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Don't Call It Expressivism: Legacies of a "Tacit Tradition"

Expressivism lost status and respect in composition and rhetoric during the 1990s, despite attempts by some to defend its insights. Few in the field call themselves expressivists today, and yet we can recognize traces of this movement in work by contemporary scholars and theorists. Indeed, the field itself still retains commitments that echo that early approach to writing and writers.

At a national conference of rhetoricians a couple of years ago, I was talking to a group of colleagues in the hallway. I had just come down with a bad cold and was hanging on till I could give my talk and return to bed, but I was trying my best to act friendly and engaged. One of the participants in the conversation was a well-known member of our field whom I had known slightly for a number of years. He turned to me and said, "Oh, Eli, I see your literacy autobiography is out." I nodded, and was about to thank him for noticing, but before I could say anything he turned to someone else in the circle and said cheerily, "J, we should write autobiographies. That would be easy and fun, wouldn't it?" I was a little taken aback by the remark, but I was too sick to respond. Fortunately, a friend in that conversation wrote me

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the next day deploring the snarky comment by our mutual acquaintance. If she hadn't testified to its reality, I might have remembered the interchange as an anxiety dream generated by my feverish condition.

Personal writing evokes strong reactions from readers. Some prefer memoir to most other forms because they experience stories from life as more authentic than analytical writing or even fiction. Present-day undergraduates, for example, refer to narratives with which they can readily connect as "relatable," and they often prize that quality above logical persuasion or even emotional appeals of other kinds. Others, like my colleague at the conference, find the undertaking embarrassing and unworthy of academic attention, perhaps even a bit threatening. There might have been a bit of gender policing involved in that episode, but I think my colleague spoke for many in the field who would rather such writing be left to adolescents, the recently divorced, veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder, and anybody else innocent enough to think that writing should include feelings. Literacy autobiography in particular, I suspect, smacks of a cartoon version of early 1970s expressivism, when sharing your struggles with a group was not only going to raise your consciousness and alleviate your emotional suffering but also improve your prose style. Long ago, Thomas O'Donnell proposed a more sympathetic view of expressivist practice: "what we *do* is encourage students to bring words to bear on their experiences, to ground their writing in their lives, to be responsible for their words, and to be responsible to the community in which they are reading, writing, and responding" (429). These are commitments to which writing teachers of most pedagogical orientations could subscribe, just as long as the word *expressivism* is left unspoken.

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The strange interchange with one colleague at a conference made me realize that, correctly or not, I'm now associated with expressivist tendencies because I've published a literacy autobiography (*Writing Home*) and written about the rhetoric of my own ethnic group ("Ceremonious Feeling"). Moreover, recent conversations with students about expressivism have made me realize that I need to reconsider the legacy of that much-maligned movement. Graduate students are often aware of the history of expressivism

largely through the Bartholomae/Elbow public conversations in 1989 and 1991 (Bartholomae) and tend to side with Bartholomae in the “debate.” Yet when some of them speak about their research interests, many demonstrate a preference for personal writing and narrative, for teaching keyed to individual development, and for writers who are marginalized in such a way that their voices hardly register in the public arena, even on the Internet. One Temple undergraduate named Rachel Efstathion became fascinated with the expressivism movement, wanted to learn about it from the beginning, and sought out expressivists writing now. Her passion for the approach and commitment to connect the historical movement to counseling and psychology challenged me to face my own attitudes toward expressivism. What do the works of Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, Wendy Bishop, and others mean to me today?

I’ve long considered my commitments in the profession to be rooted in social theorists such as David Bartholomae and Patricia Bizzell. I followed them and James Berlin in regarding expressivism as too individualist, too lacking in a political analysis of the composing situation in schools. If anything, I have also had a lingering allegiance to the cognitive research of Linda Flower and John Hayes, suspecting that the field dismissed the empirical framework too hastily. And yet, because I am also a poet who has taught many poetry writing workshops, I could never entirely let go of the notion, proposed by James Britton and his associates in 1975, that some sort of Ur-expressive drive stands behind all writing. Expressive language, according to Britton et al., “appears to be the means by which the new is tentatively explored, thoughts are half uttered, attitudes half expressed, the rest being left to be picked up by the listener, or reader, who is willing to take the unexpressed on trust” (11). Christopher Burnham and Rebecca Powell make the bold but defensible claim that “Britton’s expressivism has, in a sense, become part of the tacit tradition in contemporary teaching of writing” (120). In this essay, I hope to highlight the “tacit tradition” they identify, the way “expression” has been woven into our scholarly and pedagogical conversations silently or, as Burnham and Powell say, “refusing the expressivism label.” What is the unspoken legacy of expressivism from its early forms, through the more political version of Ann Berthoff, the feminist “social expressivist perspective” of Sherrie Gradin, and the unapologetic public expressions of Wendy Bishop?

My purpose here is not to outline a guide to expressivism for young

scholars unfamiliar with its long history. I cannot review the role of expression here, and others have done a far better job than I could in describing and defending the movement (Bishop, "Against"; Bishop, "Places"; Bizarro; Burnham and Powell; Fishman and McCarthy; Gradin; O'Donnell). Hepzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald have been particularly thoughtful in critiquing Berlin's three-part division (34) in favor of melding American romantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical traditions in a way that incorporates Elbow and Macrorie as well as others (35–36). Burnham and Powell have ably reviewed the expressivist literature and identified writers who are expanding and reimagining the theory and practice today. They also point out that expressivism is "at the center of the National Writing Project movement," which means it is probably one of the most influential approaches to writing in K–12 classrooms across the country, even at a time when standardized testing sets the tone in many school districts. However, college writing and composition/rhetoric graduate programs have not been as hospitable to expressivism as the schools have been. As a longtime writing program director and English graduate professor, perhaps I'm complicit in this split between school and college; I have consistently focused more on social composition theory with my colleagues and students. Even in my work with high school teachers and students, I have promoted academic discourse as the crucial connector for success in college courses. But for many reasons that may become clearer in this essay, I find myself drawn to the link between expression and composing in the work that speaks to me most now.

Moreover, I'm concerned that the current "writing about writing" pedagogy movement, and the contemporary conversation about teaching to transfer, have oriented the discussion about writing instruction too narrowly around school success and professional preparation. This is a move appropriate for the times, responding to heavy expectations from state legislatures, boards, and the public on universities and colleges and, inevitably, on writing programs by university and college administrators. *Writing about Writing*, the name of a popular textbook edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs, is based on ideas the two authors first proposed in a *College Composition and Communication* article in 2007 (see the discussion over their ideas in 2008 [Bird; Miles et al.; Wardle; Downs, "Response"] as well as Downs's CompPile annotated Research Bibliography ["Writing"]) and Laura R. Micciche's application of the approach to graduate teach-

ing instruction ["Toward"]). In this vein, too, is the capacious tracking of threshold concepts in the field called *Naming What We Know*, edited by

What I am suggesting is that when we focus so much on professional and theoretical understandings of writing instruction—especially in the context of higher education budget cuts, larger class sizes, and more calls for standardized quantitative assessments—we can forget the importance of two impulses that compel writers: the desire to speak out of your most intimate experiences and to connect with communities in need.

Linda Adler-Kassner and Wardle. The teaching to transfer concern is best represented in the recent influential book *Writing across Contexts* by Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. I am in no way arguing against these fine contributions or even that they are incompatible with the "tacit tradition" I describe in this essay. In fact, many authors within the Adler-Kassner and Wardle collection highlight reflection, experience, identity, and feeling as crucial to writing and writers, and Kathi Yancey has been

a longtime champion of "reflection" as the key to writing development. I admire and support these efforts at research and theory by authors I regard as disciplinary leaders and personal friends.

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I want to describe subtle legacies of expressivism that I recognize within my own practice and within the writing of others who don't particu-

larly identify as expressivists but owe a debt to the movement. I identify four habits of mind or long-standing attitudes that I associate with the expressivist movement, and I cite authors who either say explicitly they are not expressivists or are more identified with other movements. My point is not to challenge their stated identities or argue for a major resurgence of the older movement, but to embrace the “tacit tradition” as a vital part of composition studies and the teaching of writing. I regard these four as legacies of expressivism, though I’d invite others to suggest more:

1. The individual, embedded in culture and history, must find a way of being in the world through expression that cannot be adequately prescribed by textbooks, standardized curricula, or social norms.
2. A crucial social character of individual expression involves identification with a home group’s discourse—its rhythms, sayings, registers, vocabulary, and style—as a matter of historical location and linguistic resource.
3. Community literacy projects become meaningful politically and socially when they recognize and support expression for groups and individuals not usually sponsored in their own autonomous uses of reading and writing.
4. Teaching as a profession requires personal commitment, and the teaching of writing—that founding mission of composition—challenges and rewards us especially because both individuals and social groups have so much at stake in their developing literacies.

As I read these four points again and again, the persistent underlying paradox of composition/rhetoric emerges: writers write alone but within a charged social space shaped by contemporary culture, ethnic and erotic identities, home language, economics, power dynamics, genre and gender expectations. I have written about this as the “dialectic of individual and group” (*Writing Home* 243), but I find that reconsidering expressivism brings that dialectic drama to the edge of the orchestra lights on our disciplinary proscenium stage.

For each of these legacy attitudes I want to consider a book that is written by someone who does not particularly identify with expressivism. I don’t claim they are really crypto-expressivists, but their work illustrates that these habits of mind are embedded in our discipline’s culture. I think

in large measure the three-part division of the field—expressivist, cognitivist, and social epistemic—proposed by Lester Faigley in 1986 and then James Berlin in 1988 have over the years been woven and rewoven into a complex intellectual brocade that accommodates these and many other modes or orientations. At the same time, we carry the divisions from the late 1980s in our disciplinary lore as though they still have explanatory force. I would argue that the divisions, and especially the lingering value judgments associated with those early days in the field, do us very little good today, particularly if they leave us with a hesitance to embrace fully the critical insights of past scholars and theorists. Robert Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being*, Adam Banks's *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, Tiffany Rousculp's *Rhetoric of Respect: Recognizing Change at a Community Writing Center*, and Sondra Perl's *On Austrian Soil: Teaching Those I Was Taught to Hate* each strike me as speaking for one of the expressivist legacies I've described. Through them, I'd like to explore attitudes I find crucial to my own sense of the values I hold dearest in this multivoiced discipline we call composition/rhetoric.

A Personal Note on Disciplinary History

Before I go on, I need to relate some disciplinary impressions from which my thinking about the legacies of expressivism emerges. I entered the field as a graduate student in the mid-1980s, when a basic sense of “composition” as a discipline was being established by scholars and teachers five to twenty years older than I. This account is meant more to locate my reading of the four books than it is to give a rigorous history of unfolding movements. Perhaps this short digression will amuse or infuriate my immediate peers, and perhaps it will seem merely nostalgic to younger scholars, but I don't know any other way to anchor my remarks in one person's experience of a field that has changed so much in the last thirty years.

At the same time composition was moving away from expressivism as one central tendency in the field, most scholars also rejected the path toward cognitive psychology and learning theory blazed by Linda Flower and her colleague John Hayes. If expressivism wasn't academic or political enough for the majority of compositionists, then the cognitive approach was too scientific and formalist, with methodologies uncongenial to people trained originally in literary criticism. Both focused on individual experience, a limitation scholars at the time could not accept. As Laura R.

Micciche neatly sums up the shift: “The social turn in composition studies widened contexts for theorizing writing, shifting attention from the individual writer (the legacy of expressivist and cognitive process models) to larger political, institutional, and cultural contexts of writing” (“Writing” 492). The shift made possible a view of writing that could address race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social categories so crucial in debates over the next decades throughout the academy.

Not even the postprocess movement grounded in poststructuralist theory has displaced the social constructivism of Bartholomae, Bizzell, and many others as the dominant frame for the field. As Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander note in their introduction to a *College English* special issue reconsidering this frame: “But still, we believe the social turn remains very much alive and capable of addressing the systemic economic and material challenges that face our society, our cultures, our ways of being and living with one another” (485). My own private hypothesis is that composition researchers, scholars, and teachers recognized instinctively and (mostly) unconsciously that neither expressivism nor cognitive studies were likely platforms for tenure in the English departments then controlled by theorists following Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault. Berlin’s “social-epistemic” (478) scholars wrote with political sophistication and theoretical nuance. Such prose could look familiar to contemporary literary critics, even when quoting student texts; at least literary colleagues could recognize some of the theory citations. In graduate school in the mid-1980s, I was excited by the work of Bizzell, Bartholomae, and Berlin and wrote my dissertation and first book using Bakhtin and Foucault as the basis of a theory of authority in writing. The social turn—buttressed by the ethnography of Shirley Brice Heath and the sociolinguistics of M.A.K. Halliday, Geneva Smitherman, and William Labov—made sense to me, a refugee from modernist poetry criticism who wanted to pursue more political work and liked teaching writing more than professing literature. Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*, a personal narrative with a class analysis, helped me make connections to urban Philadelphia, where I had been teaching high school. My early science training prepared me to accept the process studies of Janet Emig, Flower and Hayes, Nancy Sommers, Perl, Andrea Lunsford, and others, but the social epistemic paradigm gave my new field the academic heft and a theoretical genealogy I could claim proudly in an overwhelmingly literary English department.

When feminism entered the conversation directly, with the 1988 publication of Elizabeth Flynn's "Composing as a Woman," expressivism wasn't at first invoked as a predecessor that combined the political and the personal. After all, it was a movement mostly associated with men, and none of the authors seemed conscious of the gendered language they regularly used. The feminist project needed to establish gender as a legitimate and urgent category for investigation; allying with an earlier and increasingly devalued movement would not have furthered the case for either legitimacy or urgency. In 1991, Susan Jarratt acknowledged the connection others were making in the classroom between feminist pedagogy and the "feminized" pedagogy of expressivists like Elbow (117). However, she emphasizes the dangers of a pedagogy that minimizes conflict. She echoes the critique Berlin and Bizzell were making at the time for the political naïveté of expressivism, and I find her argument for argument—for a principled commitment to *agon* when struggle against dominant discourses is paramount—just as convincing today as it was then. For better or worse, expressivism had to make way for the identity and culture battles in colleges and universities that were to follow.

Expressivism carried at least two added stigmas in English departments. The first is that schoolteachers and education schools were taking up expressivist approaches as important to writing pedagogy. Even though our researchers and theorists fought hard to promote composition instruction and program administration as a worthy endeavor in college, they chose not to fight the status battle for K–12 educational practices as legitimate for college English departments. The National Writing Project, starting in 1974 with the founding of the Bay Area Writing Project, grew significantly during this time, but I daresay most literary critics barely tolerated its presence if they noticed NWP at all, and English faculty would not easily have accepted theories of composing used in high schools as compatible with college writing instruction (see, for example, NWP founder Jim Gray's amusing account of his most obstreperous participant in their second summer institute: a Berkeley English professor with a specialty in seventeenth-century literature [22–23]). The sad fact even today is that college compositionists must find ways to promote good teaching in an environment where many English colleagues still do not regard pedagogy as intellectually or professionally valuable, especially in writing programs at research universities where grad students are trained (a literary colleague

of mine opined in a recent faculty meeting that he didn't see why first-year writing couldn't be run by contingent faculty "technicians").

The second challenge expressivism faced in English departments came from creative writing. Creative writing professors have tended to discourage conversations in their workshops that might devolve into therapy sessions or avenues for personal revelation.

In the mid 1970s, I took an advanced poetry workshop in which two of the best poets were writing in the vein of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, but our older white, male teacher—who often praised their work—always focused the discussion on form, voice, diction, and

style rather than on the forceful emotions or the gender politics of the poets themselves. The emphasis in creative writing programs, as the raw 1960s faded into the more decorous 1970s, was on aesthetic achievement rather than self-actualization. Unprocessed personal writing seemed merely half realized, a parody of more serious art, and writing about your own experience could embarrass faculty unless, like Sexton or Plath or Robert Lowell or Richard Hugo, you had famously built a life's work on your own suffering.

By the time I returned for graduate school a decade later, I was drawn as a teacher to the personal nature of creative writing seminars, but clearly creative writing and composition/rhetoric were forming up into camps within English, and very little conversation about teaching crossed those lines. Creative writing workshops were seldom compared to composition pedagogy, even if the peer review processes in first-year writing had so many similarities with workshop methods in poetry or fiction courses. The situation is changing today because, among other reasons, so many recent MFAs are making their living as faculty in first-year writing programs. I know in my own writing program, our staff conversations about pedagogy include creative writing instruction because some of our leading teachers come from that background.

Wendy Bishop published her combative and persuasive "Places to Stand" in 1999. In a personal and even conversational tone, she pushed back at critics who charged that "expressivists' keep students in a state of naiveté, don't prepare them for the languages of the academy, abandon them to the forces of politics and cultures and 'emphasize a type of self-actualization

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which the outside world would indict as sentimental and dangerous” (11, quoting from Fishman and McCarthy 648). She answers with a level but amused gaze: “Call me a dreamer, but I’m not the only self-identified something-like-an-expressivist who would never characterize my pedagogy in those ways” (11). She became a central and beloved figure as chair of CCCC, made stronger connections with Associate Writing Programs—the professional organization for creative writing in the academy—but her commitments to personally motivated writing and the crossover to poetry were more admired than imitated in composition/rhetoric. It’s difficult to find much mention of expressivism in our debates after about the turn of the millennium. Bishop didn’t even say the word in her Chair’s address published in 2001, though she did express feelings of fatigue and renewal. She also read a poem from Gerard Manley Hopkins and one she wrote for the conference at which she presided. She died too young in 2003.

Being in the World

Robert Yagelski’s *Writing as a Way of Being* seems both anchored in and estranged from expressivism. In his book you can hear the echoes of voices from the origins of composition in the expressivist tradition: Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and especially Donald Murray, with whom Yagelski studied in his early graduate career. Yet curiously, he doesn’t claim that line or trace the heritage of his insistent focus on the “writer writing” rather than the “writer’s writing” (7), that is, on the phenomenological experience of composing rather than the eventual production of a text. He mentions expressivism by name only once and gives much more space to Lester Faigley, James Berlin, and postprocess theorists in his discussion of “the current state of writing theory” (56). This isn’t entirely surprising, since his strong first book, *Literacy Matters*, draws on Paolo Friere, social construction, and poststructural theory. Expressivism and literacy narrative don’t figure in his account of the field.

Earlier in his career, his article “The Ambivalence of Reflection” appeared in the same 1999 issue of *CCC* that opened with Wendy Bishop’s “Places to Stand,” her argument for the continued value of expressivism. In that 1999 article, Yagelski cites both Lad Tobin and Peter Elbow on his way to defining a teacher’s identity as distinct from his or her subject position, but these expressivists are mentioned more for their interest in the teacher/student relationship than for their connection to freewriting or

personal experience. His *CCC* article makes it clear that Yagleski's concern for "being" grows from his attachment to Freire, his wariness of the critical pedagogy of Ira Shor and Henry Giroux, his recognition of Zen Buddhism as a better model for the non-authoritarian teacher, and his focus on identity as a tool for teaching and writing-as-action. Like many compositionists of his generation, throughout his career Yagelski distances himself from the rhetoric of individualism so associated with expressivism, even though his interests could be interpreted as having a focus on the agency and empowerment of individual writers.

In his most recent book (*Writing*), Yagelski targets the Western orientation toward rationality as the supremely human trait, exemplified particularly by Descartes in his famous dictum "I think; therefore I am." He makes an impassioned political plea about the need for a more holistic view of sentient and nonsentient being in order to save us from planetary extinction. He turns to poststructuralist compositionists like Thomas Kent, who challenge Cartesian thinking (though, in Yagelski's view, without leaving the Cartesian worldview), and then back to the thirteenth-century Zen philosopher Eihei Dogen for an alternate and nondualistic attitude toward mind and body. In the final pages of the book he speaks movingly about what students could get from a "way of being" approach to writing pedagogy in contradistinction to the hyper-tested neoliberal model so much in vogue with administrators these days:

In place of thousands of students writing individually but producing the same kinds of (mostly meaningless) texts in order to demonstrate that they conform to the same set of standards, rules, and conventions, thousands of student writers would be writing together in order to understand better who they are and how they might live together more mindfully, equitably, and ethically. . . . This is the future of writing instruction I envision. 1,000 writers writing Together. (*Writing* 164–65)

That addition of "Together" at the end of the passage indicates Yagelski's concern for a pedagogy that stresses the social, but it also signals his recognition that an emphasis on mindfulness and developing consciousness could easily be read as a focus on the individual rather than the collective. It's a tricky channel to navigate. When he actually describes the pedagogy meant to foster this exploratory, social, and "ontological" composing practice, it's striking that he turns to Donald Murray's reflection about his own

writing process as well as the poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's accounts of learning to write and read in prison (*Writing* 112). For Yagelski, the expressivist writer/teacher and the reformed/transformed poet stand as exemplars of authors shaping their own being through composition.

In order to argue against standardized writing instruction and for self-exploratory projects that matter to students, Yagelski doesn't need to make the broad and unsubstantiated claim that "[f]or all the time, effort, and money we expend on writing instruction at all levels of schooling, the act of writing seems to play a decidedly minimal role in the lives of most of those with whom we share the earth" (*Writing* 166). This sets up a binary between writing for work and writing as a way of being that feeds into the neoliberal agenda to make schools vocational and not places for self-help. Yet his call for attention to writing even an email as "being-in-the-world" (128) rather than as a vocational skill is compelling, particularly as the Common Core and its assessment machinery loom over every school and college English faculty.

When I read Yagelski's jeremiad against formalist and standardized writing instruction, I'm reminded of Ken Macrorie's influential book *Up-taught*, published in 1970, an expressivist attack on the homogenized school language he called "Engfish": "A feel-nothing, say-nothing language, dead like Latin, devoid of the rhythms of contemporary speech. A dialect in which words are almost never 'attached to things,' as Emerson said they should be" (18). Macrorie goes on to a questionable comparison between the silencing of students by the dulling educational system and the silencing of African Americans during slavery (54). The comparison must have been striking at the time, but it does justice to neither sort of oppression. Macrorie's politics can seem ham-handed and unexamined after fifty years of critiques, riots, colonial wars, spiraling inequality, and prison expansion, but his expressivism is not focused exclusively on individual development of writers. His "third way" of teaching (27) is based on freewriting, intensive and open peer review, and great respect for the thoughts and feelings of students "given real choices and encouraged to learn the way of experts" (27). He quotes student texts liberally and emphasizes the give and take both between student and teacher and among classmates. Macrorie's belief in writing as a means to explore and enrich experience, while also influenced by the political tenor of the time, shines from the 1960s into Yagelski's text of 2011.

Drawing on Home Discourses

Digital Griots starts with a deceptively simple question in the midst of Adam Banks's many historical and theoretical discursive threads: "how can African American rhetorical traditions and practices inform composition's current endeavors to define, theorize and practice multimedia writing?" (2). As befitting his subject of DJs and trickster figures, Banks demonstrates his points through style as he remonstrates, orates, and contemplates in loops and cul-de-sacs of prose. He refers at times to his own origin story in Cleveland (2, 8, 56, 89) and his work at Syracuse University (57), but the most personal element of the book to me is the rhythm of the prose, the shifts of diction and focus, the long rambling tributes to griots of the past and colleagues in the present. At some moments, he turns to readers as if to a jury.

In fact, let me just say this for the record: at this moment in 2011, anyone still attempting to argue that Ebonics is a problem for black students or that it is somehow connected to a lack of intelligence or lack of desire to achieve is about as useful as a Betamax video cassette player and it's time for those folks to be retired, be they teachers, administrators, or community leaders, so the rest of us can try to do some real work. (15)

Other times, he slips into a register eloquent in its resistance to academic hedging: "By dissing the shallow shine he perceives in many black public intellectuals, Marable calls for a different relationship to history" (52). He even allows himself a gentle joke at a colleague's expense: "Now how [Jeff] Rice is able to claim that he 'invented' a rhetoric of something, much less a rhetoric of the cool" (119). Not that Banks is talking into a recording device or transcribing a TED talk, but he indicates his answer to the large question with which he opens the book by narrating his argument in multiple voices, from multiple stances. Of course he's not alone in this strategy, any more than he's alone in contemplating the tropes of remix and mixtape, but he handles himself like a professional DJ at a Fourth of July party that attracted a crowd including young and old, black, white, Asian, Native American, diva delights, and cyberhoodoos—discourse rooted in African American tradition but consciously modeling that social boundaries everywhere must be crossed.

My favorite section of this book is the one that considers "back in the day" stories. He defines these narratives as comprising "a genre of reflection and stories that refer to an important time in the past that lies within liv-

ing memory” (93). He talks about renderings in film, poetry, and personal stories told in response to prompts at a meeting of an African American undergraduate student group he addressed. Here the power of personal testimony goes beyond “generational tensions” inherent to the genre (96), “not merely about the elders fussing out the youngins but about a broader set of both contentions and commonplaces within black communities” (94). What I respond to in this section is the multiple layers on which his discussion of generational exchange works. He accounts for his personal reactions to hearing nineteen- and twenty-year-olds formulate their own “back in the day” stories about their own childhoods as opposed to those “youngins” behind them. He plays out the larger significance of storytelling, the reframing of experience not so much for the next generation as for the solidarity possible when a rhetor recalls better days for a diverse audience in a given moment, “to remix history in order to point a new way forward” (100). There is, in the very distinctiveness of his tone and diction, a statement of pride in a hard-won and much-tested Discourse—not only its words and deeds but, as James Gee would have it (526), a compendium of its habits and gestures, its values and attitudes—in short, the way a historically rooted people express suffering, desire, and hope.

But this remains a book about digital technology and the African American experience. Without belaboring the point, Banks takes an age-old approach to education and socialization and remixes it for the online environment, showing that “old school ethos” is something that any group can take on as a way of processing and recovering from the grave ravages of past attacks and natural disasters. Within a few sentences he juxtaposes Toni Morrison in *Beloved* treating the aftermath of savagery in slave times (98) with Steve Harvey introducing Cedric the Entertainer and recollecting a time when “music was music” (99). Even though hip-hop is attacked by “old heads” as lacking moral center and melodic appeal, Banks claims, along with sociologist Alondra Nelson, that African American culture “is in desperate need of ‘synchronizing’ or synthesizing past and future” (102). For Banks, hip-hop’s rhetorical flexibility allows today’s practitioners to take the “important next step” in the cultural process (103). Style and form *are* substance in his telling, and this has great application for any new modes of communication that are likely to be invented in the future.

African American culture strives and thrives inside Banks’s telling of the stories. He doesn’t need to say, with Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, “Who

knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (581). No need to beg white people to heed his sermon, rap, lecture, or tweet. The griot speaks, and his listeners had better heed. I hear the echo of expressivism in a number of stylistic choices Banks makes: his emphasis on the urgency of writing out of individual as well as collective voices, his resistance to the homogenizing and distancing inherent in academic discourse, and his recognition that stylistic texture itself carries a good bit of the burden in his argument.

One might charge that this move to connect Banks with the expressivists coopts a work whose primary resonance is with the African American tradition and not with three white men and others associated with them. I actually intend the reverse. The greatest problems with Elbow, Murray, and Macrorie can be traced to their tendency to write as though all expression is drawn from the same well, and the metaphor of a well with one sort of water indicates the flaw. Expressivism—even as defended by Bishop, Gradin, O'Donnell, or Fishman and McCarthy—never adequately accounted for gender, sexuality, race, class, and other social differences that make the teaching of personal writing in school susceptible to the dangers of power differentials, discourse clashes, and historical amnesia. I would not call Banks an expressivist, but I would say that he demonstrates a sensitivity to tone, timbre, and narrative flow as well as historical bass that remixes, even remasters, the original effort to tap "expression." In his effort to show what the African American rhetorical tradition has to teach us about the future of rhetoric in a multimodal environment, he also indicates what expression can look like routed through a 72-channel mixing console. Although the emotionally controlled tone and highly defined vocabulary of academic discourse has its peculiar power and effectiveness, to the extent that a spoken or written language becomes deracinated, it also becomes de-resonated, devoid of the overtones that give language its most expressive qualities.

When we read Murray's 1968 prose: "The writer is sensitive, but not in any dainty, limp-wristed sort of way. If one is going to be sensitive, aware of life, caring, then one must be tough. The writer is sensitive the way high-speed film is sensitive" (Murray 2), we cringe at the homophobic, male-centered language. We want to excuse his blind spots because we'll invariably have blind spots of our own. And yet this is the very reason to embrace "expression" not as an article of faith or a label for a type of theorist/teacher but as a marker of a deep and dialogic commitment to the individual

within the swirl of events, movements, and economic pressures. Banks re-covers and re-creates the term *expressivism*—which, of course, he doesn't use—as a means of respecting language and presentation, synchronizing “back in the day” with the latest digital activism.

Expression in Community Literacy

The Community Writing Center (CWC) that Tiffany Rousculp founded in 1998 and directed until 2010 was a project of Salt Lake City Community College. Explicitly focused on people other than the SLCC student population, the CWC served clients from a variety of backgrounds and social classes through workshops, events, collaborative projects, and one-on-one coaching. The writing that emerged from their programming seldom had an academic purpose. Writers at the CWC worked on memoirs, résumés, creative pieces, and anything else they needed to compose. Her concept of “rhetoric of respect” grew out of an understanding that her initial orientation toward Freirean principles of empowerment could be patronizing if it led her to resist what community writers wanted to compose in favor of literacy projects that fit her progressive agenda (52).

In his review of Rousculp's *Rhetoric of Respect*, Steve Parks notes that she highlights the distinction between sponsorship and activism in community literacy work:

As long as our primary identification is as sponsors, it seems to me, we will imagine our role as directing university or college funding outward into the community, creating valuable programs that provide a wider sense of literacy, a greater sense of writing agency, than can typically exist in many communities at this current political moment. These efforts, however, will never provide the full agency of owning their own collective literacy resources. (497)

Parks's distinction between sponsorship and activism suggests that even the most progressive literacy program associated with a college will always be less “activist” than a more traditional or even reactionary project that is initiated entirely by community members who have supported and largely paid for their own independent institution. I'm not quite sure I can accept his conclusion, particularly in a time when conservative charter schools claim to be “community-based” but seem to reinforce all manner of rote educational practices as in the best interest of their students. And yet the distinction points up a great virtue of Rousculp's book: what is written

and shared takes an important element of its force from the framework within which the texts are composed, and this framework depends largely on the organizational characteristics of the sponsoring institution. This gives “expression” yet another new life within our field because, whether community literacy educators name it or not, they are very much in the business of facilitating the expressions of their client or partner writers.

As befitting any politically conscious writer after the advent of feminist research, Rousculp shares her own literacy story to locate herself in the work with other people. This is not to say the book is personal testimony, but she introduces her account of the “discursive ecology” at the CWC by noting that “I do not know how to tell a story of the Community Writing Center’s ideological development without including some of my own within it” (28). Although the organization is in no way purely a creature of her imagination, we cannot doubt that the CWC is in part an expression of Rousculp’s own developing vision of literacy in multiple rhetorical environments; the value and limits of higher education; and the balance between individuals, community agencies, and educational institutions.

Even though CWC’s founding ideas grow from the writing center literature, which expressly rejects the picture of a center becoming an “expressivist salon” (47), eventually they settled on an orientation that not only upheld the value of individual life stories but supported writers who told stories that did not contribute to a purpose identified by a partner organization working with CWC. Rousculp recounts a moment when the CWC partnered with “a small non-profit organization that advocated politically for the rights of people with disabilities” (106). Participants were invited to tell their stories about life in nursing homes and rehabilitation centers; the organization wanted to use these texts to generate political pressure against inhumane treatment in such facilities. But the writers, sometimes needing to dictate stories to writing scribes because they could not physically produce texts themselves, resisted writing to the political task and instead composed accounts of their lives outside the health care system or made positive or nuanced statements about life within nursing facilities.

The experience challenged the CWC to make a choice between remaining true to the wishes of their writer-clients or revise the writers’ texts to suit the needs of the partner organization. However admirable the intentions of the nonprofit partner, CWC staff chose “to align more closely with the individual than the organization” (111). Rousculp notes this decision

was particularly difficult because of the CWC's founding commitment to an ecological approach to composition that "everything is connected to everything else" and that individuals can only be seen within the web of their relationships to others (111). Her defense of their choice is particularly pertinent to the discussion of the legacy of expressivism:

Some may interpret this as a romantic remnant of expressivist and process pedagogies in composition that have long been critiqued by social constructivists and postprocess scholars as ignoring sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in which writing is produced and consumed. . . . However, our decision to prioritize the writers with disabilities—and all subsequent individual writers—was in fact in response to the contexts (the web) in which they existed. The writers with disabilities had to contend with lives regulated by policies and restrictions in the nursing homes, the advocacy organization's objectives, and social classification of themselves as incomplete persons. But when space was made for them to speak/write what they chose, change could happen in ways that we might not have anticipated, nor might these changes have been recognizable through the lens of liberatory pedagogies. (111)

In other words, the individuals are contending with expectations and constrictions that include the well-intentioned aims of the advocacy group, but they need most of all to choose their own mode and content of expression if they are to exert agency in an otherwise oppressive situation.

To me, Rousculp is not distancing herself from expressivism (or process, for that matter) but from the false portrait of expressivism that critics made of the movement. The decision CWC made to support the writers' own efforts exactly conforms to the stated principles of expressivism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Our understanding of the political and social context for writing has deepened and widened tremendously since Peter Elbow opened *Writing without Teachers* with this statement: "Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives" (v). Like Macrorie and Murray in early passages I quoted, Elbow could appear naive and paternalistic in this sentence, striking a pose as a liberator for the powerless. However, we can easily overreact to his tone and miss his intent. In Elbow's work over the years, his emphasis again and again is on individuals speaking out of their own social position and beyond the frame of school sponsorship that reduces students to imitators of a grand and dulling "Engfish," to borrow Macrorie's brave phrase. In many ways I prefer the social expressivism of

Gradin and the undaunted humanity of Bishop to the dated formulations of Macrorie, Murray, and Elbow. Ann Berthoff—claimed by Gradin as an expressivist even if Berthoff herself may not have wished the connection (Gradin 54)—advocates for Freirean “naming” (Berthoff 322) in a way more congenial to Rousculp’s portrait of the CWC. Still, a core idea in the expressivist movement over time resonates with most community literacy projects I know: the expression of the individual must matter within the rats’ nest of systems and policies that bind and control our thoughts and yearnings.

Teaching through Personal Commitment

In a book about teaching in Austria, “a country I never wanted to visit” (219), Sondra Perl recounts her work with a circle of teachers as they learn about exploratory writing and research while she learns to confront her own hatred and fear of the country’s Nazi past. It is a book about courageous friendship and the healing possibilities of expressive writing. Much of the drama among the teachers and their leader—especially the exchange between Perl and Margret, the most outspoken member of the group—takes place through and around the writing they do in class and over email. Perl describes the picturesque streets of Innsbruck while also searching for the faint traces of Jewish residents who were rounded up for extermination and the mute memorials to the Austrian Resistance. As a Jew, I wanted both to read on and also to push the book away; the beauty of the project lay in its direct, compassionate address to nearly intolerable suffering and guilt. As a teacher, I heard Perl performing a bittersweet and complex love song to our vocation. Although pedagogy is so much at the center of composition and rhetoric, we sometimes avoid talking about teaching for fear of sounding sentimental or overly mortgaged to the less prestigious aspects of the profession. Perl is unafraid to claim the identity of teacher and to investigate the hard edges of work inside and outside the classroom.

Sondra Perl needs no introduction to compositionists. She was there at the City University of New York with Mina Shaughnessy in the first days of the field, and her early empirical work helped frame one of our most crucial initial questions: “What basic patterns seem to occur during composing?” (“Understanding” 364). Although she has written intensely autobiographical non-fiction and approaches writing instruction with a decided emphasis on the personal, even bodily, experience of composing—in the memorable phrase borrowed from Eugene Gendlin, “felt sense” (“Understanding”

365)—I associate her less with expressivism than with the original process movement and, later, with teachers' research into their own classroom practice. I found *On Austrian Soil* as I was reading for this essay; the book's vulnerable and humane approach to the teacher/student relationship cut through my reservations about revisiting expressivism. What do you do when your students either cannot approach major emotional and historical obstacles to their writing practice or are so absorbed in these struggles that they cannot write about anything else? And what if those obstacles also present major roadblocks for you as the teacher?

Sherri Gradin has written about confronting racist essays in her classes at the University of Mississippi (118–19), but she doesn't follow through on the story and never really says what the expressivist teacher, no matter how socially aware, can do in such a situation. Perl accounts for her own responses to the way Austrians erased or silenced the Nazi past and how she helped most of her students address their own relationship to their parents' complicity during the war. The book gives no formulas or pedagogical tricks to handle these challenges but renders a compelling portrait of reflective writing in action, what Berthoff calls "not just a medium of communication but a means of making meaning" (311). The meaning was not lurking like a dog lost in the forest before Perl arrived in Austria to teach her class. What each participant learned separately and all learned together could not have been achieved except for the tears, songs, confessions, accusations, misunderstandings, and daring encounters that Perl tracks throughout her narrative. For example, after she and some of her students take a tour with a guide named Horst through the area of Innsbruck that still bears the faint outlines of Nazi rule, Perl remarks about the group as they are about to come safely into a warm café from the bitter snowy evening:

In my own desire to face the evil that happened here, I have asked a great deal of my students. I have asked them to face the horror that touched the lives of their parents and grandparents. By listening to Horst, each of us has, in our own ways, opened ourselves to questions regarding hatred and complicity. Will we now stand in a new relation to this frightening and frightful legacy? (82)

Perl's version of this meaning-making process is highly social. She constantly monitors her own responses as well as her individual relationships with students and the well-being of the entire group. As she says in an essay about Peter Elbow and his influence on her teaching and thinking about composition:

And yet in a writing classroom, what counts most (at least in my mind) is each person's encounter with language. I want theory that helps me make sense of my students' wonderful uniqueness, of the richness and variety of their individual life experiences, of their marvelous singularity. I want theory that leads me to act in ways I consider ethical. I want theory that addresses me in relation to others. I do not want theory that reduces me to a sign in a signifying system. ("Dear Peter" 258)

The language here can be seen as "expressivist," particularly because she is addressing Elbow himself in a public letter, but her focus is not exclusively on the individual. The need to act ethically is a socially oriented responsibility, perhaps for Perl rooted in Jewish tradition, but easily connected as well to the responsibility toward students found in the "social turn" essays of Patricia Bizzell and David Bartholomae.

The interchange between individual and group responses in Perl's Austrian narrative reminds me of an important expressivist who studied with Donald Murray, Lad Tobin. In a chapter called "Metaphors for Teaching" in his influential 1993 book, *Writing Relationships*, Tobin recounts a tricky but typical day in his writing classroom. He is characteristically self-deprecating about his weak attempts to bring the discussion along while praising his students' abilities to find rich material for their essays despite their lack of enthusiasm for the school chore of writing. He says at one moment of reflection: "The key question for me is this: how does my relationship to the class as a whole contribute to—or interfere with—my effort to establish a productive relationship with each student?" (82). His most insightful observations tend to be reserved for the one-on-one conference, which he warily sees through the lens of psychotherapy (29), but he's also acutely sensitive to the way personal writing plays out in the more public setting of a full assembly of readers. His cavalcade of metaphors for teaching is funny and distressing, accurate and ridiculous, because the job is so maddeningly human, so open to interpretation and error, to flashes of insight and incidents of misreading. Tobin employs Jewish humor and Perl Jewish empathy, but both strive to create a discursive space for individuals and entire classes to investigate what they do not know they can know.

Not a Conclusion but a Hope

I could have chosen many other books in our field to consider in relation to the "tacit tradition" of the expressivist movement. Both *Writing across*

Contexts and *Naming What We Know* are examples of current composition research that reflects commitments traceable to expressivist concerns. Scholars today write about composition and healing, about love and wisdom, about rural place or multimodal storytelling. So many authors take expression for granted as a key or underlying element, reflecting Britton's recognition that the urgency to speak within every writing task remains a muted but salient way we think about composition. We may no longer see expressivism as a distinct faction within the field, but the insights from this movement are integrated into our research and teaching. Colleagues such as Mike Rose, Linda Brodkey, Keith Gilyard, Beverly Moss, Nancy Sommers, Doug Hesse, Morris Young, and Elaine Richardson, who have each written autobiographically about literacy, are not necessarily expressivists just because they reflect upon their personal stories. When Beverly J. Moss speaks of her "heartfelt desire to do research that kept me connected to my community" (2), a great many of us from all methodological persuasions and ethnic backgrounds nod in agreement.

I'm interested in what Deborah Brandt in *The Rise of Writing* calls "authorial residue": "what's left over in the writer's person as a result of writing, something that is unacknowledged and unaccounted for in legal tradition but clearly implicates the civic and human spirit" (51). She is referring here to a felt sense that ghostwriters or those who compose for government agencies report, even when their names are not associated with their texts nor are their own beliefs or ideas necessarily reflected in what they write. Can we teach through this impalpable quality of the composing experience? The reason I chose to highlight the four books in this essay is because they each build on a quality of writing that grows from immediacy and attention. Yagelski focuses on spiritual development and awareness that comes from the presentness required of a writer at the moment of composition. Banks roots his argument and his style in cultural solidarity that must be generated, created, and reinscribed anew with every sentence. Rousculp enacts social commitment fiercely, challenging her assumptions and inventing more mutual relationships with people she encounters in the writing center and the city. Perl dwells within the urgencies of historical tragedy and contemporary silence; she locates her teaching at the friction point of memory and construction, with an exquisite sense of connection to her students. Each one widens my understanding of "authorial residue"

by emphasizing the intentionality, joy, seriousness, and intimacy available in the act of writing.

My worry about “writing about writing” pedagogy, especially for entering college students, is that the approach doesn’t adequately foreground these qualities in a composition classroom. I use the *Writing about Writing* textbook (Wardle and Downs) regularly for fourth-year English students in a capstone seminar, and I find the articles speak to students who already have some familiarity and even success with academic discourse. The essays explain, enlarge, and reinterpret their experiences in college. In a first-year writing class, however, I fear *Writing about Writing* elevates the study of writing over the experience of writing. The collection—maybe not individual essays, but the fact of its disciplinary intent—grounds their encounter with meaning making in an intellectual tradition and an academic perspective, but, in my view, students need a reason to write that comes from more intimate and compelling sources.

Without an urgency that is felt as personal, a writer will always be looking to the teacher, the boss, the arbiter for both permission to begin and approval to desist. This doesn’t mean students must always write autobiographically, but they must learn how to find the motive spark, the intention to speak, within whatever subject they take up.

Perhaps this makes me hopelessly old school or neo-Elbovian, but I picture students all too often emerging from the heavily codified high school language arts environment—haunted by standardized exams and grading rubrics—only to enter college classrooms where they are given yet another set of procedural expectations. Yes, first-year students are well served by learning the rules of the new academic game. But am I utterly naive to hope for a space where students of all backgrounds and interests can challenge their minds and emotional reactions to an unfolding world without a heavy dose of explication? At least in my part of the higher education world, hostility toward intellectual play and exploration has grown so intense that every moment, every credit must be accounted for and justified to administrators. Just recently a central administrator informed me that only young people paying the highest tuition should major in the liberal arts or engage with underserved communities without declaring the experience preparatory for

But am I utterly naive to hope for a space where students of all backgrounds and interests can challenge their minds and emotional reactions to an unfolding world without a heavy dose of explication?

a career. In response to my call for more support to the College of Liberal Arts and service-learning courses, this administrator answered succinctly: “Higher tuition brings benefits as well as costs.”

By writing this essay, I have come to understand my reaction to Brandt’s term “authorial residue.” I’ve experienced some version of this strange intellectual and emotional state all of my adult life, whether I’m writing a poem or a report to the dean. I want writing to matter to my students, but I want them first of all to find what matters by writing, not by studying experts who can tell them why it does. Literacy is negotiated, adversarial, collaborative, intimate, public, and lived. Like Lad Tobin and many other teachers (including those I know who teach through “writing about writing”), I can’t teach writing without encountering each student in a way that goes beyond passing on principles. I read their work in the context of relationships built through classroom discussion and one-on-one conferences. Students’ political persuasions may be similar to or different from my own, but I hope to link their acts of writing to purposes more compelling to them than passing the next class or getting a job, even though I do not discount those goals as vital to the project of higher education. I imagine, as I teach, a spirit named by the term *expression* that cannot be tracked or described by concepts alone but must be generated and embraced in every generation by fresh writers and their newly forming readers.

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