an overwhelming sense of loss:

I am stroking this bird’s elaborate, feathery purple and orange and white crest, letting tears come up to the surface and roll down my wind-chapped face. . . . Craig says, “Let’s get the camouflage back on the boat, and then

you can play.” “Play?” I ask him. At this moment I hate him fiercely. I vow that I will never hunt with him again. . . . I ask him “What would a man hunter do about this bird? Would he cry?” Craig says, “No, he would throw it away.” And there is a hardness to what he has said, so that I barely recognize his voice. (78)

She feels the wrongness and alienation between them, how the failed hunt mirrors their failed marriage and strained love. Her ex-husband has always before joined in respectful rituals around hunting, and his coldness feels unnatural because it is:

Hunting with Craig has never been like this. My heart aches and I am afraid. I hate what we have done this year. It feels like murder. . . . I think now that hunting for us has everything to do with love; with the way we feel about ourselves and each other. . . . I want to correct this imbalance between Craig and me and inside myself. I want to go on hunting, but not this way. (79)

What she comes to discover is that hunting represented an important sense of communion in their marriage, which they no longer feel. It was about intimacy, with the food they foraged from the land or killed themselves, with each other and their friends:

Part of what hunting meant for us, when we were together, was feasting. It wasn't the shooting that mattered, but what we did with this food we gathered: how we prepared the ducks to eat, how we shared them with friends, how we raised our glasses before we ate, at a long table lit by candles, covered with a lacey white cloth, and thanked the ducks for their lives. Several times a year, at Easter, at Thanksgiving and at Christmas, Craig and I prepared banquets for our friends. Nearly everything we cooked for our feasts was from our garden, or collected from the woods, or killed by us. This, I think now, was why I hunted and why I still want to. Because I want this kind of intimate relationship with the food I eat. (79)

The shattering of their intimacy will shatter her sense of the hunt until she can find a point of balance and forgiveness within herself and with Craig.

Legler shows how the invisible can be reflected in our rituals and interactions with others and our environments. This, too, models to academics an example of self-

awareness and acknowledgement that transcends traditional landscape narratives. The outer landscape is understood through the inner landscape—the professional is understood through the personal—whether one wishes to acknowledge this or not.

Richard Selzer: (In)Scribing the Body as a Sacred Act

Some science writers, too, seek to establish integration between themselves, their work, and their readers. Selzer's *Mortal Lessons* is a collection of essays, most of which are series of thematically related vignettes. Selzer's writing, too, reflects the importance of process as a learning model, validated through the very experiences of discovery and insights rather than by a particular end product. He uses metaphor to think about the body, finding a poetic value within a scientific context:

But facts, to one who is trying to make art, are less important than the truth that lies just beneath them waiting to be perceived. It is this truth for which the ardent writer forages among the facts, letting language lead him by the hand. To this end, I have observed the human body not only clinically, but metaphorically as well. . . . Again and again I have made use of the poetic potential of scientific description in order to illuminate an anatomical landscape. (Preface 8-9)

“The Surgeon as Priest” is primarily about a spiritual way of listening to the body that Selzer witnesses from one man. Initially, Selzer discusses the “taboo” of opening a body: “Even now, after so many voyages within, so much exploration, I feel the . . . sense that one must not gaze into the body, the . . . irrational fear that it is an evil deed for which punishment awaits” (24). But he literally invites us in to this experience anyway:

I feel some hesitation to invite you to come with me into the body. It seems a reckless, defiant act. Yet there is more than dread reflected from these rosy coasts, these restless estuaries of pearl. And it is time to share it, the way the catbird shares the song which must be a joy to him

and is a living truth to those who hear it. So shall I make of my fingers, words; of my scalpel, a sentence; of the body of my patient, a story. (25)

One day, Selzer learns that Yeshi Dhonden, the personal physician to the *Dalai Lama*, will be visiting the hospital where he works, making rounds and examining a patient without previous diagnostic information. The sense of spiritual grace touches Selzer when he first learns about Yeshi Dhonden's preparations for this examination:

We are . . . informed that for the past two hours Yeshi Dhonden has purified himself by bathing, fasting, and prayer. I, having breakfasted well, performed only the most desultory of ablutions, and given no thought at all to my soul, glance furtively at my fellows. Suddenly, we seem a soiled, uncouth lot. (33)

He watches with his colleagues as Yeshi Dhonden gazes quietly for half an hour at the woman he has been asked to diagnose, then holds her wrist, listening to her pulse, for another half hour. After this, Yeshi Dhonden whips her urine into a froth and breathes its odor several times. The woman, with peace and gratitude, thanks him as he retreats from the room to meet with Selzer and the other doctors. He gives his diagnosis through an interpreter:

It is like the chanting of monks. He speaks of the winds coursing through the body of the woman, currents that break against barriers, eddying. These vortices are in her blood, he says. The last spendings of an imperfect heart. Between the chambers of her heart, long, long before she was born, a wind had come and blown open a deep gate that must never be opened. (35)

After Yeshi Dhonden lapses once again into silence, someone asks the host for the hospital's diagnosis: congenital heart disease. Selzer sees in Yeshi Dhonden a healer who can hear the body in a way that speaks of great spiritual depth and quietude: "So! Here

then is the doctor listening to the sounds of the body to which the rest of us are deaf. He is more than doctor. He is priest” (36).

Oliver Sacks: Neurological Narratives of the Human Odyssey

Sacks, a neuropsychologist, uses story and metaphor in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* and *An Anthropologist on Mars* to integrate his patients’ stories into his clinical work. In the Preface to *Man*, he expresses the importance of bringing a person’s story to a central position when doing clinical work:

To restore the human subject at the centre—the suffering, afflicted, fighting, human subject—we must deepen a case history to a narrative or tale: only then do we have a ‘who’ as well as a ‘what’, a real person, a patient, in relation to disease—in relation to the physical. (xiv)

The title essay, “The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,” is about Dr. P, a talented painter and musician who is suffering from visual agnosia and can no longer put shapes together into whole images. Sacks seeks to understand Dr. P’s way of perceiving. From a clinical perspective, he sees in Dr. P’s symptoms a tragic perceptual loss; however, Mrs. P helps him to see that it can also be perceived as a perceptual shift.

One afternoon, she is showing Sacks her husband’s paintings, displayed on the walls of their home in chronological order. Sacks sees a tragic movement from sense to chaotic nonsense in their imagery and mentions this to Mrs. P. She replies (16), “‘Ach, you doctors, you’re such philistines!’ . . . ‘Can you not see artistic development—how he renounced the realism of his earlier years, and advanced into abstract, non-representational art?’” At first, Sacks dismisses her response as denial, but then he writes:

And yet, I wondered, was she not partly right? . . . for as he lost the concrete, so he might have gained in the abstract, developing a greater sensitivity to all the structural elements of line, boundary, contour—an almost Picasso-like power to see, and equally depict, those abstract organisations embedded in, and normally lost in, the concrete . . . Though in the final pictures, I feared, there was only chaos and agnosia. (16)

He does not dismiss his own clinical analysis, yet he also lets Dr. P and his wife tell him their story, and he blends this story with his diagnosis.

Finally, Dr. P says to him (17), “Well, Dr Sacks You find me an interesting case, I perceive. Can you tell me what you find wrong, make recommendations?” Sacks replies:

“I can’t tell you what I find wrong . . . but I’ll say what I find right. You are a wonderful musician, and music is your life. What I would prescribe, in a case such as yours, is a life which consists entirely of music. Music has been the centre, now make it the whole, of your life.” (17)

Sacks concludes this part of the essay by stating that Dr. P “had no body-image, he had body-music” (17), finding in this the only recommendations he can give Dr. P. However, the reader sees a concrete person in Sacks’ rendition of Dr. P, someone who can act and move rhythmically as long as he’s tuning in to “inner music”; music becomes the metaphor in a new way for Dr. P’s life, and it provides a place of connection for the reader to see how Sacks integrates the patient’s story with his own.

An Anthropologist on Mars does much the same thing in terms of story. “A Surgeon’s Life” relates the story of Canadian brain surgeon Carl Bennett, who is afflicted with Tourette’s syndrome yet is very successful in his practice. Sacks reminds us of his philosophy before getting into Bennett’s story: “Any disease introduces a doubleness into life—an ‘it,’ with its own needs, demands, limitations’ (77). He writes also that ‘we must

see Tourette's . . . from an inner perspective, an existential perspective, that of the affected person himself. Inner and outer narratives here, as everywhere, must fuse" (78-79).

In a wonderful passage, Sacks gives us an example of stepping (at least partially) into Bennett's narrative and of the value of this for helping him and us connect a bit to the reality of Bennett's experience. He is staying at the Bennetts' house and awakens to a strange noise coming from the playroom:

Bewildered, I opened the door and peeked in. Bennett, stripped to the waist, was pedaling furiously on an exercise bike while calmly smoking a large pipe. A pathology book was open before him—turned, I observed, to the chapter on neurofibromatosis. This is how he invariably begins each morning—a half hour on his bike, puffing his favorite pipe, with a pathology or surgery book open to the day's work before him. The pipe, the rhythmic exercise, calm him. There are no tics, no compulsions—at most, a little hooting. (He seems to imagine at such times that he is a prairie train.) He can read, thus calmed, without his usual obsessions and distractions. (87)

As Sacks tells his stories, he does not hesitate to find the humor in them, or the ironies. All of these elements are part of the metaphorical language that forges connections between the readers and the narratives. We see real people in the contexts Sacks experiences; thus, we can find places for them in our world.

Sacks mentions that Bennett is comfortable Toureting with his colleagues and describes one such instance:

The conversations in the common room were like those in any hospitals—doctors talking among themselves about unusual cases. Bennett himself, lying half-curved on the floor, kicking and thrusting one foot in the air, described an unusual case of neurofibromatosis—a young man whom he had recently operated on. His colleagues listened attentively. The abnormality of the behavior and the complete normality of the discourse formed an extraordinary contrast.

There was something bizarre about the whole scene, but it was evidently so common as to be unremarkable and no longer attracted the slightest notice. But an outsider seeing it would have been stunned. (90-91)

There is no attempt here to cover up or euphemize, merely to share with us what Sacks sees and how he responds to Bennett's milieu. Things remain, though remarkable, on the human plain. In surgery, Bennett is completely free of tics, given over to the focus and rhythm of his work: "His whole identity at such times is that of a surgeon at work, and his entire psychic and neural organization becomes aligned with this, becomes active, focused, at ease, un-Tourettic" (96). There are always several levels of experience and insight being addressed in Sacks' essays, as these comments demonstrate: "Bennett's operating brings up all the conundrums of Tourette's, along with deep issues such as the nature of rhythm, melody, and 'flow,' and the nature of acting, role, personation, and identity" (96). And:

But above this [automatic] level, coexisting with it, was a higher, personal one, which has to do with the identity, the role, of a surgeon. Anatomy (and then surgery) have been Bennett's constant loves, lying at the center of his being, and he is most himself, most deeply himself, when he is immersed in his work. (98)

Sacks ends his essay with a scene in which Bennett (also a pilot) is flying him back to Calgary. The flight becomes another metaphor for Bennett and his neurology:

We head toward nine-thousand-foot crests, and Bennett tics, flutters, reaches, taps, touches his glasses, his mustache, the top of the cockpit. Minor tics, Little League, I think, but what if he has big tics? What if he wants to twirl the plane in midair, to hop and skip with it, to do somersaults, to loop the loop? What if he has an impulse to leap out and touch the propeller? Touretters tend to be fascinated by spinning objects; I have a vision of him lunging forward, half out the window, compulsively lunging at the propeller before us. But his tics and compulsions remain very minor, and when he takes his hands off the controls the plane

continues quietly. Mercifully, there is no road to keep to. If we rise or fall or veer fifty feet, what does it matter? We have the whole sky to play with. (104-05)

Terry Tempest Williams: Landed Religion

Williams and Norris interweave their spirituality and religions very consciously with their other writing subjects. Clearly, the spiritual as these women experience it cannot be disconnected from the rest of their lives. They, too, model integration of personal and professional, of formative experience and insight, of intellect and intuition.

The central theme of *Refuge*, Williams' first collection of essays, is the natural cycles of life, particularly from the perspective of the dying and death of her mother from breast cancer. Each essay is titled with a different bird's name and a note on the water level of Salt Lake as it rises and recedes. In "Ravens," Williams recounts taking her mother to swim after her first radiation treatment. The image she creates is of complete absorption into the landscape in which they live:

This afternoon, I coaxed Mother into going swimming at Great Salt Lake, something we have not done for years. On our backs, we floated, staring up at the sky—the cool water held us—in spite of the light, harsh and blinding. I heard the whisperings of brine shrimp, felt their orange feathered bodies brushing against my own. I showed them to Mother. She shuddered. . . . We drifted for hours. Merging with salt water and sky so completely, we were resolved, dissolved, in peace. . . . We returned with salt crystals in our hair and sand in our navels to remind us we had not been dreaming. (78)

In "Dark-Eyed Junco," her mother's death is imminent. Williams writes of carefully choosing bright-colored clothing to wear for her mother each day. Her mother's response is, "You are changing scenery. I appreciate you dressing up for me. I look

forward to your costumes” (213). Williams’ time now is focused on helping to care for her mother, and she shares the holistic experience of this:

My days are immersed in the pragmatic details of care. And I love caring for her, we all do, even though there are times when horror splashes our skin like scalding water as we watch her writhe with nausea and pain.

And the other side, always the other side, is as tender as the pain is severe—bathing her, washing her hair, rubbing her body with fine French creams, feeding her ice chips, stroking her hair, her hands, and her forehead. (213)

She weaves in Mormon rituals and her dissatisfaction with Mormon chauvinism as the family prepares to let her mother go. Along with this is her concern for the local bird sanctuary, threatened by the rising of the Lake. Through all of these experiences, she is learning acceptance of what she is and is not powerless over, and she goes to the land to help herself connect with life and regain an intuitive perspective of life’s cycles:

I feel calm, having just returned from a brisk walk along the base of the foothills. The balm of fresh air, Great Salt Lake glistened on the horizon. The valley is in sharp focus, crystal clear. I am reminded that what I adore, admire, and draw from Mother is inherent in the Earth. My mother’s spirit can be recalled simply by placing my hands on the black humus of mountains or the lean sands of desert. Her love, her warmth, and her breath, even her arms around me—are the waves, the wind, sunlight, and water. (214)

The final essay, “The Clan of One-Breasted Women,” brings together love, anger, betrayal, powerlessness, memory, in a stunning discovery. About one year after her mother’s death, Williams and her father are eating dinner together, talking about their love of the land that surrounds them:

Over dessert, I shared a recurring dream of mine. I told my father that for years, as long as I could remember, I saw this flash of light in the night in the desert—that this image had so permeated my being that I could not venture south without seeing it again, on the horizon, illuminating buttes and mesas.

“You did see it,” he said.
 “Saw what?”
 “The bomb. The cloud. We were driving home from Riverside,
 California. . . .” (282-83)

Her father recounts the many bomb tests that had gone on in that area in the 1950s, and Williams begins to see the connection between that and the enormous incidence of breast cancer in the women of her family. The land she loves may also be killing her, and the sense of betrayal, not from the land but from those who abused it, is deep and strong. At her mother’s death, she may have witnessed her own heritage. The book ends with her and other women being arrested for crossing into a Nevada test site in peaceful protest. They are bused to the outskirts of town then released:

The officials thought it was a cruel joke to leave us stranded in the desert with no way to get home. What they didn’t realize was that we were home, soul-centered and strong, women who recognized the sweet smell of sage as fuel for our spirits. (290)

Kathleen Norris: Finding Self in a Religious Community

Norris’s *The Cloister Walk* also centers itself in her personal spirituality, recounting what she learns from two residencies as a Benedictine oblate at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. She integrates monastic themes into her own life; this can also be seen in her first book, *Dakota*, in which the landscape itself forms a metaphorical monastery for her. *The Cloister Walk* is more deeply focused on her inner growth, however, and how it relates to her marital, writing, and communal relationships.

“Celibate Passion” shares with us what she learns from watching the friendships between celibate men and women for ten years. She writes that they “are fully aware of

themselves as sexual beings but . . . express their sexuality in a celibate way. That is, they manage to sublimate their sexual energies toward another purpose than sexual intercourse and procreation” (116-17). She relates this valuable learning experience to her own marriage and to marriage in general:

Any marriage has times of separation, ill-health, or just plain crankiness, in which sexual intercourse is ill-advised. And it is precisely the skills of celibate friendship—fostering intimacy through letters, conversation, performing mundane tasks together (thus rendering them pleasurable), savoring the holy simplicity of a shared meal, or a walk together at dusk—that can help a marriage survive the rough spots. When you can't make love physically, you figure out other ways to do it. (118)

In “Good Old Sin,” Norris explores the importance of understanding that human beings are complex—not all good or all bad (that parallels Moore and Hillman’s perspectives). She describes the difference between her and her husband’s early religious introductions to sin:

My husband and I, raised in the pietistic churches of the 1950s, received an education in sin that was not only inadequate but harmful. From the Protestants I got a list of rules that were not to be broken and naively thought that as long as I wasn’t breaking those rules, sin was not much of a problem for me. As a young adult, I believed that I had no conscience, a state I was fortunate to survive. From the Catholics my husband got less a sense of sin than a terrific ability to feel guilty for everything under the sun, a situation that left him less likely to recognize and contend with those things for which he might actually wish to repent. (125-26)

What she learns from the writings of some early monastic monks is the importance of self-knowledge—holistic and honest self-knowledge:

The goal of the monks was to know themselves as they truly were, warts and all, and to be able to call it ‘good,’ not in order to excuse bad behavior but to accept the self without delusions. The point was to know the material you were working with, in order to give a firmer foundation to your hope for change. (128)

In “A Story With Dragons: The Book of Revelation,” Norris explores her identity as a writer, using the apocalypse metaphor as a vehicle for self-knowledge:

Apocalypse takes us far beyond the usual bounds of language and custom. If you’ve ever experienced the strangeness of being a healthy person in an Intensive Care Unit, or a hospice or nursing home, then you have experienced apocalypse in this sense. The world turned inside out, revealed as radically different from what we thought we knew, all the things we value so highly—productivity, control of mind and body, the illusion of personal autonomy—suddenly swept away. And our response to this revelation—whether it depresses us and makes us want to run, or whether we can discern hope, and love, and grace in this strange, new place—is a measure of our true condition. It reveals us to ourselves. . . . And isn’t this one of the goals of writing? (214)

Her health-care-context analogies provide an immediate experiential link for most of us to what she means by apocalypse, the complete disruption of all we are used to. However, the analogies also show how she integrates a formative experience into her writing and philosophy. Norris is always mindful of humanizing her religious analogies so that they may be understood as aspects of each individual’s personal spirituality rather than tied to a particular formal religion (though for her and many others, formal religion works well, too). It does not, however, for all of us, whereas spirituality as integration and holism can.

For Norris, hearing the Bible read aloud opens her again to a child’s fresh perspective, what she sees as hope, and in some ways it parallels the role that writing played in the years that she was separated from church:

Writing kept the fires of hope alive in me during the twenty years I never went near a church. But in the Benedictine choir, as I allowed the words of John’s revelation to wash over me—to be repulsed, offended, attracted, and moved to tears of grief and anger, joy and wonder—my full sense of the sacredness of the world revived. I had begun to listen as a child again.

. . . The radiant faith of childhood demonstrates that the opposite of faith is not doubt but fear. (219)

Looking Forward

These essayists and the few works I've looked at are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of writing that models integration of self with self and community. However, they help define how writing can be a meaningful endeavor with deep personal connections, a model that transfers to the learning process itself. In the writing classroom, deep connections to what one writes cannot be enforced from outside (by *Teacher*, for instance), but a classroom that acknowledges its spiritual context in terms of self-integration and integration with one's community(ies) can provide the space for this meaningful connection and for a mindful learning experience.

Chapter 5 Teaching as a Sacred Act

Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the teacher within, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self.

Parker J. Palmer, 29

As an expressive essay, this chapter concretely defines the purpose of my dissertation. Here, I write almost in my speaking voice and express my experience of teaching as a sacred act. In previous chapters, I demonstrated my research; in this chapter, I open the door a bit more to myself as a teacher. I am expressing a pedagogical attitude in a way that maintains integrity with my interpretations of expressive discourse and its academic and personal value.

Beginnings: The Formative Teaching Years

“So, what are *humanities*?” My first moment of teaching; the first question I asked. I didn’t realize it at the time, and could never have articulated it if someone asked me what my philosophy of teaching was, but questions were and have remained a big part of teaching for me. Just before entering a classroom as teacher (humanities TA, but on my own, leading my first of three discussion groups), I had been sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette, scared to death and wondering how in hell I was going to pull this off. I didn’t know *how* to teach, I just knew that I had been hired to lead these groups and had to do it—somehow. In a way, though, this introduction was a blessing because I had to listen closely to myself, to find out what came naturally, to figure out when I was and was not comfortable.

During my first three years of teaching, I dressed up—high heels, skirts or nice slacks, blouses. I felt like a fraud far more often than a professional, and somehow dressing up gave me a little extra security—an aura of authority, perhaps, but primarily, it helped me to feel more attractive and better about my self-presentation. I had spent many years feeling invisible and unappealing, and dressing up helped hide my fear that I still wasn't good enough. But even in those years, I'd find myself slipping into blue jeans every now and then, and after nine years of teaching I wear blue jeans almost exclusively. Why is this important? Certainly not for fashion purposes. My attire comes from listening to myself, to what makes me comfortable in the classroom community. I'm miserable in high heels and stockings—and prone to tripping, tearing, spotting. . . . And when I'm miserable, I'm uptight, distracted. I'm comfortable in blue jeans, big shirts, work boots—and thus, a better teacher.

But what do questions and blue jeans have in common with the *sacred*? A great deal. It's in listening to myself that I also began to learn to listen to my students—to hear them, their experiences, even if I didn't always agree with or respect their points of view. *Patrick hated writing and made a point of telling me this in the middle of my fifth year of teaching. I needed that five years to handle Patrick's statement with equanimity. Behind contemptuous blue eyes and a slouching arrogance, however, was a strong creative need—an urge to physically and mentally participate in his learning process. This, I later suspected, was why education felt so tasteless to him. He had been relegated to a passive role, so he chose the demeanor of disdainful nonparticipant to carry it off. Instead of getting angry and defensive, I found myself telling him, "Then write about that.*

Write about why you hate writing.” He did, and then wrote more and more, writing his way through anger to creative interactions with the texts we read and discussed—and that they taught at the semester’s end. This is soul stuff—the material that comes from paying attention, from knowing that there is a spirit in everyone. From learning that my spirit was dying and needed to be honored. From finding my way through a dark night of the soul to myself, bare of bone, cleaned of a lot of flotsam and jetsam that I had picked up like flies on flypaper over the years. And here is where the sacred enters.

However, when writing about the sacred, I am not working to manifest only light and flowers. To me, an important aspect of the sacred is its ability to contain demoralizing situations, too. One of my worst beginnings occurred at the start of my third semester of teaching. I had decided that I was too *nice*, that I needed to take a firm stance with my students, scare them right from the start so that they wouldn’t take advantage of me. This came out of naiveté and fear. I walked—no, stalked—into my first class and aggressively proceeded to tell them what I WOULD NOT put up with, what my PET PEEVES were, and so forth. Instead of firm, I sounded angry and aggressive, and after about 10 minutes, several students were looking back at me in bewilderment, others with open hostility. Who could blame them? I would have felt unnerved in their shoes, too. Later, I would discover that safety in the classroom *wasn’t* about hitting students over the head with a sledge hammer on the first day, although I still wouldn’t know for a while what it *was* about.

There was a married couple in that class, and their work mirrored each other’s so much that I couldn’t tell who had done what, although I suspected that the husband was

doing most of the work. We became enemies, and I was convinced that she copied from him during the final exam; however, I couldn't prove it. What I didn't yet understand was that I did not have to force people to choose integrity in their work, and this adversarial role became excessively draining; I focused on the negatives rather than the positives, wielding a sword that was full of hot air. I had initiated an open conflict on the first day, but there was nothing I could fight—nothing I needed to fight.

During another early teaching semester, a young man spent all of his energy trying to seduce me into giving him an “A” rather than putting that energy into doing his work. He'd loom over me in the dingy English Department corridors, leering and pleading simultaneously. I was disgusted by him, and angry, not yet accepting that some students just choose this kind of path over the path of learning, sometimes for all the wrong reasons, and sometimes for all the right ones. It was a power-play situation in my mind as well as his, and I had to win. Today when a student does this, I just accept it as his or her choice and continue about my business. *Esther stomps into Basic Writing preceded by a capital “A” attitude. She glares at me, gossips loudly with her mates, swears at me in Spanish, does a low-key pseudo-chola tap dance. All I remember is thinking, “What a bitch! I hope she gets a grip.” Most of the evening remains blank in my memory, but Esther is the one person who stays after and helps me put the furniture back into nice, straight janitorial rows. When did the awareness come that I don't have to wrestle them into submission? that they are free to choose how they approach their education?*

I don't know when, but I do know how. It came about when I stopped taking responsibility in my personal life for the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others, and started owning my own stuff. This took years, and it was a deeply personal journey, involving *ghastly relationships with myself and others in which betrayal, cruelty, and despair were the primary components*. I was reliving my early childhood holocausts in these relationships, not yet aware that I was the only one who could choose differently. Divorcing myself from psychic battering (my own of myself and others' of me) had a direct impact on my behavior in the classroom.

I did some things well from the first day of teaching, though. One of my first semester students wrote that I taught in a Socratic way, asking my students thoughtful questions and giving them room to respond. I didn't drone at them for an hour, lulling them into a daze; I encouraged discussion, feedback, debate. All of this was rough around the edges for many years, but it was also intuitive. I didn't write out lecture notes because I was always bored as a student being lectured to.

Learning to Teach from Within My Skin: The Sacredness of Darkness

Feeling fraudulent took eight years to pass. I don't know that the amount of time has any significance except that it took time to become real to myself. Teaching and personal growth went hand in hand in this process. As a teacher, you are going to be in agony if you take yourself too seriously. Your body will do things—farting, sneezing, tripping—and your mind will do things—forgetting, stuttering—that show your clay feet

in front of a group of people. I learned the value of making mistakes, of not being perfect—and not having to be.

Giving myself permission not to be perfect also took a long time. Although I'm only 37, I've spent over two decades trying to re-knit my soul, my identity, together from the fragmentation it went through in early childhood. Part of this effort has involved learning self-acceptance, and that took a long time. I needed to reorient to my inner voice rather than to the outside influences that surround and pummel me on a daily basis. It involves loosening up about who I am—and knowing who I am.

November 1995. I have chosen to drop out of two conferences, unable to do the writing I need to do for my presentations. Words—academic words—simply aren't coming anymore; in addition, I'm about to take my comprehensive exams. I know in my gut that I've made the right decisions, but I'm terrified of their consequences. What will I do now that I've committed myself to a non-university track? I begin spending more time in the desert, looking at the land I live in and feeling it caress my soul, taking photographs and experimenting with my camera. Should I find some outdoor work? I volunteer with an environmental organization to find out. I do discover that it's healing for my body, mind, and spirit to be outdoors, but I also learn that I don't want to spend 40 or more hours a week there. Should I work with touch? I attend several highly expensive workshops in body work, and the more I am exposed to it, the less I like it. All I seem to have accomplished is more questions.

June 1996. I sit at my kitchen table smoking one cigarette after another. A relationship has just ended—ingloriously; I'm teaching a new class five days a week with

a group of students younger than I've ever taught before. I'm exhausted, and some of them think I hate them because the grades they are earning are shocking them and I'm too weary to handle it with humor or compassion. I need every ounce of humor and compassion for myself, and there's little enough of either. I plod through the rest of the term in pain—the breakup occurred during the second of six weeks. I want to run away but can't. My roommate dodges me—unable to deal with the hurt and anger emanating from me.

I am writing through a depression as I've written through fear and anxiety. Is the depression something to be "studied?" Right now I think so. Why? Because it helps—it makes me feel better. I can't take a cold, analytical approach, nor do I want to. But I pull this depression out of my bones, drag it onto the blank whiteness of this page, and I feel better. I can look at it, let it be real—stare it in the face instead of cowering from it. If depression is going to be present in my mind and body, I want to look at it rather than tripping over it in surprise. I create distance, a manageable distance, from this depression by using it as a tool. I can write from it, and I can write about it. My approach is accepting instead of fearful, straightforward instead of indirect.

Yeah, right.

I've been wanting to write all day but instead have run around doing errands and feeling out of balance, restless, slightly to one side of my body. Why? Writing brings me solace, yet for some reason I couldn't bring myself to do it earlier. It's a release—often—certainly leads to clarity—sometimes—mostly just the relief of expressing. And yet sometimes this is all a lie. Sometimes writing is simply too painful. My words crush

me up against myself, and I have no room to breathe. All day my mind has fluttered around like a restless moth, unable to settle on one thought for long; unfocused; tossed and dizzy.

January 1997. A job offer falls through—the classes don't make. Another relationship explodes from cruelty and misunderstanding. Teaching in general is unsatisfying, and I'm questioning my entire life. My roommate by now has decided that she is my victim, hoards food in her room, shuts her door on the rest of the apartment, refuses to talk. Other friendships have ended badly, too, in the past year. Sometimes I make myself feel crazy because I try to change what I am powerless to change—namely anything other than how I respond to my own thoughts and feelings. I reach out blindly to the wrong people, the people who have shoved me out of their lives. And I come back to my pain alone, of course. It is a time of endings, and I am overwhelmed with fear and grief.

I look around me at a society that has stripped phrases like "family values" to puerile, vapid buzz words, ignoring the way it manhandles love, loss, joy, fear, pain. And my hatred for such mass dehumanization is strong. I weep for those who have endured so much pain that they now can only create pain in others in order to avoid being hurt themselves. My mind and heart are full of rage at such callous disregard for human feelings and needs. And then I feel such overwhelming sadness and compassion as I look within and without at so many crippled hearts doing the best they can in a society that denigrates their passions at every turn. I wonder why I look in the mirror and see ugliness again instead of beauty, sadness instead of comfort, restlessness instead of

peace. Then I look down the hall and see a door that has been closed on me, and I understand why I feel both bitter and that somehow my loneliness is all my own fault.

March 1997. I sit in my new apartment sewing curtain liners into curtains. The only thought in my head is, "I want to die." No place feels like home anymore; no answers have come, and pain and disappointment have increased. But somehow I sit and sew for the rest of the day, and the impulse to die decreases. It's back again, however, the next morning, and I drive two hours to talk to a friend. On the way, I'm almost hit by a car, and for a moment I am very attached to life—shocked into survival mode. It shows me a glimpse of the connection to life that I had thought was gone.

During this time, I learned about what a dark night of the soul is—and that it often lasts far longer than a night. This is where I found out what it feels like to be stripped to the bone, to feel that life is falling away and that I can't control this process. I wrote my way back into coherence, and all of my writing reflected this devastating journey—it was sometimes the only tool I had to find my center. Gradually, the emptiness and grief faded, work and people came along that I loved—and writing and teaching remained constants. I had lived for over a year in near complete powerlessness; however, what this experience taught me was how to pay attention—to my mind, body, emotions, soul. I learned the importance of safety and comfort, and that I could provide these things for myself.

Finally, I stopped waiting to be rescued from the childhood pain that had driven me against myself in the first place, driven me to make choices that endangered my spirit. All I could count on was what was within me—my soul. And the only way I succeeded

was to stop listening outside myself to the “rules” and begin living from my center.¹ But it’s to listen to the “voice of authority” outside ourselves that we are trained to do. Part of improving as a teacher involved learning to listen to the voice(s) inside myself. That freed me to begin listening to the voices of my students: voices from what I consider the realm of the *sacred*. The sacred seems to be about a different kind of listening—a kind of listening that is attending to the needs of the self. This is not in a way that isolates the self from community but that teaches you where your center is. And from that center, you can listen to others instead of having to inoculate them with your particular remedy.²

Reclining in the Sidelines: Stepping Back to Let Learning Happen

Getting out of the way, to me, is a true path for a teacher; it is also sometimes frightening. I have to be willing to be an apprentice, to learn from my students as they learn from me, because true learning is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning process, to find out what is meaningful by being more fully present to the learning experience. And one cannot be present if another is always in the way and shutting him or her down. I get concerned, however, that my students think I’m avoiding my work because I give them the responsibility of designing parts of the curriculum, leading discussions, asking questions.

In one freshman writing class I taught, I gave over the end of the semester to my students. We were studying the book *An Anthropologist on Mars*, by Oliver Sacks, and I wanted them to plan classes around the readings rather than having my interpretations dumped wholesale into their heads. It was exhilarating to watch them plan in small

groups; I had a sense that they would come up with something special, but I wasn't sure. And they did—everything from acting out skits that interpreted his perspective to presenting a variety of papers on his narratives. They got the class involved because *they* were involved. This was the first time I took this risk, and I'm grateful that I did. Now, in my Technical Writing class, I help my students brainstorm project ideas, but then I let them go and remain in the background as a consultant. Sometimes, by using such a student-centered pedagogy, I'm afraid a student is going to come up to me and tell me that I'm not doing my job (indeed, one semester a young man jokingly made the comment that I wanted them to do all the work). However, the appreciation of other students—that I'm respecting their processes—helps me through these times of self-doubt.

I'm still discovering what I have to say as I write. This process reminds me of Nancy Mairs' relationship with writing. Sometimes I teach this way, too, coming in with an open mind about what we'll do that day, and letting it happen naturally. I often communicate this way, too—needing trusted friends to be sounding boards for me as I lay out my thoughts and feelings, exploring them, almost tasting them to see which ones feel okay and which ones I want to let go of—finding out about myself in this process (where I stand, how I feel, what I want and need).

Sacred Work: The Integration of Work and Life

As a child, I often felt invisible—and in truth, my needs often were invisible. Crying in the mornings before I was taken to nursery school—not having the words at

three or four to tell my father that I was being molested by my teacher. Left to my own devices when my mother attempted suicide and was put in a hospital. Frightened after my parents' divorce; missing my mother; afraid of my angry, hurting father. The first two decades of my life were mostly about basic survival—and making myself as invisible as possible, if not physically, then emotionally. This could take the form of outbursts that frightened people away, as well as of lying about how I felt and what I liked/didn't like. I prostituted myself metaphorically and literally on some levels, ignoring my own needs, hiding from the world then dragging in the wrong pieces of it. It was another decade before I began realizing how strong I was, and another five years after that before I felt comfortable sharing who I am honestly and not worrying so much about my differences from others.

The first three decades of my life were an odd mix of rebellion and approval-seeking—an exhausting contradiction that often confused me and those around me. I had to learn that being a good woman was about keeping faith with myself, acting from who I am with integrity. It wasn't about pleasing others to avoid confrontation or punishment—or death (this was how strong the fear was).

All of this played its part in my teaching. On some days in the early years, I was terrified to stand in front of a class—or even to sit in a circle with my students. They weren't yet fellow beings; they were powerful adversaries in front of whom I had to prove myself and my learning. They reflected the adversarial nature that the world in general appeared to take on in my times of great anxiety. Needless to say, days like this were draining and frightening, leaving me feeling empty and desolate. Life still happens

now, but because I have come to accept this and that it happens for my students as well as me, I no longer view them as adversaries. The most comfortable way to see them at this point in my life is as fellow apprentices.

Aspects of Sacred Work

The feelings of not having a choice and of being a real person are both elements of what I call *sacred work*—of what I believe my work (writing and teaching—a *listening apprenticeship*) to be.³ I teach and write from a sense of calling—and if I think back, I’ve always done this. I remember playing teacher in the basement of our house, my friends sitting around looking at me expectantly (I didn’t know what to do when I set up a formal classroom setting—significant). I helped my friends with their problems as they helped me with mine. From the age of five or six, I began writing poetry—I’d discovered the magic of words. Reading and writing were places I could express myself when there felt like no other safe place to do so.

A safe place—this is another element that I believe my students and I need in the classroom. A safe place within and without, where learning becomes safe instead of competitive. When my students snap back at me, disagree with an idea, demand clarification, complain about their lives, I sometimes forget for a moment that they feel safe enough to do this and aren’t (necessarily) doing it out of disrespect. I *want* to hear them, to know what is important to them. I *don’t* want to frighten them or bully them into learning. I’m not their buddy, and I maintain my boundaries, but I’m not an authoritarian tyrant, either. Many places exist between these two extremes.⁴

When my scholarly work started breaking down because I wasn't honoring the needs of my spirit and body, I began to pay more attention to the fact that I bring my life with me wherever I go. Knowing this helps me to avoid what Jane Tompkins refers to as "unconsciously reenacting on a public stage an inward drama of which I have no knowledge" (128). Being conscious of my life and my state of being helps me to be more present to my students. It's part of the irony of being present to myself. It also gives them room to be present to themselves, each other, and me if they so choose.

Balance is another component of sacred work. It is important for me to find balance between being with others and being with myself. I become a "bad" teacher when I've spent too much time with others (not able to hear myself) or too much time with myself (forgetting other lives).⁵ Embracing this paradox helps me bond with myself and others but in ways that aren't about taking any of us hostage. I can feel these connections more honestly when I have given myself necessary solitude. There are times when I have to retreat from the world, when it hurts me to be around the world's noise. There are times when I have to be completely alone and safe, surrounded by my nest of books, music, pen and paper, cats, and movies. In the years when I didn't honor this need, I felt both lonely and frightened by the crowd. Now I feel gratefully alone then refreshed when I go into the world again.

I think that as teachers we want to feel comfortable in our own skins and in a classroom. We want our students to respond to us positively, to love learning. This is the need for community and comfort. I walk down this path every day wondering how well I'll do, if I'll reach someone—sometimes forgetting that I need to be open to *being*

reached, too. But if I teach to lead, I'll get nowhere fast. If I teach to help others learn to lead themselves, then I've accomplished something important. The competitiveness of academia makes it difficult to stand aside and get out of my students' way. I've been trained to prove my intellectual learning. The problem is that there is no substance, for me anyway, if my heart and spirit are not also involved; and if they are involved, then the need to step aside strengthens.

Sacred Stories: Entering Our Hearts

The theme of a humanities class that I'm teaching is *sacred stories*. I'm not giving exams in this class. One of the assignments, in fact, is for each student to write a sacred story out of his or her experience. I feel a trained part of me fighting against this, telling me that I'm not doing my job, that they don't need the class material to do this assignment, so it's not a real assignment. The inner critic that Tompkins writes about is alive and well. But another part of me knows that the men and women in this class have responded to the sacred stories they've been exposed to with sacred stories and deep insights of their own—these have already come up in most of their journal entries.⁶

Carolina responds deeply to issues of life and death in Maxine Hong Kingston's story "No Name Woman":

I disagree with the fact that the woman took her [and her baby's lives] to escape from her sad reality. . . . The decision [to live or die] is not up to us, and we have no right [to take] anyone's life. But [to] some extent I know why she decided that she was not worth living. She was already marked, forgotten, vanished from society; she had nowhere to turn. The only exit she found was the door of no return: death. It really did not matter if she existed or [not].

Mary Jo's journal entry, "Riding the Fence," poignantly relates the loss of a sacred childhood space:

Before the freeway [was built], a small group of friends and I would hike to the end of a pasture, in complete darkness, until we met with a loose wire fence that rested on a grassy knoll. . . . We would sit on the top wire, balancing ourselves, and proceed to bounce. Once we were all in rhythm, the bouncing of the fence went along effortlessly. It made me feel giddy and free. . . . A wonderful motion of harmony with my friends. . . .

We returned to the fence one night. We positioned ourselves for the motion of harmony. The white noise of the traffic snuffed out our giggles. The headlights of the cars speeding by briefly lit up our faces. As I looked at my friends, their expressions seemed a bit sickly. Somehow the motion of harmony was shattered by the motion of civilization. Riding the fence would no longer be a luxury.

And Martinez relates a powerful ritual she performs that has taken on new meaning after the recent death of her grandfather:

Every time I pass by a church I [make] the sign of the cross. I then start to remember family that has passed on. . . . Now that my grandfather has recently [passed] away I have felt . . . pain . . . more than . . . happiness. We were not the closest in the world, but he held a special place in my heart. I have lost great-grandparents, and I have also lost my paternal grandparents. For some reason I felt a lot of sorrow with my most recent loss. I think it must be because I am older. I also think that it was because I was able to spend more time with him. . . . One thing I believe had a great impact was that I saw him suffering in the hospital. . . . For me [the sign of the cross] is a sign of respect. I do this gesture because I believe in what I am doing. . . . And now, it has an even deeper meaning. . . . So whenever someone asks why, I simply say, "out of respect for my family that has passed on."

The spiritually connected part of me believes that they will take more with them from this class if we have acknowledged our souls, lives, hearts, experiences. This part also believes that souls, lives, hearts, and experiences are deeply connected to learning—and to whether or not one places a value on what one learns. The whole point of the

class, really, is to acknowledge the sacred stories within all of us so that we can also remain open to the sacred stories of others—so that we can *hear* them because we have honored ourselves.

The stories I've told and read in and for this dissertation are primarily sacred. In recognizing my need for them, I found a way to carry them (in spirit anyway) into teaching. Now I feel that each set of journal entries or essays that I read from these students is a gift. Their words stretch me beyond myself and simultaneously validate my presence, not so much in an ego-directed way anymore (though I'm sure that's a component) as in a spiritual way, a reminder to listen to who *I* am through listening to who *they* are.

Sacred work has grace and love behind it. As Parker J. Palmer writes, “Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships” (*Courage* 90). It is this grace that I feel around and within me when I read their sacred stories and hear their hearts. I have been somewhat directive about their weekly journal entries, telling them I will not collect them if they are hastily written at the beginning of class—that I want the entries to be thoughtful and from the heart. Of course, some students slip the entries in during break anyway, but most of them honor my words. These words, though directive, are from the soul—they are a soul boundary. Perhaps this isn't appropriate or is hypocritical, but right now anyway, I'm okay with my demand.⁷

Part of the sacredness of teaching for me is that it *is* a calling. As Palmer says, “We were drawn to a body of knowledge because it shed light on our identity as well as

on the world” (*Courage* 25). James Hillman would probably say that it shed light on our souls—and on what our souls wanted. I’m not just drawn to the subject matter, though. It’s something else that I need, something that happens, well or poorly, between me and my students: we teach each other. I need to learn, to be able to bend, be flexible—and teaching allows me, challenges me even, to do this.

Affirmations: Joining Hearts in Community

Teresa walks up to me after one humanities class and says, “Thank you.” Her large brown eyes look weary yet peaceful. She had been in a car accident with her teenage daughter earlier in the day, work had not gone well, and she had been feeling exhausted and discouraged. “Your class tonight helped me forget all my worries for a while. I know you don’t think we appreciated it, but I really did.” We hug each other, and before walking out, she hands me a note full of further affirmations.

I had been worn out and frustrated that day, but our class revolved around listening to music, and it was a relief for me. But it looked like the students weren’t interested. Actually, I had focused on one particular student, who clearly was bored. When I’m in this state of mind, I tend to focus on the negatives, and I had missed the obvious pleasure some students were getting from this experience. Somehow, Teresa noticed this and also took the time to tell me that she appreciated what I had done. This is community at its best, to me—the blessing of connection and support.⁸

My teaching experiences change from day to day. Some days are great, and some feel like dismal failures. This used to devastate me, until I realized that it mirrors life and

being human. I still can come home from some classes unhappy, or angry at a manipulative student, or angry at myself for stumbling over an idea or missing someone's point. But this happens in all of my life; it isn't exclusive to teaching. My fear of teaching and my obsession with how I appear to others have decreased as I've realized it's not about being perfect but about being present. And students like Teresa remind me of this by being present to me.

Kathy asks me if I will help her with a personal statement for law school, and I agree to meet her at a coffee shop. We go over her work, which is real and good, defining how arguments with her anti-conservationist father forced her to articulate her pro-conservationist beliefs. I offer some editing suggestions. The main problem is that her mind is tired; she's been working on this statement for days, has gone through several drafts, and can't see it anymore. My mind comes to it fresh, and I enjoy showing her where she can cut sections out, redefine phrases, introduce the statement effectively. It's fun. We agree to meet a week later, and when I next see her, she says, "You're awesome."

This experience is the result of connecting to my work as sacred—and enjoying myself with another person. All teachers have moments like this, but we can forget them when the days are grinding by. And we can forget them because we know ourselves too well and not well at all. We know our foibles, flaws, terrors, weaknesses, but we sometimes forget our strengths, talents, commitment. This, at least, is true for me. When I remember myself now, I try to do it holistically—seeing the shadows and the light. I

am complex, have both, because I am human. This does not disappear when I enter the classroom.

A Parting Note on Soulful Teaching

As a teacher and a human being, I am part of a process—life’s self-organizing process, one that shows me, if I pay attention, what works and what doesn’t. Trusting this process is sometimes difficult because the process itself is not concrete, although its results usually are quite concrete. But faith is necessary before the concrete results make themselves known. I have to listen to my heart, my soul—what are they telling me about who I am? I work and write myself into being every day.⁹ I believe writing and teaching begin from within. Before stepping into a classroom, I need to know who I am; otherwise, there is merely a body there but no soul. Many of us have heard the expression, “Now, that music has *soul!*” Intuitively, we know what this means—or many of us do: The music is written from a place of complete and honest complexity; it reaches us in its genuineness, whether the piece itself is complex or simple. This is true for teaching, too. Soulful teaching carries within it an acknowledgement that there are not just bodies in the class setting, nor are there empty minds to be filled; spirits, dreams, experiences, emotions, thoughts, memories, points of view—*stories*—are in this setting, and they have much to tell us.

What I’ve done in this dissertation is publish some of my stories.¹⁰ I no longer feel the need to apologize for my life’s beginnings, but they could have led to bitterness and endless cynicism, and they most certainly did erupt in despair and attempts at self-

annihilation. Learning to live in my body and not leave it behind has brought me to the belief that my clay feet will carry me; it has taught me how to learn from my students by listening to who they are. To know myself is much more challenging than to know any particular subject matter; however, self-knowledge turns subject matter into a place for integration rather than merely an object for intellectualizing. I don't claim to be the best teacher in the universe, but I do claim to be the best teacher *I* can be at any given moment. Because my work is sacred; thus, it is my life.

Notes

¹In *A Life in School*, Jane Tompkins expresses this external pressure beautifully:

After babyhood we spend a lot of time learning to sit in rows. Going from unruly to ruled. Learning to write on pages that are lined. Learning to obey. There is no other way, apparently. Even if the desks were arranged in a circle, or were not desks at all but chairs or ottomans, still they would have to form some pattern. We would have to learn to sit still and listen. (154)

²Tompkins here describes the necessity of letting go and getting out of the way of other people's processes, something that doesn't happen until you learn to get out of your own way:

A class doesn't get to know itself until it has been let go. People's personalities won't be visible, their feelings and opinions won't surface, unless the teacher gets out of the way on a regular basis. You have to be willing to give up your authority, and the sense of identity and prestige that come with it, for the students to be able to feel their own authority. To get out of the students' way, the teacher has to learn how to get out of her own way. To not let her ego call the shots all the time. This is incredibly difficult. But I think it is a true path for a teacher. (147)

³Tompkins writes about letting go of her authority, being pulled to enter a class with a minimal agenda. At times she struggled with insecurity, but the pull was compelling:

I simultaneously thought of myself as a fraud—someone passing for a teacher who didn't in fact have anything to teach—and as a *real person* [my italics] for the first time in my life. . . . But the way that appealed to me then, that called and coerced me (for this was not a choice, really, it was what I had to do), was to have no knowledge. To know nothing, nothing solid, pre-existing, nothing that would deflect the course of events from its unpredictable path. (122-23)

⁴About safety, Tompkins writes the following:

. . . I believe that school should be a safe place, the way home is supposed to be. A place where you belong, where you can grow and express yourself freely, where you know and care for the other people and are known and cared for by them, a place where people come before information and ideas. School needs to comprehend the relationship

between the subject matter and the lives of students, between teaching and the lives of teachers, between school and home. (127)

⁵Parker J. Palmer writes in *The Courage to Teach* that

our equal and opposite needs for solitude and community constitute a great paradox. When it is torn apart, both of these life-giving states of being degenerate into deathly specters of themselves. Solitude split off from community is no longer a rich and fulfilling experience of inwardness; now it becomes loneliness, a terrible isolation. Community split off from solitude is no longer a nurturing network of relationships; now it becomes a crowd, an alienating buzz of too many people and too much noise. (65)

⁶Carolina Carrillo, Mary Jo Allen, and Marinez Bretz were students in my Intercultural Perspectives humanities classes in Nogales, Arizona, during the Spring semester of 1999. Each was kind enough to allow me to publish excerpts from one of her journal entries.

⁷Palmer writes about the importance of a teacher/mentor having “coherence between his method and himself” (24). He learned that to teach well he had to know himself. Then he could create a reciprocal relationship with the people he worked with:

Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching’s great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn” (25).

I think this apprenticeship/mentor reciprocity works both ways, however. I love learning from my students—when I can get my fearful ego out of the way (the one that says I’m supposed to do all the teaching, they the learning).

⁸In discussing affirmation as a teacher, Palmer relates two reasons for affirmation’s importance:

First, becoming aware of our gifts can help us teach more consistently from our identity and integrity. . . . Second, we need reassurance about our gifts in order to take the next step—examining, with others, a moment when our teaching became all pain and no joy. Looking at our “failings” is always hard, but it is easier when done against the backdrop of our strengths. (69-70)

In education, such affirmation can get lost for several reasons, which Palmer enumerates beautifully as what he calls “broken paradoxes”:

- We separate head from heart. Result: minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think.
- We separate facts from feelings. Result: bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote and ignorant emotions that reduce truth to how one feels today.
- We separate theory from practice. Result: theories that have little to do with life and practice that is uninformed by understanding.
- We separate teaching from learning. Result: teachers who talk but do not listen and students who listen but do not talk. (66)

⁹G. Lynn Nelson writes about such an experience in “Writing from the Feather Circle,” which he uses in some (perhaps all, now) of his writing classes:

. . . in our feather circle writing class, as in the traditional Native American feather circle, we try to write openly and honestly. We do not look for our words in the library, we try to find them in our hearts. We work on writing to ourselves in our personal journals (“How do I know what I know till I see what I say”) before we write to the world. We try to find our own voices—not Shakespeare’s or Hemingway’s or Faulkner’s, but our own. We try to use our words to find out who we are and what really matters in this world. And doing this, we often arrive at a very different place from where the commercials and the textbooks and the first-year composition directors would lead us. (6)

¹⁰Nelson writes about the power of “publishing” personal stories:

. . . everything in us gets published, one way or another. That is, we need to tell our stories of our anger, our pain, our losses, our confusion—or they will sit in us until they translate themselves into some other language, almost always a language of violence. So a drive-by shooting by a gang or blowing up the Federal Building in Oklahoma or suicide or alcoholism or drug abuse are all “publishings” of the stories within us that must be told. (“Feather” 7)

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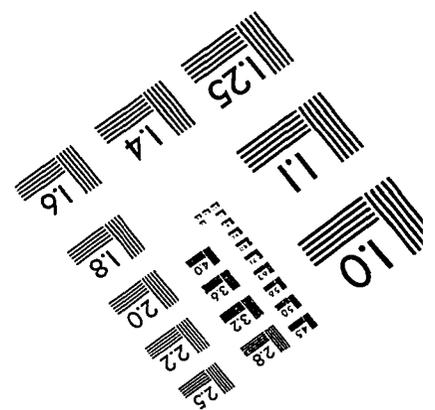
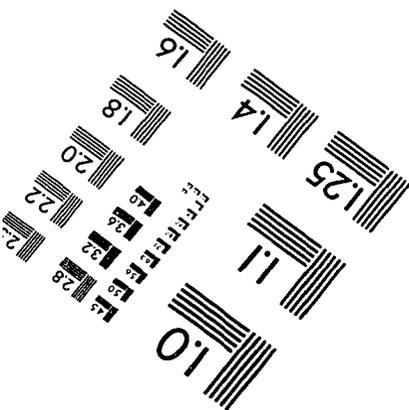
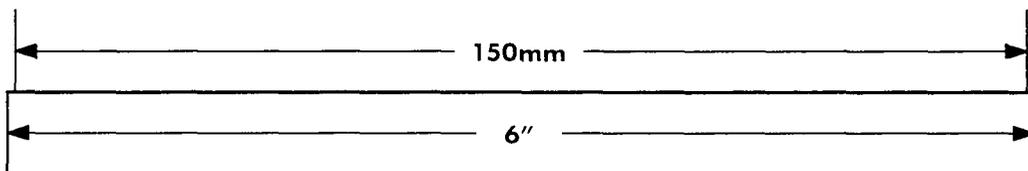
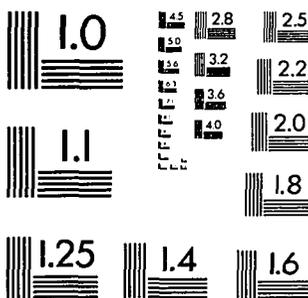
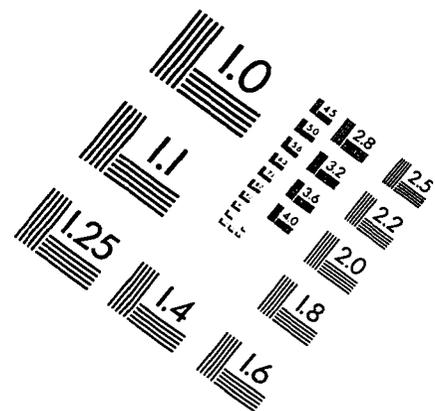
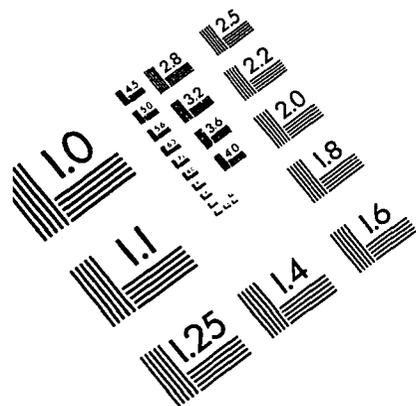
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