

CHAPTER 2

ACKNOWLEDGING GOOD FEELINGS

“All writing . . . has the feature that it is difficult, lonely work, and satisfying mainly when finished. I face writing with enthusiasm when I am rolling the topic around in my mind . . . and I enjoy the attendant research, but I genuinely dread the moment when I have to put pen to paper—or for that matter, put fingers on the keyboard in front of the green screen.”

– Louis T. Milic, “How a Stylistician Writes”

Writing is ubiquitous, particularly as tools for producing it continue to proliferate beyond the “green screen” that Milic references in 1985. And experiencing a spectrum of emotions during the process of writing—from excitement to dread and back again—is arguably pervasive as well. The inner involvement of writing can sometimes make us outwardly half-present. Those closest to us are most likely to endure the divided attention and preoccupied conversations that inevitably pepper our daily lives while we are in the midst of writing projects. They are also among those most likely to know something about the dry spells, blocks, insecurities, and feelings of hopelessness likely to plague any writer at one time or another. Writing is embedded in personal life, has been known to wreck relationships and trigger unhealthy habits, just as it may strengthen bonds of appreciation and gratitude for all that is *not writing*. It’s as if immersion in writing creates beer goggles: once the writing is over, the world appears promising and full of possibility, at least for a time, contrasted with the quicksand-like reality of writing in progress, which often feels like descending lower and lower into uncertainty with no clear way out or up. This dark narrative about writing is one that I feel and hear from other writers, but it’s (mostly) not one I’ve encountered in written acknowledgments, though it is gestured toward via thanks to a friend, colleague, or family member who stood by when times got tough. The dread depicted so vividly by Milic tends *not* to be what preoccupies the genre of acknowledgments, suggesting that, when it counts, writers have blessedly short memories. Derrida’s summary of the *Phaedrus* is relevant here: “writing is at once mnemotechnique and the power of forgetting” (24).

Maybe it is forgetting which accounts for the optimistic tendencies of writing about writing that are so common in acknowledgments. Barbara Ehrenreich describes optimism as a “cognitive stance, a conscious expectation, which pre-

sumably anyone can develop through practice” (4). This stance is likely learned by exposure to existing examples, as I believe to be the case with acknowledgments. Optimism and its positivity can point us in specific directions, most obviously toward objects of these expressions. They can also lead us to certain kinds of scripts for living that substitute idealized versions of reality for less than ideal ones. For example, admonitions to “go green” issue imperatives (much like “just do it” and “just say no”) to emphasize the importance of individual choices and reassure us that “going green” is possible in an industrialized country. Awareness of the organized, systemic degradation of the earth might end up debilitating people, making us feel as if choosing a reusable bag, for example, is utterly absurd in the face of wide-scale environmental destruction. The promise of “go green” is that a clean, smart, contained, and conscious way of living is within reach and offers its own distinct rewards. The slogan, in other words, is a performative; its articulation is also its action and its promise.

Also performative, writing about writing in acknowledgments tends toward a largely positive, cheerful, funny, harmonious, appreciative, warm and loving discourse of resilience—exactly the sort of qualities one would want to associate with writing (the sprawling self-help industry around writing frames this want in plain economic terms). Positivity associated with writing forms an ideology, “the way we explain the world and think we ought to function within it” (Ehrenreich 4), that no doubt obscures, even wills away, writing difficulties, blocks, and failures. Via acknowledgments, writers might be thought of as ideologues, spokespersons on behalf of writing as good feeling. One wonders if, by always showcasing the healthy and productive elements of writing, we lose touch with fuller depictions, and if losing touch is ultimately the real purpose of acknowledgments. If we were to find, rather than lose, touch, after all, we might say something similar to C.H. Knoblauch, who remarks that, while he sometimes enjoys writing, he also finds that it

frequently gives me both a headache and a backache, just as the jackhammer does, I imagine, when a worker has spent all day vibrating over it. Worse, writing causes endless anxiety about that most dreaded of academic catastrophes—the saying of something indefensibly dumb in print, where it cannot be denied, disowned, or restated as though it had never happened. (134)

Knoblauch’s anxiety about reception is echoed by Elspeth Probyn, who contends that the “specter of not interesting readers and the constant worry about adequately conveying the interest of our chosen topics” contributes to what she calls a “shame-induced ethics of writing” (89). For Probyn, shame can produc-

tively influence writing because it is “a visceral reminder to be true to interest, to be honest about why or how certain things are of interest” (73).

Of course, shame and other self-assessment affects related to writing are not always experienced as generative. Some may contribute to serious blocking. Mike Rose presents a portrait of blocked writers in his preface to *When a Writer Can't Write*, illustrating how anxiety and other issues can create formidable obstacles to writing:

Thoughts won't come, and when they do they evanesce as the writer tries to work them into written language. Pauses become longer and longer and transmogrify into avoidances. Inner conflicts manifest themselves in jumbled syntax and unclear diction. The demands of one's life and the ways one has been taught to deal with them interfere again and again with writing. . . . And so goes the painful litany. (ix)

In sharp contrast, acknowledgments are largely bereft of writing pain, whether productive or destructive, indicating that this genre is more aspirational than descriptive. Acknowledgments serve multiple purposes for writers and readers: they do the obvious in terms of formalizing methods of thanking people, institutions, and others who enabled a writing project; provide a public forum for writers to pay psychic, intellectual, and emotional debts; and offer release after completion of a significant piece. Also, as I'll discuss below, they serve as an unofficial archive of good feelings that writers would like to associate with writing, a drive no doubt inspired by the afterglow of completion. Acknowledgments, that is, are not more revealing than the rest of an academic book. They are a different class of performatives, offering clues toward understanding what writing involves, needs, consumes, desires.

Borrowing from Sara Ahmed's formulation of happy feelings in *The Promise of Happiness*, this chapter postulates that the abundance of good feeling in acknowledgments functions as an affective script, a good feeling partner. This script associates writing with good feeling, or the “right” feelings about writing. Ahmed, interested in how happiness functions as a coercive promise directing us toward certain life choices and away from others, focuses on figures who challenge happiness imperatives: feminist killjoys, melancholic migrants, unhappy queers, and angry black women. Happiness, for her, “involves a way of being aligned with others, of facing the right way” (45). While the reproduction of good feelings attached to writing obviously is on a different order and pain-scale than happiness imperatives associated with compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed's ideas make it possible to consider good feelings as performatives aimed at associating writing with a good. In this sense, acknowledgments are often-

times archives of good feeling, storage for positive associations with writing that seek to proliferate goodness. Good feelings in acknowledgments describe “not only what we are inclined toward . . . but also what we should be inclined toward” (Ahmed, *Promise* 199). When they include more than a list of permissions or boilerplate thank-yous to funding sources, acknowledgments are pedagogical: they teach readers and potential writers how to orient appropriately to writing. This chapter reads affect and acknowledgments as partners that together form a pedagogy of how writing is supposed to feel. I then explore the worrying consequences of projecting too much happiness onto writing, including the marginalization of writing blocks and of writing differences associated with linguistic diversity as well as the valorization of writing as an able-bodied pursuit.

In this chapter and the next one, I rely on textual analysis of acknowledgments excerpted from a wide range of sources in and related to writing studies. Of the 75 books referenced throughout this study, all made mention of what I interpreted as either “good feeling” or “time,” the latter of which I’ll address in the next chapter. Weaving together excerpts from nearly 20 acknowledgments, this chapter interprets as “good feeling” references to laughter; comfort and support from family, friends, home, music, and objects; positive emotions (joy, love, happiness), and physical activity.

GOOD FEELING

What we learn from acknowledgments is that writing is supposed to be—and, when successful, often *is*—pleasurable for writers; good feelings are supposed to cohere around it and bad ones, if writing guides and self-help texts are any indication, are to be overcome through practical strategies and writing rules (i.e., Fowler; Strausser; Yagoda). Within composition studies, a field dedicated to studies of writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy, the disassociation of writing from bad feelings might help explain the limited research on writer’s block. Keith Hjortshoj notes that blocking is widely misunderstood in academia and in the culture generally, leading to responses that treat writing as more of a mechanical matter than a holistic art. Blocked academic writers in his study describe themselves as feeling “*immobilized, motionless, stuck, stranded, mired, derailed, disengaged, disembodied, paralyzed, or numb,*” revealing that blocks are more than cognitive difficulties; they are experienced mentally and physically (9). “Somewhere in the process of doing something they want and need to do, and are fully capable of doing,” writes Hjortshoj, “these writers run into trouble they shouldn’t have” (9). In other words, nothing is ostensibly stopping them from writing; they are capable, smart, and have the resources and tools to write. Blocked writers, however, challenge imperatives to feel good about writing, confounding advice modalities and calling to

mind a point Ahmed makes about unhappiness that might just as well apply here: “I think what is underestimated by affirmative ethics is the *difficulty* of giving our attention to—and sustaining our attention on—certain forms of suffering” (216).

This point became very clear to me when I read acknowledgments that refuse good feelings. In 2012, I served as a reader for a dissertation, entitled *Emotional Literacy and the Challenge of ESL Academic Literacy*. The study by Joseph Slick develops grounds for an explicitly emotional discourse about second-language learners’ experiences of writing. Reading the opening pages of his acknowledgments, I was not prepared to encounter his direct, unapologetic bad feelings about writing:

I could not have survived without [my wife’s] support to continue this lonely and depressing endeavor. The dissertation challenges a dissertator to be resilient in the face of the “symbolic violence” of the dissertation, and I could not have survived without her love. She has taught me that a dissertation is not the ends to a successful life, but a means to understand how to handle the difficulties in life. That includes how to plan and prepare to meet the unexpected challenges that are always lying just around the corner. . . . Most of all, this dissertation was a lesson in how to survive and overcome obstacles. A completed dissertation hides the sadness, the tears, the frustration and the depression of the dissertation process. (v-vi)

Slick knows the conventions and expectations of acknowledgments—he discussed them during the defense—but he wanted to express his truth about the dissertation process. And his truth was hard, lonely, heart-breaking, dark, depressing. His language can be read as a refusal to consent to good feeling and its circulation in the economy of writing frequently anticipated in acknowledgments. Slick doesn’t hold in place a positive conception of writing, softened by the increasing fuzziness of the rearview mirror.

Slick is an outlier in this regard, an “affect alien . . . one who converts good feelings into bad” (Ahmed, *Promise* 49). The feelings typically deposited in acknowledgments stir good feelings and create writing worlds nourished by love and care that, wittingly or not, obscure the many challenges to writing. One manifestation of good feelings comes through writers’ frequent praise of the emotional environment developed by family members, often represented as the backbone of writing progress. Constance Weaver, for example, notes that her son and partner both offered “unfailing support for my work and [brought] joy to my daily life” (xiv). Victor Villanueva, writing of his wife’s importance, confides that from her he knows “of magic, of loving. And knowing love opens up possibilities, allows one to be utopian in the midst of all that sometimes seems hopeless” (ix). Ann Cvetkov-

ich likewise writes in euphoric terms about the role her partner has played in her life: “And then there’s Gretchen Phillips, who for over ten years now has loved me passionately and extravagantly. In her perpetual insistence that I follow my heart’s desire, she has helped me remember that writing can be a labor of love, and she has given me a constant supply of reasons to love her back” (xi). In another outpouring of affection, Paul Prior confides the following:

Over the last ten years, Nora and Anna have illuminated my days (and often my nights) with their love, joys, and sorrows, and insights that continue to teach me much about life. Finally, for 22 years, Julie Hengst has been my full partner in all spheres of activity. In addition to remarkable moral and material support, she has contributed to my thinking in general and to this specific text in innumerable substantive ways, only hinted at by the discussion in chapter 10 of the influence of her research. (xviii)

Christina Haas is less specific about the contributions of family members but attributes a productive emotional scene for writing partly to her daughters, whom she describes as “studies in strength, determination, and force of will, and there were many days when I looked to them for example. They also provided hugs at critical times” (xvii). She goes on to thank two women and their staff “for the unwavering support they provided to my family; their efforts continue to allow me to manage a life of work and family on a day-to-day basis” (xvii). Margaret Syverson, author of *The Wealth of Reality*, notes that she has “been nourished by the love, encouragement, and strength I have received from my family and extended family, the real wealth of my reality . . .” (xxi).

Others thank family for helping to prioritize what’s most important. In this category, Nedra Reynolds writes, “This book has been written in a loving home and has made me appreciate more than ever the joys of placemaking. Truman and Bentley [presumably, pets] faithfully follow me up to my study, and Martin keeps all kinds of things growing around here, including me” (xii). And Shari Stenberg credits her husband with keeping her tuned in to her own life. Specifically, his “patience, perspective, and love not only guide me, but also remind me of what matters most” (x). Shipka thanks others for keeping her company and “perhaps more importantly, for pulling me away from the process every now and then, and providing me with something else to focus on, respond to, and care about” (xiii). Reynolds’ ability to “appreciate more than ever” the pleasures of home, Stenberg’s to remember “what matters most,” and Shipka’s to discover “something else to . . . care about” indicate that writing competes in a world always threatening to consume the writer, distance her from all other matter(s), and cause her to forget the small pleasures and the vitality of others as directly

and indirectly important to writing and writer. In a way, these acknowledgments might serve as an indirect response to David Bartholomae's musing in "Against the Grain" regarding the difficulty of writing: "Writing gets in my way and makes my life difficult, difficult enough that I sometimes wonder why I went into this business in the first place. There is work that comes easier to me" (20). The writers above seem to invert this logic by suggesting that writing, in essence, magnifies the importance of all that is not writing. Writing and not writing, in other words, are inseparable complements to one another.

Familiar "not writing" complements that contribute to writing success are often bodily based. Laughter, for example, emerges as a significant part of the emotional scenery of writing, one that especially emphasizes the importance of witness. Krista Ratcliffe thanks her family "for supporting me with their patience, love, and laughter" (xiv). Kirsch thanks her partner for "years of friendship, love, and laughter" (Kirsch and Rohan xii); Sondra Perl notes that her editor/friend kept her "laughing as well as writing." Ahmed, in *On Being Included*, expresses appreciation of her partner, "whose questions keep me thinking and whose jokes (good and bad!) keep me laughing" (x). Harris, in *Rewriting*, notes that he was "buoyed, as always, by the warmth, laughter, affectionate irreverence, and good company of my wife . . . and my daughters . . ." (136). Kathleen Stewart names three figures nearby during the completion of her book who have "spun around the thing, day to day, with grace, squeals of laughter and rage, rolled eyes, whispers, headaches, distractions, interruptions, and smiling eyes (or knowing smirks)" (x). Laughing and appreciating others' laughter signal the body in repose, a physical release or catharsis. Laughing often means letting down your guard and allowing yourself to be caught up in moments of surprise or unpredictability without worry. Laughter creates concerted efforts to break silence. Laughter can also function to build community by highlighting common ground even as differences remain intact.

Laughter, like much else that gets mentioned in acknowledgments, is often anchored in domestic scenes that support sustainable writing habits. Notably, the inevitable annoyances and frustrations, or more extreme forms of unpleasantness familiar to domesticity, go unmentioned. This is perhaps an apt example of how the reproduction of good feeling forms a writing economy. Ahmed offers a useful explanation of this point:

The expressions can be repeated by others, as a form of return, which will affect what impressions we have of that space. Expressing bad feeling can even become habitual in certain times and places, as a way of belonging to an affective community. The use of complaint as a form of social bonding would be a case in point. Good feelings are also affective. . . . Smiling,

laughing, expressing optimism about what is possible will affect others. It is not that you necessarily catch the feeling but that the experience of being with and around a person in a good mood gives a certain lightness, humor, and energy to shared spaces, which can make those spaces into happy objects, what we direct good feelings toward. (*Promise* 43)

Likewise, reading acknowledgments may not change your disposition toward writing, but the experience of reading others' positive accounts of writing may help you accumulate your own storehouse of good feelings. This would explain why writers "direct good feelings toward" acknowledgments, reproducing the affects they've become accustomed to encountering there. Holding bad affect at bay and treating acknowledgments as spaces where writing as good feeling surfaces represent forms of emotion management aimed at maintaining appropriate social norms. Good feelings in acknowledgments, like happiness generally, involve "the comfort of repetition, of following lines that have already been given in advance" (Ahmed 48).

In composition studies, those lines often lead right to students. Jody Shipka literalizes this by addressing her students directly in the acknowledgments of her book:

Your work challenged and amazed me then and continues, all these years later, to challenge and amaze me. Collectively and individually, you have taught me so very much about potentials for meaning, for composing texts and lives, in short, for thinking more about what it might take to work toward a composition (or compositions) made whole. For all that, and for your willingness to allow me to share your work with others, I am most grateful. (xii)

Less effusive and not stated in direct address, Shari Stenberg puts the matter simply: "My students are an endless resource of energy and inspiration" (ix).

On the one hand, these kinds of thanks are so routine in the genre that they barely merit attention. On the other, they reveal the important role that acknowledgments play as storage for good feelings and their habitual production, cultivating the impressions of and objections to acknowledgments outlined in the introduction. Impressions, in my usage here, are uses of language that press, as an actual machine press does, changing the shape of something through the application of pressure to make an imprint. When acknowledgments are treated as texts that make imprints, they exceed their marginal status. They constitute near imperatives to like writing and to express attunement with all that touch-

es writing, understanding “touch” to include what presses on writing from the outside—another word for this might be contaminants. Acknowledgments are a powerful record of writing’s impurities, its contaminated dealings with whatever and whoever it comes in contact.

Another way to think about contamination—or the mingling of forces and energies in writing environments—is through the framework of partnerships. Acknowledgments house a record of partnerships that have real affective value to writing environments. It’s not that they prove there’s no subject who writes, which strikes me as utterly absurd as I sit here writing for days on end, feeling the physical aches of being stationary too long and the mental exhaustion of pushing forward despite a desire to stop and do something, anything else (I’m writing before a window that overlooks a blue sky dotted with puffy white clouds . . .). Thus, evacuating the subject will not produce a more authoritative, rigorous theory of writing, as some postprocess theories suggest (e.g., Dobrin, Rice, Vastola), nor would this move be relevant to my students or myself. We are writing; there’s no way around that. Rather, acknowledgments illustrate that the writer depends on and benefits from all kinds of assistance and support delivered through a variety of sources. Through acknowledgments, writers position themselves within a web of others whose ultimate invisibility in the final product distorts how a work comes together, creating an impression of writing as seamless, linear, untroubled. Pages turn, screens scroll, words follow words—these assurances can obscure what happened to make language into something.

The next section discusses good feeling entwined with sensory experiences and physical movement, common writing partners in acknowledgments. Working both with examples from acknowledgments and from essays in which writers discuss their writing practices, these examples give a different resonance to “good” than does the foregoing discussion. In part, what’s different is that scenes of writing associated with good feeling are explicitly articulated as embodied—and, moreso as the foregoing examples indicate, able-bodied.

ALL OF YOUR SENSES

“[W]riting is to be done by the feel, for it is a tacit craft.”

– Richard Lloyd-Jones, “Playing for Mortal Stakes”

In a *Paris Review* interview, novelist Haruki Murakami comments that music is an important writing partner for him. “I’ve been listening to jazz since I was thirteen or fourteen years old,” he explains. “Music is a very strong influence: the chords, the melodies, the rhythm, the feeling of the blues are helpful when

I write. I wanted to be a musician, but I couldn't play the instruments very well, so I became a writer. Writing a book is just like playing music: first I play the theme, then I improvise, then there is a conclusion, of a kind" ("The Art"). Noted theorist Slavoj Žižek similarly describes music as central to his work: "I cannot survive without music; I always work with music, with loud music. I cannot survive without five or six hours of chamber music per day" (Olson 198-99). Žižek, like Slick, who "could not survive without [his wife's] love," uses a language of urgency, framing writing partners in terms of survival. The codependency between writers and their others, whatever form they take, inspires awareness of writing as a needy, vulnerable, difficult process—something that one *survives* thanks to companionate others.

The pairing of writing and music is crucial for me as well, as I presume it is for many other writers. Writing, much like running, has a pace established by the music I'm playing. If I want to write quickly, without concern for particulars, I'll play fast-paced tracks; if I want to edit or revise, lingering longer on what I've produced, I might play a moody, slower selection that creates a hypnotic focus. (Runners can use apps to create playlists that correspond to a desired pace; not a bad idea for writers.) Music and writing often generate creative energy, as is the case for Ann Cvetkovich, who begins *An Archive of Feeling* with a discussion of queer feminist punk band Le Tigre. Citing "Keep on Livin," a song about survival after sexual trauma, Cvetkovich explains how the band functions as a partner in her efforts to articulate the purpose of her book: "Sometimes the most effective way I can explain my project is to point to work like theirs because it articulates better than I can what I want to say. If I were to 'follow the trail of breadcrumbs in my head' (to quote Kathleen Hanna) and try to tell the story of how I came to write this book, I would probably start not with trauma but with depression" (1-2). The band's work, and especially that song, serve as focal points that help bring Cvetkovich's project into being; more than scenery or aesthetic touchstone, Le Tigre is an essential contaminant in the book's making.

In his acknowledgments, anthropologist Tim Ingold goes further, describing his cello as "truly a co-author" of his book *Being Alive*. The cello, he writes, has "become so much a part of me and of the way I am that when I think and write, it thinks and writes in me" (xiv). The creative energy formed by this partnership indicates the indelible role of sensory things and of objects in composing. Ingold's cello would qualify as what Sherry Turkle calls an "evocative object"—objects as life companions that spin worlds, combining intellect, feeling, and creativity (5). In some cases, Turkle notes, we "feel at one with our objects" (9). This certainly seems to describe Ingold's relation to the cello; there is no distinction between self and cello when it comes to writing. They are mutually enabling and sustaining extensions of one another.

More evidence of writing's holistic character is available through the frequent mention of physical activity and writing. Lynn Bloom, in "How I Write," explains that "After a slow start in the morning, my energy, ability to concentrate, and creativity build throughout the day and evening, with time out for meals, an occasional nap, and an invigorating evening swim" (36). Murakami is forthcoming about acknowledging physical movement and sensory factors in his writing process (though he doesn't name these factors as such), particularly in contrast to describing the role of other people—mentors, influences, trusted readers, and so forth—in his writing life. In fact, in *The Paris Review* interview, Murakami describes himself as a loner with no discernible community of writers. Claiming that he has no writer-friends in Japan, he describes the awkward embarrassment he feels around other writers when in the U.S.: "At Princeton, there was a luncheonette, or something like that, and I was invited to eat there. Joyce Carol Oates was there and Toni Morrison was there and I was so afraid, I couldn't eat anything at all!" ("The Art"). He develops writing rituals that combine intellectual, physical, and what might be considered spiritual activities: "When I'm in writing mode for a novel, I get up at four a.m. and work for five to six hours. In the afternoon, I run for ten kilometers or swim for fifteen hundred meters (or do both), then I read a bit and listen to some music. I go to bed at nine p.m. I keep to this routine every day without variation." This extraordinary discipline and commitment to repetition is fascinating for many reasons, not the least of which is that Murakami's routine includes various sensory experiences: writing, running, swimming, reading, listening, and sleeping. His approach seems downright monastic in its simplicity as well as fetishistically balanced and healthy.

The interactive relationship between physicality and writing is frequently depicted in acknowledgments, creating a portrait of writing as inseparable from other worlds of activity, thriving in interaction, helping to create a portrait of writing as in medias res rather than as a discrete activity cut off from the natural and material world. Perl comments that her work on *Felt Sense* was "enriched by a week-long writing retreat in a farmhouse in southern Vermont where Nancy Gerson, Nancy Sommers, Mimi Schwartz, and I mixed writing with running, swimming, and cooking" (xi). Knowing this gives me a greater appreciation for her description of felt sense. The environment, composed of other writers and physical activity, seems the perfect incubator for approaching writing as perceptual, sensory, inchoate, and cognitively as well as bodily experienced.

Also attributing the value of physicality to her writing process, Gesa Kirsch thanks friends "for sharing training runs and martinis and for helping us find our new home" (Kirsch and Rohan xi). Joe Harris remarks in *Rewriting*, "I was also prodded along gently by my friend Pakis Bessias, who at the start of each of our Sunday morning runs would ask me how much I had written the week before, and then

congratulate me on whatever my answer was” (136). And Michelle Payne identifies cycling as an important prelude to writing: “Most mornings before I began to write the first draft of this book, my Cannondale [a bike] took me all through York and Ogunquit, Maine, keeping me focused, centered, and aware of the coastal beauty I could so easily forget.” As in the earlier examples, Payne’s comment suggests that writing could subsume her, make her forget about beauty and all that’s beyond writing. The good stuff—coastal beauty, laughter, love, etc.—competes with the reality of writing. Writing is simultaneously co-immersive in life activities and cut off from them. An opening up to and closing off from the world, writing occupies an ambivalent location for most writers, at least those who choose to comment on it. W. Ross Winterrowd describes the inner/outer tension as follows, “Writing is the most human of actions; it forces you to live through your ideas and your experiences, and to realize that the two are not strictly separable” (341).

In addition to the way writing competes in these accounts with not-writing, the above examples are striking for another reason. They feature active, able bodies intermingled with good feeling and writing. In reviewing hundreds of acknowledgments, a handful of which appeared in books explicitly focused on disability issues, I uncovered none that addressed bodily impairment in relation to writing production. Only after receiving a recommendation from a reviewer of this manuscript did I find Michael Harker’s acknowledgment in *The Lure of Literacy* in which he thanks a cystic fibrosis clinic. Harker writes, “Since receiving my diagnosis and learning how to manage complications that come from living with CF, I have developed a new appreciation for many things in my life. To be sure, I cherish each day that I breathe freely, especially those days when I find myself surrounded by friends and family” (viii).

Given the imperatives toward good feeling that guide acknowledgments, it’s not surprising that able-bodied writing experiences dominate, that disabled bodies literally don’t fit in this overly positive genre. What’s missing in this context is the sort of reveal that Michelle Gibson makes in her short essay “Revising a (Writer’s) Life: Writing with Disability.” As multiple sclerosis advances, Gibson explains that she can no longer type: “[M]y hands have weakened and become uncoordinated, so I have had to revise the very basic ways I write and interact with my computer. I now spend my days wearing a headphone that controls my computer through voice recognition software” (13). The absence of disabled bodies in acknowledgments means that we end up with an image of writing as for the “fit,” even as a form of “fitness” that does not reflect the realities of non-normative embodiments. While I recognize that acknowledgments are not the exclusive venue for challenging images of writing bodies, I also believe that the dominance of able bodies in acknowledgments is symptomatic of a field that likes to project happiness onto writing, a penchant that both causes writing scholars to miss important insights

about writing practices and reproduces, unwittingly or not, writing as able-bodied. Jay Dolmage writes about ableism as an ideology that “makes able-bodiedness compulsory” (22). It does so, he argues, by rendering “disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default” (22). Reading about bodily fitness and writing in acknowledgments (and thinking about my own tendency to link writing and running) makes me reflect on the extent to which acknowledgments index a kind of writing ableism consistent with Dolmage’s contention.

FEELING SCRIPTS

“The pleasure of writing and the pain of its absence tells something crucial about the motivation to write and the way it springs from our instinct to communicate. It is a feeling that is essential both for our ability as writers and for our potential to interact as human beings.”

– Alice W. Flaherty, *The Midnight Disease*

Despite what I’ve found (and not found) in acknowledgments, writing of course reproduces and uncovers bad feelings. While I haven’t uncovered a meaningful number of examples beyond Slick’s, I have discovered that Tom Waldrep’s 1985 collection *Writers on Writing* offers valuable insight into how critical writers describe their craft. Waldrep’s two-volume collection includes essays by rhetoricians who respond to the question, “How do you write?” (vii). When asked directly, and presented in essay form rather than in acknowledgments—the genre expectations seem particularly relevant here—writers appear eager to reveal their bad feelings about writing and to bemoan their slapdash writing habits. Among the many interesting answers to Waldrep’s question is Knoblauch’s confession that “writing is never, for me, the pure joy some people insist it can be” (135). Knoblauch associates bad affect and writing with blue-collar work, admitting that he’s grown “accustomed to the feeling that I’d rather be doing something else, just as the welder has” (135). By aligning the physical demands of writing with physical labor, Knoblauch also aligns alienated labor with writing. In an essay, Sue Lorch presents a visually arresting, embodied image of “doing something else” other than writing: “I inevitably view the prospect of writing a mental set more commonly reserved for root canals and amputations: If it must be done, it must be done, but for God’s sake, let us put it off as long as possible” (165). Lorch associates writing with extreme forms of physical pain and, in the case of amputation, devastating loss. While hyperbolic, these associations provide a glimpse of writing pain that can plague those for whom writing is a profession or desire.

With less fanfare, George Hillocks, Jr. admits in his acknowledgments that

his wife “has understood my need to indulge in occasional depression and to find some level of isolation to work on the manuscript,” a statement made especially evocative by the running narrative of positivity that frames it (xv). Before Hillocks gets here, he spends two full pages expressing gratitude for the support he received from friends, colleagues, and students. The six-sentence paragraph in which depression is mentioned is followed by more than half a page of cheerful gratitude—most immediately, a paragraph on generous, helpful readers during the manuscript preparation process. Hillocks does not belabor his negative feelings; instead, he positions them approximately half way through his acknowledgments, tucked unassumingly into a fleeting paragraph overwhelmed by the predominant positivity around it.

Robert Boice, in *Professors as Writers*, offers an explicit view of writing pain through excerpts like the following, drawn from his interviews with professors who experience writing problems:

“You probably won’t like this. I hate to write. At least I do now. I’d rather clean the house. . . . I’d rather do almost anything else. I mean writing is a strain. I remember straining to figure out what to say. And then *how* to say it. It’s much easier to talk about my ideas.”

“Even before I tried to begin I was already thinking about how exhausted I’d be. How tired I’d be after flailing away for a few hours. Do you know what I mean? And I was tired, even though I wrote for only about an hour.”

“I’d rather not hunk about it because whenever I do, I think about how difficult it is for me. Writing does not come easily for me, if it comes at all. When it comes, it happens slowly, painfully. I write about as fast as a snail. . . . And about as well.”

“I just thought about writing and I realized that I have yet to build a body of knowledge, a major contribution. I’m not ready. I certainly wasn’t ready then. In the past, my efforts have often led down dark, blind dead ends. Perhaps it’s nonsense to believe that I can contribute.” (22-23)

These accounts will likely reveal unsurprising realities to any academic writer, whether in relation to one’s own or colleagues’ difficulties with writing. Yet acknowledgments often fail to register even a single hint of bad affect. Indeed, as already established, they are characterized by a near prohibition of bad feelings

such that writers largely banish narratives of failure, discontent, and disappointment, which presumably would mark them as affect aliens.

Acknowledgments, instead, store feelings, especially good ones, related to writing. What does this drive to stockpile and enact good feeling tell us about writing? In some ways it suggests that writers, composing acknowledgments as the last step in preparing a manuscript for publication, are blinded by success or completion enough to develop a cheery retrospective attitude toward writing (the same logic sometimes used jokingly by those who decide to have a second child). Also, though, accumulating good feeling in acknowledgments implies that negative feelings undermine credibility and professionalism and effectively spoil happiness imperatives. The writing killjoy, kin to Ahmed's "feminist killjoy," might "expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy" (*Promise* 65). Making bad feelings public is bad taste, an inappropriate indulgence, particularly in light of a finished, published work in an extremely competitive scholarly publishing market. Genre conventions for acknowledgments are so entrenched that exposing bad feelings simply falls too far outside the normative. These conventions also seem to dictate coherent narratives about writing rather than encourage multiple intersecting ones that might contradict or challenge one another. That is, acknowledgments are, in effect, happy endings that appear at the beginning of a book. Then again, I'm sure that writing is good feeling for writers, that writing is not suffering or hardship for some writers, and acknowledgments simply provide a space where those real experiences are prioritized.

Composition studies as a discipline is especially invested in writing as good feeling since writing and its production organize the field; bad feelings around writing rarely divert attention long enough to influence conversations about disciplinarity, first-year writing requirements, and writing's empowering capability (this is certainly true for my own research). For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, attention to writer's block remains anemic in composition studies, and, if publications and conference presentations are a reliable barometer, basic writing continues to occupy a marginal location in scholarship (and in the academy). More promising turns to writing and bad affect, for lack of a better phrase, have emerged in relation to transnational language use and composition (Canagarajah, *Translingual*; Horner, Lu, Matsuda; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur) and code-meshing (Young et al.). In these works, writing is not only a matter of skill and hard work but also a cultural tableau through which identity and language tensions surface. Alternative feeling scripts emerge as students from a variety of backgrounds bump up against the (arbitrary) conventions of Standard English. Such varieties are partly visible in acknowledgments, as examples throughout this book attest, but, on the whole, ideologies of goodness, happiness, and fitness associated with writing are far more prominent. Whether a consequence of genre

conventions, dominant feeling scripts, writing ideologies, or something else, acknowledgments are probably too bright-sided, to borrow Ehreinrich's phrase, and, as a result, end up glossing over much of what hurts about writing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH

This chapter indicates that studying acknowledgments can uncover a hidden affective curriculum. Acknowledgments as archives of good feeling, balm to ward against bad feeling, provide context for considering how teaching strategies can highlight the underlife of writing, bringing to the fore some non-procedural elements of writing that otherwise might not get a hearing but are important to sustain writing. To that end, students could collect their own examples of acknowledgments and individually and collectively code themes that emerge therein. In addition to being an engaging and slightly unconventional research project that could involve undergraduate students in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data, such an exercise could become the basis for identifying writing partnerships—particularly, in this case, with feelings. To what extent is writing aligned with feeling for students? What kinds of feelings? What associations are linked to those feelings? How do those associations bear on writing processes, habits, dispositions? Such openings might create permissive spaces for both articulating and valuing an affective continuum linked to writing. This, in turn, could prompt further research on writing difficulties—writer's block and population-specific writing issues (i.e., second language learners, veterans, trauma victims)—an area of study that deserves fuller treatment than it currently receives.

Writing acknowledgments to accompany writing assignments, as Joe Harris advocates in *Rewriting*, also has benefits, even if only to generate awareness of the always collaborative relationships built into any scene of writing. Considering the affective issues explored in this chapter, students might use the genre to chart the emotional work of writing, its highs, lows, and plateaus. This kind of mapping could be just as useful to faculty as to student writers themselves by motivating pedagogical methods that value embodied, affective experiences of writing. Writing is very often experienced as an endurance activity that takes a physical and emotional toll. That toll likely plays out in how students perceive writing and orient to it. What do we want students to feel? How does feeling relate to writing? Why is it important to acknowledge bad feelings about writing? What kinds of bodies show up in acknowledgments and why?

The next chapter continues my exploration of writing partners in acknowledgments by turning to how writers narrate their experiences of inhabiting time. Attention to temporal materialities of writing brings focus to one of its most basic dimensions: how writing happens.