

# INTRODUCTION: FROM THE STICKY MAT TO THE CLASSROOM: TOWARD CONTEMPLATIVE WRITING PEDAGOGY



What we cannot imagine cannot come into being  
—bell hooks, *All About Love*

The intelligence of the body is a fact. It is real. The intelligence of the brain is only imagination. So the imagination has to be made real. The brain may dream of doing a difficult backbend today, but it cannot force the impossible even on to a willing body. We are always trying to progress, but inner cooperation is essential.

—BKS Iyengar, *Light on Life*

I move from kneeling on all fours into *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, or downward-facing dog, lifting and straightening my knees and elbows. I exhale along with the rest of my class and try to send this energy down into my hands, pushing each palm evenly onto my mat and pressing the tops of my thighs back in order to descend my heels as close to the floor as possible. Even as I move quietly, my thoughts create a loud frenzy inside my head, destroying the peace for which my *sadhana*, or my practice, aims. This pose frustrates me. I know I'm weak in it, so I begin to question my alignment. As I push my hips back and up, I wonder if my spine is scooping instead of creating a long line. My mind orders my spine to go long, and I think about shifting more weight into my heels. As a result, I forget about my hands and they begin to slide forward, inching their way up to the top of my sticky mat. I wonder with bitterness how terrible my pose looks. This is a genuine concern: with my head down and my eyes staring at my toes, I can't see myself. I begin to wish I could view myself as my teacher and classmates can in order to confirm my fears that I'm doing this pose all wrong. I suppress a sigh and, with no better alternative, begin a silent prayer for the pose to be called to an end.

Instead, I feel hands grab my hips and pull them back. With this action, I feel my heels settle firmly onto my mat. At the same time that she moves me,

my yoga instructor, Holly, enjoins me to lift my sitting bones and direct them toward the back of the room.

“Oh. Sorry. I . . .” Thoughts racing forward, I fumble to explain my ineptitude.

Holly cuts me off to reply, “No. You need to stop thinking and feel.”

Because Holly knows me well, she understands I need to be reminded of this. I know hers isn’t a command *never* to think when doing an *asana*, or pose, like *Adho Mukha Svanasana*. Instead, it’s a reminder to let my brain and body work *together* in the pose.

This kind of integration is frankly something to which I am not accustomed as an academic and a compositionist. Jane Tompkins may have written *Me and My Shadow* decades ago, singling out the professional discourse community of composition studies and indicting its propensity to separate our personal, material realities from our professional voices, but hers is a reality I share years later. Nevertheless as a yogi and increasingly as a feminist and a writing teacher, claiming my body is a move I know I need to make for growth. The above example from my yoga practice makes this lesson clear. Rather than trying to force my body into confused compliance as I was in my frustration with downward-facing dog, Holly’s message was that I needed to listen to it. When I could *feel* my hips shift back and down, when I could find a balance between the agency of my body and the directives of my mind, I would have little need for my earlier out-of-body desire to see myself; instead, I could use these embodied, critical feelings to work toward a better pose and, therein, a more holistic sense of self, a contemplative awareness of my subjectivity. But to achieve this end, I first must relax my habit of trying to control my body with my mind and, through awareness, learn to work with my physical body’s organic intelligence and to respect it as a site of knowledge. When I can do this, I will improve my mindfulness of how knowledge is created and embodied in both processes around which I structure so much of my life: yoga and writing.

## SETTING INTENTIONS AND PRACTICING THEORY

I begin this introduction with a recent experience from my Iyengar yoga class in order to frame my *sankalpa*, the Sanskrit word for intention, in this project: namely, exploring the consequences of stepping away from pedagogies that overlook students’ and teachers’ embodiments and toward contemplative writing pedagogies that view the body as a lived site of knowledge and not, primarily, as a discursive text. In response to higher education’s growing interest in contemplative education and a reaffirmed commitment within composition

studies to create pedagogies that facilitate a meaningful transfer of skills, this book argues that contemplative practices should be integrated in our college writing curricula. Using the embodied insights from contemplative practices like yoga, meditation and the martial arts, among others, and fusing them with a traditional curriculum is what distinguishes contemplative education from other learning methods. Professor at Amherst University and Director of the Mind and Life Institute, Arthur Zajonc, notes that contemplative pedagogies offer teachers “a wide range of educational methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior, while also providing new pedagogical techniques that support creativity and the learning of course content” (2010, p. 83). Writing pedagogies that integrate contemplative practices are concrete examples of how we might forward—with difference—recent attention to embodied rhetorics. For, contemplative pedagogies not only self-consciously take up the body, but they also direct focus to *mindfulness*, an embodied intervention that creates a rich source of practice and theory which can be used to transform the work completed in our college writing classrooms and the ways that work is transferred to other writing environments.

The rhetorical primacy of the body is guaranteed within contemplative pedagogy by mindfulness, or moment-to-moment awareness. Mindfulness is the practice of slowing down and paying close attention to the present moment. We practice mindfulness when each “thought feeling or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is” (Bishop et al., n.d., p. 8). Rather than over-identifying with or immediately reacting to thoughts and feelings as they arise, the practitioner of mindfulness creates a critical distance, a space between perception and response, that allows for eventual, intentional response as opposed to automatic, unthinking and habitual reaction (Bishop et al., n.d., p. 9). As my reader will see in the coming chapters, mindfulness forces us to be responsive to the sensations of our bodies and our corresponding feelings; it roots us in the present moment so that we may more consciously shape our future actions. Because it encourages careful consideration and choice, mindfulness fosters in writers the kind of rhetorical responsibility characteristic of embodied approaches to writing and rhetoric.

While embodied rhetorics remain a relatively new area of interest for the field of composition studies, some beginning explorations have started to document the changes that occur when awareness of the organic body productively interrupts our professional writing (Jane Hindman’s *Making Writing Matter*), reflections on our teaching (William Banks’ *Written Through the Body*; Tina Kazan’s *Dancing Bodies*) and our understanding of literacy as primarily ver-

bal (Kristie Fleckenstein's *Embodied Literacies*). While no two embodied writing pedagogies are exactly alike, they are all united by the common purpose of inserting the body into education by self-consciously attending to the somatics of learning and teaching. Debra Hawhee points out that recent interest in embodied pedagogy actually returns us to an ancient connection between rhetorical and athletic training. Hawhee reveals that

sophistic pedagogy displayed a curious syncretism between athletics and rhetoric, a particular crossover in pedagogical practices and learning styles, a crossover that contributed to the development of rhetoric as a *bodily art*: an art learned, practiced, and performed by and with the body as well as the mind. (2002, p. 144)

Whether we view them as contemporary movements or renewals of classic paradigms, these pedagogies have effectively shifted our focus to the material bodies of the students and professionals involved in the act of writing and away from a strict theoretical discourse of the subject who is written.

Raul Sanchez overviews the history of this shift in his recent *College English* article, *Outside the Text: Rethorizing Empiricism and Identity*. Sanchez argues that the defining feature of the postmodern moment, which he situates in the 1980s to 1990s within composition studies, was an emphasis on “the subject,” a theoretical term that questioned the validity of “the writer,” a term rooted in realist materiality: “[t]he writer and the subject, then, have not been interchangeable: the latter remains a figure with which to theorize systematically, while the former is encountered materially and individually” (2012, p. 235). Noting we are now past postmodernism, Sanchez claims we are once again asking ourselves what’s “outside” of writing. Sanchez’ central query establishes recent investigations of embodied writing—and this project’s focus on contemplative writing, arguably a richer alternative—as part of a contemporary, historical movement to validate “commonsense materiality” (2012, p. 235).

Indeed, embodied writing’s exigency typically springs from the postmodernist zeal to “read away” or narratize the organic body by understanding discursive consciousness as *the* site of struggle and agency (see, for instance, Fleckenstein’s *Writing Bodies*). To look for a paradigmatic example of what happens when a pedagogy validates subjects and not writers, we need to look no further than James Berlin’s social epistemicism. Critical pedagogies like social epistemicism have justified the erasure of the organic body by insisting that our coming to consciousness *is* our coming to language, a powerful move that validates the kind of rhetorical analysis so key to our field. With its attention on the writer,

Sanchez' essay marks the new spaces opening up in our field for teaching methods that neither ignore the shaping powers of language nor condemn the body to a linguistic prison, classified as a trope. It is within this space that I insert contemplative writing pedagogy.

By starting from the perspective of the body, contemplative writing pedagogy represents a hopeful alternative that shares a fundamental goal with approaches under the larger umbrella of embodied rhetorics: to cultivate an understanding of embodiment as more than simply a conceptual framework (even if it may be, in part, this too) but also as a lived, fleshy reality. It is this fleshy reality my students and I encountered in our first practice of yoga together, which I narrate in my preface. Tompkins, perhaps one of the first in composition studies to gain notoriety for her enactment of embodied writing before it was even labeled as such, argues that the separation of the personal from the professional is due to interdisciplinary trends within the professoriate that insist on objectivity as a prerequisite for responsibility and truth. Being schooled within a system that places value on the "life of the mind" over the supposed banality of her flesh creates tension between the particularities of embodied experience and the promise of transcendence in Tompkins' real life. For instance, Tompkins cannot reconcile her academic persona with her personal embodied reality. She describes in *A Life in School* an inverse relation between her achievements in school and her body's physical sufferings, including wetting her bed and developing physical ailments for no explainable reasons. In *Me and My Shadow*, Tompkins questions this relationship by inserting her lived body into her narrative, saying, for example, that as she writes, she is "thinking about going to the bathroom. But not going yet" (1987, p. 173). Such a fleshy interjection startles readers and reminds us that when objectivity is construed as an erasure of the body, the split between the personal and academic becomes a metonym for the hierarchical divide between the body and mind. Tompkin's unapologetic reference to her body doesn't "belong" in academic writing because it breaks the rules of "mind over matter"—even if readers identify with the reality of her observations given their own lived experiences. Precisely because they disrupt, hers become examples of the body's refusal to be ignored despite our best attempts at theorizing it away.

It is not surprising that female scholars like Tompkins have been at the forefront of critiques that center on the dangers of a disembodied academe. Historically, women have not been able to elide their embodiment because patriarchal systems have simply reduced them to their bodies, allowing men to be associated with the transcendent mind. Because patriarchal power often rests on the ability to cast women solely as body objects, academic feminism has been wary to claim the reality of the physical body lest it naturalize that body once more. Femi-

nism's struggle with the organic body was the subject of a talk by Toril Moi who visited my former university as I worked on this project in the spring of 2010. Despite Moi's warnings, a struggle it remains: feminism has placed women's bodies at the center of political and theoretical discussion and scholarship since its beginnings, but it too often continues to do so without the aim of claiming the organic body's ordinary materiality, its integrity beyond language.

No feminist writing pedagogy can stand outside the influence of Judith Butler's work to rhetoricize gender.<sup>2</sup> But just as Butler's work has helped shape what it means to theorize and to practice feminism in our composition classrooms, resulting in popular field readers like *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, it has also served to naturalize the textualization of the body. Susan Bordo, pithily capturing the problem of using Butler to drive our pedagogies, writes, "Butler's world is one in which language swallows everything up, voraciously, a theoretical pasta-machine through which the categories of competing frameworks are pressed and reprocessed as "tropes" (1993, p. 291). Focused more on what we gain (attention to the social construction of gender and its performance) than what we lose (attention to the physical world and the material body), feminist sociologist Alexandra Howson argues that we have too heavily relied on these tropes. As a result, "the body appears in much feminist theory as an ethereal presence, a fetishized concept that has become detached and totalizing for the interpretive communities it serves" (2005, p. 3). Howson tasks herself the project of corporalizing gender studies and exploring the particularity of embodiment as applied to her field, which shares with our own an interest in real people and authentic spaces of living and learning.

By dialoguing feminism with contemplative pedagogy, I hope to expand the spirit of Howson's project and make it applicable to our field. The abstraction of the body has left personal experiences and pragmatics of embodiment felt by individual student and teacher bodies devalued for the construction and representation of corporeality as a social performance. To claim these embodied experiences as "personal" does not do enough to insist on their material reality—a reality that extends beyond semiotics. Compositionists, especially those interested in feminisms, have lost too much by resting our critique there. To the revaluation of the personal that Tompkins started years ago, I argue that feminist compositionists must add an unabashed focus on organic embodiment via the contemplative. In this book, I will examine how the metonymic confusion of the body and the personal in composition studies, while pragmatic and understandable, has tended to stunt conversations about the body by simply casting it under the net of the personal, thereby entrenching it in the circular, pedagogical debate between personal writing and critical writing, neither of which can sup-

port a serious investigation of matter.

Contemplative pedagogy moves us beyond these divisions and gives us a third possibility. In contemplative traditions like yoga, embodiment becomes the means of knowing, feeling and making sense of the world and not just a physical enactment of social forces. Contemplative pedagogies are distinctive in that they capture the importance of felt knowledge as a creative force on both content and process levels without capitulating to solipsistic or essentialist-expressivist notions of singular embodiment. The kind of felt knowledge to which I refer certainly encompasses Sondra Perl's exploration of Eugene Gendlin's felt sense, or the "body's knowledge before it's articulated in words" (2004, p. 1), but expands beyond it too, as it doesn't preclude discursive knowingness nor need it be built entirely on intuition. In contemplative writing pedagogy as in yoga, the body and mind are both agentive and creative forces, companionate in relation to one another. The personal narrative I relate to begin my introduction captures this intelligent interdependence. Respecting the natural or organic body does not mean we ignore the dynamism of nature or the shaping powers of culture: just because I accept my body as real doesn't mean I can't also resist notions of authentic feminine essence on and off my sticky mat.

As far back as the 1980s, James Moffett drew our attention in his *Writing, Inner Speech and Meditation* to the ways Eastern practices like meditation could sustain the development of somatic awareness where our own cultural practices fell short. More recently, Mary Rose O'Reilley has argued that the contemplative tradition of claiming silence central to Buddhism and present in Quaker rituals can be of value to our classrooms. Marianthe Karanikas claims as well that "meditative exercises can help students uncover their tacit assumptions, become aware of their biases, and begin to act mindfully in any number of situations" (1997, p. 161) based on her experiments in the technical writing classroom. My embodied experiences have also led me to contemplative pedagogies. Zajonc has called such growing interest in the contemplative a "quiet revolution in higher education" (2010, p. 83). I am not alone, then, in my interest to explore what contemplative pedagogies might add to our classrooms. Our current decade has seen an explosion of interest in the contemplative within academic circles. Here are just a few of interest to those of us who teach:

- In 2001, the Mindfulness in Education Network (MiEN) was established with the purpose of "facilitat[ing] communication among all educators, parents, students and any others interested in promoting contemplative practice (mindfulness) in educational settings," according to its website. MiEN sponsors annual conferences on mindfulness in education and maintains an active listserv of over 1,000 educators

interested in sharing mindful approaches to teaching.

- In 2003, the Garrison Institute was founded as a non-profit, non-sectarian organization committed to exploring “the intersection of contemplation and engaged action in the world” and education (“Envisioning,” 2009). In 2005, the institute released a report mapping the use of contemplative educational programs and presented this “Mapping Project” at the first Garrison Institute Symposium on Contemplation and Education in April. In 2008, the institute issued a report on the growing trends of contemplative education as discussed at their education leadership forum held the same year.
- In 2006, *Teacher’s College Record* published a special issue on contemplative practices in higher education, which grew out of a national conference at Teacher’s College, Columbia University, highlighting the growing inclusion not only of these practices within individual classrooms but also the building of centers and programs for mindfulness on campuses (“Contemplative Practices and Education,” 2006).
- In May 2008, The Association for the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) was launched. Starting as an “Academic Program” of the Association for the Contemplative Mind in Society and after ten years of administering fellowships to contemplative educators, the ACMHE grew into a program of its own standing. Today, the program is a “multidisciplinary, not-for-profit, professional academic association with a membership of educators, scholars, and administrators in higher education,” which “promotes the emergence of a broad culture of contemplation in the academy by connecting a network of leading institutions and academics committed to the recovery and development of the contemplative dimension of teaching, learning and knowing,” according to its website (Zajonc, n.d).

Important as the above milestones are in establishing the prominence of contemplative education as a central query and legitimate practice for those of us situated within higher education, they are nowhere near the only that might be cited. Large initiatives like the ACMHE and the MiEN network and more local, institutional programs like Brown’s thriving Contemplative Studies Initiative are just a few of the many testimonies we have on how popular and invasive the recent move toward contemplative education has become within American universities. These programs and initiatives echo a larger cultural uptake of the contemplative, a critical mass of public discourse and awareness about contemplative practice. Take yoga, for instance. In 2008, 15.8 million Americans practiced yoga and spent around \$5.7 billion on yoga classes and



related products, according to a study done by *The Yoga Journal*. This level of spending amounted to an increase of 87% as compared to the journal's previous study, conducted in 2004 (Macy, 2008). Such findings hold up locally, I've found. In my own small department, there are three of us who regularly practice yoga, and my small university downtown area has two yoga studios (though no stoplights).

Aside from following larger cultural trends, academic interest in the contemplative has also been driven by new scientific evidence that testifies to the beneficial psychophysiological effects of practices like mediation and yoga. Growing acceptance and inclusion of the contemplative within the university "is happening, not coincidentally [then], as the scientific research on mindfulness is expanding and producing results relevant to teaching, learning and knowing," notes Mirabai Bush, cofounder of ACMHE (2011, p. 183). And, this expansion is itself notable: "[o]ver the last twenty years, there has been an exponential increase in research ... from some eighty published papers in 1990 to over six hundred in 2000" (Smalley & Winston, 2010, p. 2).

Bush's comments remind us that the focus on mindfulness is the key to contemplative education, not which methods are used to cultivate it. Contemplative teachers willingly model mindfulness for their students and coach students to use mindfulness to enhance their creativity, attentional focus, awareness of others and proprioception. In this book, I am most interested in contemplative pedagogies that incorporate yoga as the primary means of developing mindfulness of the body as an epistemic origin; though, the insights contained within can be cultivated using a variety of other contemplative practices and can be easily translated to other contemplative pedagogies provided that they follow the tenants of mindfulness. See figure 1: "The Tree of Contemplative Practices" for just some of the many practices that engage us in mindfulness training. Barry M. Kroll, for instance, provides a complementary but different approach in his recent, *The Open Hand: Arguing as An Art of Peace*. Kroll details his creation of a freshman seminar devoted to the instruction of non-adversarial methods of argumentation—deliberative, conciliatory and integrative—through, in large part, the incorporation of contemplative practices and meditative arts. He uses Aikido as a way to teach students how they might "cultivate awareness and equanimity in the midst of conflict" (2013, p. 3). Kroll goes to the movements of Aikido as a humble practitioner and introduces those as "a physical analogy for the tactics of arguing" (2013, p. 12) in much the same way that I introduce yoga to first-year students as a means of reframing and navigating the writing process.

Fellow contemplative educator, O'Reilly, warns of the importance of both

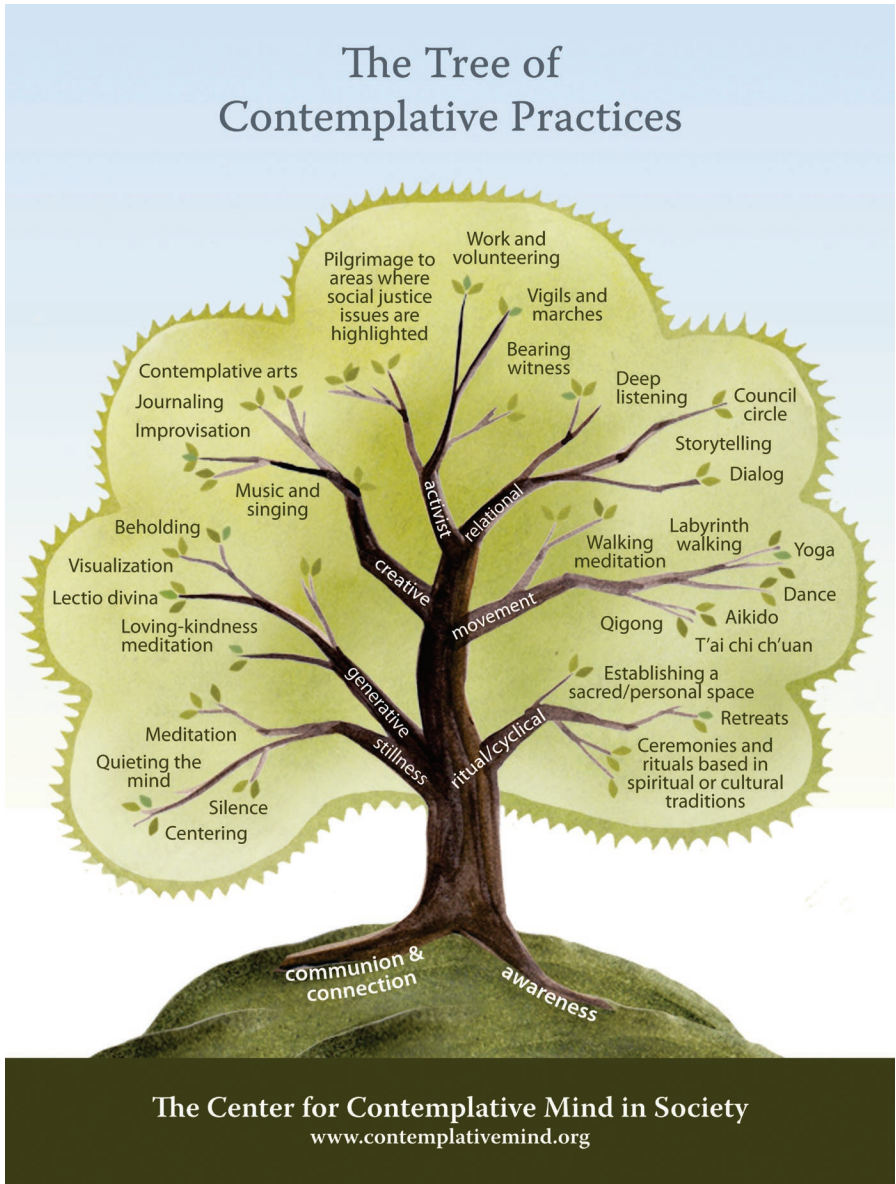


Figure 1. The Tree of Contemplative Practices.  
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2012. (permissions granted)

finding inspiration from others using contemplative methods in their courses while also staying true to our motivations for incorporating those methods in our classrooms in the first place. In her book on using Buddhism and Quakerism in her writing and literature classrooms, O'Reilly cautions us that “when we talk about teaching within a contemplative frame of reference, I think we should keep our prescriptions to a minimum. I want to sketch the lines of a certain approach, but I don't want to trespass into another teacher's prayer hall” (1998, p. 14). I proceed in much the same way here, using this book to document how I have created contemplative spaces in my writing classes inspired by my personal practice of yoga and the ways I have begun to see yoga and writing as complementary creative endeavors. And while I could choose any modern practice of yoga, I've chosen Iyengar because it is what I practice and because it is highly adaptable, as I note in my preface, though this style is also arguably the most influential school of modern yoga (DeMichelis, 2005, p. 15). I invite my readers to find their own “prayer halls.”

In concentrating my efforts around yoga, I am echoing the calls within Judith Beth Cohen's and Geraldine DeLuca's recent articles, *The Missing Body—Yoga and Higher Education* and *Headstands, Writing and the Rhetoric of Self-Acceptance*, respectively, to actively seek out the connections between writing pedagogy and yoga practice. Cohen argues that the most obvious connection between the two is the focus on process and movement, and DeLuca inhabits this fluid process in her article as she documents the difficulty of accepting her limitations as a yoga student and discovers a parallelism in this humbling exercise that she can draw upon as a writing teacher. Through her struggling practice of headstand, *sirsasana* in Sanskrit, DeLuca learns the pedagogical value of “radical self-acceptance,” or of accepting where she is in the present moment instead of trying to push away the parts of her reality she'd rather not face. In doing so, she challenges the commonplace that forward motion is the only way growth in our writing and teaching of writing can be measured.

Like critical thinking, mindfulness is a particular, intentional application of awareness and is best seen as a skill that can be developed with practice. As a yogi, I practice mindfulness each time I sit on my mat to mediate and each time I flow through a series of poses, a *vinyasana*, linking breath and movement together. It is this sense of mindfulness I hoped the students in my preface were exposed to as they experienced moving their bodies through poses. But, mindfulness doesn't just stay on the mat; not only can mindfulness learned through contemplative traditions transfer to our daily activities such as writing, but the very act of performing our day-to-day experiences can become a viable means of practicing mindfulness and learning to develop contemplative presence. Thus,

the act of teaching can itself become a contemplative practice when driven by mindfulness, and our most mundane classroom routines (such as taking roll or pausing for reflection) can become contemplative exercises in themselves (by using this time to have students sit in a moment of silence).

It is in this spirit of self-acceptance for where I am in the present moment that I offer this book as an initial exploration of how a feminist writing pedagogue who is also a committed yogi might take yoga into the writing classroom and make sense of what happens in both practical and theoretical terms. My comprehensive goal is to see what feminist theory, writing studies and contemplative practice have to offer each other, and how we might build responsible incarnations of contemplative pedagogy in their generative coupling. This is important work as the field investigates how crucial metacognition is to students' ability to learn and transfer writing skills and processes. Yoga offers mindfulness as the "meta" link that bridges learning, self-reflection and movement. While my investigation will at times take me to the practical and at other moments to the theoretical, it is grounded firmly in the lessons of my embodied experience on the mat and in the classroom. Like O'Reilley, I "[l]et methodology follow from the particular" (1998, p. 14) in my application of contemplative writing pedagogy.

I noticed early on in my own training that both yogis and compositionists share a fundamental premise about the importance of lived theory: as a master of yoga has put it, "your practice is your laboratory" (Iyengar, 2005, p. 102). This humble attitude means that contemplative educators must be willing to show their vulnerability as learners in the classroom, alongside their students. As a colleague recently said in response to a conference presentation of mine on contemplative pedagogy, the most radical element of this kind of teaching is the way it positions teachers as students too and asks them to engage directly in the learning experiences of their classrooms, destabilizing their complete authority in the classroom. Like others before me, I am not a certified yoga teacher, but I still teach my students basic poses and breathing exercises. Indeed, I have found that approaching these activities as a learner too helps to shift the power dynamics in my classrooms in productive ways. And, while I've had the very good fortune of bringing in my yoga teachers to help expose my writing students to contemplative practice, this is not a necessary element of contemplative pedagogy. Despite a handful of visits each semester from these yoga teachers, I remain the primary resource for students since we practice every class meeting. For readers contemplating using contemplative practice in their own classrooms, though, I do encourage reaching out to local contemplative communities to find support. I never expected to find yoga instructors willing to teach my students for nothing but a cup of coffee and a few conversations in return—at not just

one but at the two universities I taught during the drafting of this book—but I did. Contemplative communities are full of giving and generous people, as my experience highlights.

In sum, there are many ways to integrate contemplation, silence and focused movement into our classes, and contemplative pedagogy can support all of these ways. What distinguishes contemplative pedagogies is their attention to the body as a primary site for mindful reflection, contemplative awareness and centeredness—not the practice of yoga. Just as a voice teacher might instruct students on deep belly breathing or a drama teacher might get students moving around, we too can teach students mindful breathing and movement to help them work through writing anxiety and show them stretches to help them generate new ideas. The goal of contemplative pedagogy is not to turn students into martial artists or yogis; rather, it is to show them what they can learn by paying attention to their bodies.

## PRACTICING THEORY

Just as my writing classroom is the locus of invention for my teaching theory, my own yoga practice was the first research space for this project. While I've followed a home practice of yoga for years, it was only more recently that I began to explore the connections between yoga and writing—and only because they kept colliding in ways I could no longer ignore. Knowing how centered and calm I felt after practicing yoga, I found myself naturally creating a writing routine that integrated yoga breaks. As often as my schedule would allow, I'd wake up early to write and when I felt my attention wander, I would break for time on my mat. Initially, these breaks were simply geared to get me away from the computer and were taken more with the intent to develop my *sadhana* or practice of yoga than to sustain my writing. Even so, after these breaks, I felt revived and ... something more. I began to see that “something more” as a sense of mindfulness and clarity cultivated through my *yogasana* practice that transferred into my proceeding writing sessions. These were different breaks than those I took to watch television, take a nap or fold laundry; none of those acts felt like a continuation of the writing process the way that yoga did. Yoga, true to its promise to cultivate mindfulness that transfers off the mat, was helping me grow a deep awareness I could feel seeping into my writing. Of course, this awareness remained only as strong as I was; my motivation to write still threw a fence around my attentiveness.

It only seemed natural to begin integrating more yoga into my long writing sessions, leaving my mat open near my computer in order to isolate poses as

needed, such as stretching my rounded “computer” shoulders with *gomukhasana* arms, hooking the hands together near the shoulder blades by sending one arm up to the sky and down the body and the other around the back body to reach up and meet the first. I didn’t see this practice in line with the commercially-popular “office yoga,” which is stretching for its own sake, but as part of a writing process that worked with the body and respected its effect on making meaning as much as that of the mind. When my body was tense and tired, I was less likely to read my sources compassionately and more likely to skim them for points of weakness without listening to their arguments. As my body self-awareness grew through a combined practice, I gradually came to see yoga not as a miracle cure to all of what ails writers, but as a helpful tool for us to transform our mental and physical writing habits and rituals.

The metaphoric and the literal began to bleed together through my integrated practice and made me begin to question the value for writers of not just practicing yoga but also understanding the philosophies behind such contemplative practices. I was drawn to the metaphoric connections between the practice of writing and the practice of yoga; they suddenly screamed for my attention. Yoga, both as a philosophy and as a tradition of movement and breath awareness, is highly literary and symbolic. Literal balance developed in *asanas* or poses is thought to translate to a metaphoric balance in the yogi’s life. In tree pose, for instance, you learn to find balance in the constant sway of your body by developing a mind-body awareness and strength that works *with* such movement in order not to dominate but to channel the sway productively. Tree pose literally trains the body to find balance, and this is understood to transfer off the sticky mat and to give the yogi poise and balance amidst the undulations of life. Nothing ever simply stays on the mat. The body is the hinge for such lessons so that when we learn to work with it, we grow and advance in all aspects of our lives. Yoga’s core focus on balance, flexibility, consciousness, non-violence and awareness was intimately familiar since these were qualities I recognized in good writing and as possessed by strong, feminist writers. These were qualities I could appreciate in both forms of self-expression before I ever began to write my way through them. I’d taught Rogerian argument in my writing classes as a means of encouraging students to question our society’s “argument culture,” as Deborah Tannen (1998) calls it, for instance, and I’d long admired disability studies writer Nancy Mairs for her pithy and often humorous reminders to become aware of our writing bodies.

At the same time that I was exploring the union of yoga and writing, I came into contact with Jeffery Davis’ *The Journey from the Center to the Page* (2004), which advocates infusing yoga practice into the creative writing process. Davis’ intent to use yoga to get writers to work with and through the physical body

and its experiences resonated with me even if his call for “authenticity” and his concentration on fiction writing did not. In the end, his book serves more as an inspiration for what I describe here rather than a source. As my own sustained practice of yoga converged with the process of my burgeoning academic research on embodiment and writing, I saw how yoga provided not only a new lens for my work but also a set of practices I could use to bring the body into the domain of the writing classroom, hopefully teaching students to think about their bodies as generators of meaning. This contemplative goal has consequences for feminist pedagogy.

## BRINGING TOGETHER THE FEMINIST AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE

My practice of yoga has been a space for me to enact my feminism. Through yoga, I continue to learn acceptance of my body while not reducing myself to it. When I read the *Yoga Sutras* and stumble across passages about moving toward self-understanding and enlightenment through union of the body, heart and mind, I am struck by the congruence between these goals and feminisms’ focus on egalitarianism and experience as the means by which change and understanding occurs (the personal is always political). And so my thinking about contemplative pedagogy is filtered through my feminism and, indeed, strengthened by it. In turn, I use this book to explore not only the theory and practice of embracing contemplative pedagogy in the writing classroom but also to explore what happens when we consciously approach this pedagogy as feminist. Yoga can be seen as a feminist’s guilty pleasure, a time when she submits to our society’s obsessive regulations of women’s bodies to be tight and toned, and feeds the capitalist-patriarchal system by purchasing hundred-dollar Lululemon (lululemon athletica®) yoga pants because they make her backside look good. What this characterization points to is the problematic ways that yoga has been commercialized and gendered in American society and not necessarily an intolerance for feminism at yoga’s core.

Yoga’s commercialization has sometimes reduced this contemplative practice to a form of exercise, and a hypersexualized one at that. This hasn’t gone unnoticed by the most committed of yogis. A popular journal for practioners, *Yoga Journal*, recently published a letter written by the publication’s co-founder which condemned the magazine’s ads for their use of almost- or completely-naked models to sell products ranging from yoga clothes to yoga mats. If modern incarnations of yoga reveal capitalist misogyny, and classic yoga texts like the *Yoga Sutras* are immersed in Eastern patriarchy, then what makes yoga—or contem-

plative philosophy and practice altogether—useful for feminist inquiry?

While I recognize the important historical and cultural complications raised by this line of questioning, my use of Iyengar yoga and yoga philosophy as a mainstay for my pedagogy's implication in the contemplative takes a hopeful view of its usefulness for feminist writing pedagogies. While I do recognize that ancient yogic texts are steeped in the traditions of patriarchy and that some modern Western applications still reflect these traditions as well as our own, I believe there are just as many congruencies between yoga and feminism ripe for consideration, such as a commitment to change through transformation as well as a spirit of equanimity that eschews binaries. While the task of delineating the ways in which yoga philosophy is reflective of the patriarchies in which it is practiced is worthwhile, that is not my aim here. Rather, I am engaged in understanding how yoga can sustain the kind of feminist, embodied-contemplative inquiry I am after.

Feminist studies is uniquely situated in the university as interdisciplinary. This refusal to sit still and play nice when it comes to matters of academic institutionalism is a feature it shares with contemplative pedagogy, which has sprung up in departments as diverse as biology and religion. I use this interdisciplinarity to my advantage. A key figure for me is scientist-theorist Donna Haraway who provides a means to reclaim our writing bodies as lived, fleshy presences—the kind around which Tompkins creates personal vignettes—while avoiding essentialist criticism that tends to follow claims to the organic body. Because Haraway speaks from the point of view as a scientist, she is interested in models of subjectivity that better reflect our lived realities as biological beings living as part of and among a material world; and because she too writes from her perspective as a feminist theorist, she wants models that do not eschew the theoretical progress we have made in the name of postmodernism, which has helped us understand the social construction of many of our “givens.” Instead of seeking any sort of definitive answers by drawing new lines between nature and culture, Haraway finds promise in the indeterminacy of materiality and the way respect for our flesh necessitates a stance of openness as opposed to the false closure of other postmodern variations of the subject, which tend to espouse a thinly-veiled linguistic determinism. Haraway's alternative epistemology consequently offers an alternative to the etherealization of the body that Howson targets by leaving the organic body as a source of necessary tension to keep our theorizing in check—a tension too often lost. As a result, she mediates contemplative pedagogies' focus on the center and poststructuralist decentering by insisting on the generative paradox of embracing both simultaneously. Simply, she helps me to theorize the writer within a field of “commonsense materiality” (Sanchez, 2012, p. 235)



while remaining sensitive to the rhetorical acts that situate this writer also within a field of discourse. While feminists writing today have sometimes leapfrogged over her in attempt to embrace newer theorists, Haraway, I believe, leads the way in our journey to rethink the body materially and in a spirit true to contemplative practice.

Haraway doesn't just address our dangerous tendency to efface materiality; she pins hope on the body for revamping our systems of meaning-making and epistemologies in order to bring about real change in the world, converging her project with the central foci of writing studies *and* contemplative practice. What's more, she corrects those who claim the body without asserting its agency by insisting that we need to be concerned not only with the materiality of subject formation but also with the agentive status of bodies themselves—bodies that shape language *as much as* language shapes them. It's not just that the body is involved in our meaning-making processes, but that it conditions our systems of knowledge from the very start. This is consistent with contemplative pedagogies' reliance on the physical body as the primary structure for self-realization. With Haraway, I will theorize a feminist-minded "writing yogi" for contemplative pedagogies, a mode of authorship that agentizes student writing and validates students' experiences of embodiment. My notion of writing yogis insists on a level of conscious awareness of our writing bodies; we certainly always write as bodies, but few of us are ready to claim them—especially in academic environments beholden to disembodiment. Further, a focus on writing yogis within this book indicates a concern with how writers *experience* their embodiment and *practice* it rather than on a semiotics of material placement, even if situatedness will be a key term to define this experience. The writing yogi is a concept that I play off of in my project's title, and one I will further flesh out in the following chapters.

Writing yogis is an appropriate marker because contemplative pedagogy both re-theorizes the writing subject as writing body-heart-mind and actualizes this theory by engaging writers in contemplative acts that move their whole beings. Such pedagogies are important to writing studies because they encourage mindfulness of writing and learning processes in ways that promote the academic work accomplished in our classes while at the same time remaining committed to a larger scope of a writer's physical and emotional well-being. What further marks these pedagogies is their combined focus on self-examination and awareness of our connectedness with others as complementary understandings that can be deepened by the learning process. In a widely-cited article on contemplative education, Tobin Hart claims that contemplative knowing rests on opening the "contemplative mind" which is "activated through a wide range of approach-

es—from poetry to meditation—that are designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate the capacity of deepened awareness, concentration, and insight” (2004, p. 29). Once the mind is opened in such ways to create inner awareness, a “corresponding opening occurs toward the world around us” (2004, p. 29). While I can’t take his term as my own since it advances the misnomer that contemplation is solely a practice of the mind, Hart’s understandings rearticulate what it means to be focused on a “whole life” pedagogy and show how a developed sense of embodied interiority necessitates an equal connection to exteriority and to others. Mindful knowing is, by default, connected knowing as it refuses the mindless fragmentation of our scattered lives. Along the way, this contemplative model may help student writers find balance and compassion on and off the page; teaching difference as embodied may lead to stronger and more pragmatic understandings of social justice and personal transformation through the formation of an embodied, feminist-contemplative ethics.

## YOUR BODY IS YOUR MUSE: THE EMBODIED IMAGINATION IN YOGA

And so I arrive full-circle back to my opening narrative in this introduction. My struggle in downward-facing dog highlights the potential value of yoga’s insights for the writing classroom and provides the thread that ties together the braid of this book’s chapters and interchapters. Namely, my difficulties in downward-facing dog attest to the ways yoga asks its practioners to be embodied imaginers, realizing meaning with and through our feeling flesh, against modern impulses that deny the intelligence of the body. If I hope to improve my practice of *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, I have to learn to use my body awareness to *feel* my way toward full expression of my *asanas*. This requires me to lay aside my academic neurosis of attempting to control, ignore or transcend my body for the sake of identifying myself solely with my mind. It’s not that I must define myself as *only* body, but that I must begin to imagine myself as an interrelated whole, not in parts, in order to grow intellectually, spiritually<sup>3</sup> and physically.

My practice of poses like downward-dog teaches me that verbal abstractions in the form of the directions my yoga teacher gives to her students must pair with our actual experiences of them. For instance, Holly’s frequent injunction to push the front knee into the back knee in down-dog means nothing to me unless I can both imagine this process and make real these imaginings though practiced embodiment and self-awareness. In my struggle recounted at the beginning of this introduction, I knew where, in theory, my body should be placed for successful execution of the pose, but I couldn’t connect this with my practice be-

cause I assumed that the theory was what mattered most. But, as I have learned, it is only with awareness of my organic body and my physical and emotional feelings can I be “in” the pose as opposed to simply forcing myself through its actions.

Moving from the mat to the classroom, I correspondingly define the embodied imagination as the faculty by which body, heart and mind work together to bring meaning and understanding to writing under the praxis of contemplative pedagogy. Imagining, as I see it through a feminist and yogic lens, is integrative, thoughtful and emotive. Its axis is the heart; what is felt both physiologically and psychically shapes the interrelationship between the body and the mind. I recognize the ways imagining is often limited to describing fantastical or illusory mental processes, flights of fancy. But, following feminist usage and the yogic philosophies of Iyengar, founder of the yoga method that I practice, I hope to extend the concept of the imagination to talk about the creative fusion of the intelligent, organic body and mind toward the construction of present realities and future possibilities in writing. These realities and possibilities are based on the knowledge we construct from our experiences (what we understand) and our affective positions toward other bodies as a result of these experiences (how we feel). The imagining process is therefore a situated and recursive one that involves our bodies and minds. Put differently, our imaginings always occur in the context of our material environments and within the frame of our flesh; similarly, our bodies must embrace and enact the dreams and ideas of our intellect for them to *mean* and to be acted upon. As bell hooks puts it in the opening quotation of my epigraph, what we imagine helps to create our reality, which shapes what we believe to be imaginable from the start. In the embrace of imagination, the body interprets and structures our ideas, lending validity to the idea that responsible imaginings are those that remain accountable to our flesh.

The embodied imagination provides a new method of inquiry in composition studies, one that takes its lineage from feminism and an Eastern tradition of Iyengar yoga that challenges hierarchical dualities and seeks integration and mindfulness at its core. In their recent *College Composition and Communication* article, Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster trace contemporary feminist usage of what they coin the “critical imagination” which becomes one of the three “terms of engagement” they trace throughout their historical survey of feminist rhetorical practices (2010, p. 648). Working alongside “strategic contemplation” and “social circulation,” the critical imagination is a strategy of inquiry or a tool “to engage, as it were, in hypothesizing . . . as a means for searching methodically, not so much for immutable truth, but instead for what is likely or possible, given the facts in hand” (Kirsch & Royster, 2010, p. 650). A look at Royster’s earlier

*Traces of a Stream* gives a fuller picture of their concept.

In her book, Royster develops this conception of the imagination in order to propose how feminist reconstruction might aid in the making of historical narratives about ancestral African women's history. Within the historical narrative, the

imagination becomes a critical skill, that is, the ability to see the possibility of certain experiences even if we cannot know the specificity of them . . . . So defined, imagination functions as a critical skill in questioning a viewpoint, an experience, an event, and so on, and in remaking interpretative frameworks based on that questioning. (2000, p. 83)

The imagination so defined enables conversation and interaction between the feminist researcher and her subjects, according to Kirsch and Royster, as it connects the past and present with future "vision[s] of hope" (2010, p. 652-53). Because it is grounded in the particularities of experience, the critical imagination helps facilitate an embodied practice that focuses on research as a lived process (2010, p. 657).

In another permutation, feminists Nira Yuval-Davis and Marcel Stoetzler have claimed the "situated imagination" as necessary to the workings of transversal politics, which seeks to dialogue through difference without overwriting it (2002, p.316). Yuval-Davis credits feminists in Bologna, Italy for the cultivation of this democratic, feminist political practice based on three interlocking concepts: standpoint theory's reminder that because differing viewpoints produce varying bodies of knowledge, any one body of knowledge is essentially unfinished; that even those who are positioned similarly may not share the same values or identifications; and that notions of equality need not be replaced by respect for difference but can be used to encompass difference (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp. 1-2). As I will in Chapter Two, Yuval-Davis uses Haraway's notion of situatedness, which is multiple and embodied, to underscore the importance of differential positioning in knowledge-making practices. She and her co-author introduce the situated imagination as a conceptual tool that works in tandem with situated knowledge in feminist epistemology.

Working at the intersections of present reality and future hope for change, the situated imagination shapes experience into knowledge by helping to construct meaning as well as to stretch it in new directions. Even if situated like knowledge, the imagination, which is both self- and other-directed, can help to establish common ground, especially important to transversal politics (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002, p. 316). Imagining is understood within Yuval-Davis' project to be both a social faculty as well as a bodily one, or a "gateway to the

body, on the one hand, and society, on the other hand” (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002, p. 325). Imagining and thinking aren’t just bridged in the process of understanding, however, they are inseparable and contingent on each other so that, as both authors note, “intellect and imagination, these terms do not refer to clearly separate faculties or ‘spheres,’ but merely to dialogical moments in a multidimensional mental process” (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002, p. 326). The circularity is key. I take this as a reminder of the companionate nature of thinking and imagining which converge in the physical body to create knowledge as well as hope.

For my conception of the embodied imagination, I chose to stitch the best together from this quilt of feminist definitions. What I like about Kirsch and Royster’s critical imagination is its focus on the *skill* of imagining; what this means for our writing classrooms is that we can teach students to deepen their imaginative embrace when constructing new ideas, filtering through their own experiences or when presented with others’ experiences or ideas. The embodied imagination I propose resembles the critical imagination in that it too works as a method of inquiry that allows us to imagine creatively that which initially may not be a reality, that which may yet be eclipsed by our personal experience or that which we would like to change, remake or revise. But, I don’t accept the critical imagination as my own because I find it engages too weak a model of embodiment, even if it does acknowledge materiality in the process of researching, reminding us of the personal bodies who investigate as well as the particular bodies studied. And partly because I do not come at my project from a historicist perspective, I find it too limiting to talk mostly about the imagination as a frame for possibility and not also as participating in a concrete reality; I wish for a less speculative application of the imagination. Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler provide an earthier or more rooted definition for my tastes, and it is happy coincidence that they too draw from Haraway’s theories, connecting, to an extent, our projects. But while Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler divide their episteme into two functions, that of imagining and knowing, I feel this is a restrictive model that eclipses the role feeling has to play in meaning-making. Consequently, I concentrate on three related processes brought together under the rubric of embodiment and representative of the contemplative: imagining, thinking and feeling.

The embodied imagination, as such, can be understood as a space for negotiation between situated thinking and situated feeling toward new possibilities and a mindful awareness of the present (and, therein, the future). Thinking of the imagination as the spider that spins the sticky web that helps connect our feelings and thoughts to fashion such awareness coincides with yet another feminist forwarding of this facility: Haraway’s definition of the imagination as the

connective tissue between feminist networks of meaning wherein individuals are not simply involved in critiquing or distancing, but are interested in establishing coalitional epistemologies and methodologies to bring people together. Haraway claims she “hates” the model of negative criticality that only sees value in dismantling arguments so that you don’t have to implicate yourself in the struggle, “rooted in the fear of embracing something with all its messiness and dirtiness and imperfection” (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000, pp. 111-112). Of course, the body stands as a living symbol of the “messiness” we have often locked out in fear of losing the certainty of closure. Working from a place of connection, Haraway is not simply involved in critiquing but is “involved in building alternative ontologies, specifically via the use of the imaginative” (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000, p. 120). Feminist contemplative pedagogies provide such an alternative.

Also working within a framework of connection, I will be less interested in delineating the lines between the organic body and the cultural body (or, incidentally, feelings as biological or social) and more interested in a holistic approach that respects the companionate nature of the body as both marked and marking. Haraway explains to her interviewer in *How Like a Leaf* that defining her methods as part of a “worldly practice” as opposed to aligning them with either side of the inherently problematic nature/ culture dichotomy emphasizes the “imploded set of things where the physiology of one’s body, the coursing of blood and hormones and the operations of chemicals—the fleshiness of the organism—intermesh with the whole life of the organism” (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000, p. 110). In the same way, contemplative writing can help form a “worldly,” “whole life” pedagogy that takes into account the ecological connections between the body and mind, nature and culture, rationality and emotion which we tend to elide for the relative simplicity of academic processes of inquiry. Owing more to Aristotelian logic than inquiry vested in awareness of the contemplative connections between body, heart and mind, traditional processes of academic inquiry focused on objectivism have excluded and/ or marginalized alternative ways of knowing such as contemplative and connected knowing. As these typical processes are driven by narrow applications of problem solving through logic, they tend toward closure via disconnection and skepticism as opposed to the open-endedness of the imagination.

When inquiry *is* driven by the imagination, we end up with projects of connected knowing, or the process of understanding difference through connection, not distance. In contrast to separate knowers who experience the self as autonomous, connected knowers experience the self in relational webs (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1973, pp. 113-123). If the primary action of separate knowing is that of breaking down, connected knowing is characterized by

building both on and anew. Likewise, we can see the process of embodied imagining as connected; to genuinely connect, we need to be aware of our thoughts and feelings and attend to others' whether real or anticipated. In these ways, we can extend positioning not only as the key for grounding knowledge claims but also our imaginings. When we focus on the imagination, we change discussions of inquiry from finding *the* answer to a problem to investigating multiple possibilities *and* testing these alternatives against our embodied realities, lending more weight toward embodied pragmatism than a transcendent critical analysis that ignores our corporeality. In other words, the embodied imagination becomes a tool of mindfulness for feminist pedagogies. As we imagine, we slow down and pay attention; we reflect and notice; we connect and draw together.

In the afterword to *The Teacher's Body*, Madeleine Grumet notes that the "body throws a horizon around [the] imagination . . . it tethers [the] imagination to a set of possibilities which, although they are protean, are not limitless" (2003, p. 274). Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler say much the same: "Imagination is situated; our imaginary horizons are affected by the positioning of our gaze" (2002, p. 327). How we imagine ourselves and our world matters because it shapes the meaning we take from our experiences and the receptiveness with which we approach others' realities. Imagining ourselves as situated, embodied beings accords respect for differential positioning and compels us to respect the very real consequences of our materiality in our worlds and in our words. Connected to the body and attentive to difference, these feminist versions of the imagination are a far cry from the neo-Romantic "creative imagination" of expressivism.

Yoga philosophy can be seen to build on Grumet's idea that the body serves as an anchor for the imagination. Yoga is also a contemplative practice that actualizes the mindfulness at the heart of the embodied imagination. Iyengar's thoughts on the imagination are the second wellspring for my concept because they stress the application of the imagination in our ordinary lives as we bring our imaginings to bear on our realities in order to shape and to change them. Iyengar explains that the imagination must be steadily applied to our reality. Comparing this application to the writing process, he notes, "[a] writer may dream of the plot for a new novel, but unless he applies himself to pen and paper, his ideas have no value . . . . Never mind the idea, write it down" (2005, p. 156). The embodied imagination described here is the fire that transforms the writer's thoughts into reality on the page and in her life, differentiating imagining from daydreaming; the latter of the two lacks the pragmatic pulse. *Asana*, or practice of the physical poses of yoga, is the link that trains us to bring our thoughts to bear on our realities: "[a]sana practice brings mind and body into harmony for this task . . . . The coordination between them that we learn in asana will enable us to turn the

shape of our visions into the substance of our lives” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 157). *Asana* teaches us to claim our materiality by developing our physical and imaginative faculties. This is not just about imagining possibility then, but using the imagination as a source of intentional doing. Just as in writing, it is the process that becomes the focus.

*Asana* teaches us to embody our imaginings by bringing together the intelligence of the body, which “is a fact . . . is real” and the intelligence of the brain which “is only imagination” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 63). “The imagination has to be made real. The brain may dream of doing a difficult backbend today, but it cannot force the impossible even on to a willing body. We are always trying to progress, but inner cooperation is essential” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 63). To return once more to my own practice as an example, I must make my imaginings of *Adho Mukha Svanasana* “real,” or embodied, by listening to my body and tapping into my feelings through continued practice of the pose. This means I can’t simply overwrite by body’s intelligence, which grounds my intellect: “the brain may say: ‘We can do it.’ But the knee says: ‘Who are you to dictate to me? It is for me to say whether I can do it or not’ (Iyengar, 2005, p. 30). It means that I must begin to imagine myself as not just consciousness or body but both by interweaving brain and body into intelligent movement that respects the limits of my present practice while stretching toward a future of what may be. The greater my personal awareness in the pose and the more experiential knowledge I gather, the more possibility my current and future pose holds. This reality rests in my present actions so that my imaginings are embodied through the fruits of my labor. That is, embodied imaginers develop awareness of habits by tapping into the intelligence of our cells so that we are able to challenge old patterns of doing and entrenched beliefs by *being in the present moment*, for it is the actions of today that will bring about the growth of tomorrow.

To be present, we must be flexible and must respect the fluidity with which we interact with others, be they subjects or objects, in the world. I will capitalize on this literal-metaphoric flexibility in Chapter Three. Gloria Anzaldúa is an example of an author who embodies this sort of flexibility and awareness in her writings. It is for this reason that I often use her as a resource in my writing classes. In *Borderlands*, she argues that while “we are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head,” “the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to ‘real’ events” (1999, pp. 59-60). With the congruence between her thoughts and those I have just explored from Iyengar, it is no surprise that Anzaldúa adopts the concept of “yoga of the body” in a 1983 interview to explain the ways a writer’s creativity



is filtered through the body and how readers respond to this viscerally (2000, p. 77). This author's essay in *Borderlands, Tilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*, dramatizes the process of writing from the body and with the body while viewing the text produced as taking on a fleshy presence itself. About the visceral reaction of reading and its connection to a yoga of the body, Anzaldua reminds us after reflecting upon the 1983 interview years later that

[e]very word you read hits you physiologically—your blood pressure changes; your cells; your bones, your muscle [stet] are moved by a beautiful poem, a tragic episode. So that's the kind of yoga that I want: a yoga filtered through the body and through the imagination, the emotions, the spirit, and the soul. (2000, p. 77)

Over thirty years ago, Anzaldua started a conversation about yoga, writing and the imagination that I want to continue here within the frame of composition studies and contemplative writing pedagogies.

## A FEW NOTES ON STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

As indicated above, this project is invested in a faithfulness of being within a “worldly” pedagogy that concentrates on the non-duality of experience. To respect the united aspects of being, I have yoked mind, body and heart together. This structure unlocks the power of contemplative learning as applied to writing pedagogies: such pedagogies are transformative of the writer's whole being in an ethical and relational context which takes matter as the connective substance that facilitates a developed self- and other-awareness.

A true praxis, the theory and practice of yoga reciprocally inform one another. To highlight the strength of contemplative connectedness where the imaginative becoming of theory feeds and is fed by the lived practice of being, I have followed each of my three theoretical chapters on body, heart and mind with a corresponding “interchapter,” an equally-long section that reports on my efforts to practice contemplative writing pedagogy in the classroom and analyzes students' reactions to it. In doing so, these sections speak back to my chapters and showcase the pedagogical interventions and applications of the theory covered in them. The interchapters also loosely apply and yet purposefully confuse the chapter's divisions between body, heart and mind, reminding us that while writing may be rooted in the linear, our embodied identities are most certainly not. Overall, the chapter-interchapter structure of my project supports my combined focus on theory and practice, dialoguing lived research from qualitative case studies

with the theories from yoga, feminism and composition studies explored in my chapters in order to “speak back” to the theory. The interplay between chapters and interchapters testifies to my belief in the power of teaching practice to generatively complicate, shape and transform pedagogical theories—just as the lived experience of *being* a body in the world can inform our theories of embodiment.

Chapter One responds to the recent call for “different” theory that recognizes the writer’s commonsense materiality. I trace the steps feminists have already made to embrace the organic body, journeying from Tompkins and Hindman to Fleckenstein and others, and introduce contemplative writing as a viable theoretical and pedagogical approach. I offer a contemplative view of the writer as a “writing yogi” and address the need for this moniker by examining three main tenants of embodiment from yoga: that our flesh is intelligent because our consciousness is diffused throughout the body and not simply located in the brain; that embodiment is uniquely experienced and situated; even if it is also the case that because of our shared material nature, the yogi’s inner turn to the center is simultaneously an unfolding to the external. I dialogue these three core understandings with Haraway’s theories of embodiment. The dialogue allows me to enact the self-reflexivity that is key to contemplative pedagogical approaches and to insist that contemplative pedagogies can be strengthened by feminism’s overt attention to what happens when we view the body as an anchor and tool of our self- and other-awareness.

The first interchapter then shares details of how teachers might help students see themselves as writing yogis. I focus on how I primed my students to be receptive to an integrated yoga-writing practice within my application of feminist contemplative pedagogy. In this section, I detail a composite account from a string of recent first-year writing courses<sup>4</sup> that asked students to investigate the corporeality of the writing process by examining writing habits and rituals. The language of habits and rituals is one that provides students a feminist, embodied hermeneutic by which to re-evaluate their processes. This is language my students cultivated through a beginning assignment that required them to complete a multi-step, self-ethnographic study of their writing. As it gave students a fresh perspective on writing and engaged them in a metacognitive analysis of their process, this assignment unearthed questions of the body’s impact on writing and highlighted the transformative potential of yoga.

As with my other interchapters, while I draw from the theoretical framing provided by the chapter that precedes this section, I concentrate my efforts on the practical dynamics of the assignment itself and focus, in particular, on student writing. Allowing students to speak through their writing in this section reiterates the claim I make repeatedly about the respect afforded to individual

bodies in feminist contemplative pedagogy. And as with all student writing and reactions in this book, my accounts are drawn from a series of first-year writing classes and do not reflect a single class. Because I moved institutional homes in the process of researching and writing this book, the first-year classrooms represented in my composite course represent a wide sample of students. While my methods are primarily qualitative in nature, my sample includes students from both an East-coast private, liberal arts school and a Mid-Atlantic public liberal arts university. While my course content morphed some over the years I taught the first-year composition courses represented here, the general pedagogical approach remained consistent.

Having explored the cost of ignoring the writing body and addressed the benefits of situating the body at the center of our theories and classroom practices of writing, I use Chapter Two to highlight what feminist contemplative pedagogy expands our learning approaches to include and what effects this has on the writing yogi. I review the ways body criticism in composition studies has been stunted by the conflation of the body with the personal—even advocates of the body such as Hindman have fallen prey to this slippage. A contemplative understanding of presence, I argue there, is far less embedded in the tropes of the theoretical body, and forwards instead a lived, moment-to-moment understanding of materiality. Presence allows us to approach a writer's agency as singular, situated in a particular body, and located via her interaction with other material bodies—even if it is also social. Finally, I explore how situated knowledge calls for this kind of presence as situated knowers refuse to ignore embodied particularities in the quest of understanding themselves and the world.

Interchapter Two investigates the situated knowledge students develop in a contemplative writing classroom about the writing process itself. I use the recently released and popular Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing to explore how writers develop successful habits of mind by engaging in an integrated yoga-writing practice driven by mindfulness. Drawing on preceding chapters' discussions of mindfulness as an embodied process of metacognition that involves writers in an analysis of how they and others experience and practice embodiment, I illustrate how writing yogis approach learning and writing purposefully and responsibly. I focus on my students' execution of three of the Framework's eight habits: openness, persistence and metacognition. Examining student writing for these representative skills, I argue that contemplative pedagogies can foster the habits set forth in the Framework, goals we as a field have established as intentions for our instructional practice. I show how a contemplative approach to the writing process helps students develop the habits forwarded by the Framework and also uses means that develop them as habits of mind *and*

body, penetrating students' lives at a deeper level and giving them a foundation for approaching their educations contemplatively and their writing mindfully.

In the third chapter, I argue that because mindfulness practices like yoga teach writers to exchange mindless rumination on and judgment of experiences for open awareness, writers who engage in these practices learn to better monitor and understand their thoughts and feelings. Feminist theory within (Lynn Worsham, Laura Micciche) and outside our disciplinary bounds (Sarah Jaggard, Haraway, Sara Ahmed) creates an exigency for the visibility of emotion within contemplative writing pedagogy and anchors my investigation of how we might enable students to become passionate, embodied imaginers, constructively engaging their emotions instead of simply managing or dismissing them. Yoga teaches writers to mindfully approach feeling as an agentive force of the body; it also offers an understanding of feeling as a measure of one's limits and partial perspective. In this way, contemplative pedagogy unlocks situated knowledge's dual structure of situated knowing and what I call "situated feeling." I explore recent discussions of emotion in the field, such as Micciche's "rhetorics of emotion," and argue for situated feeling instead of these performative alternatives, which too often establish the body as an empty stage, not a material agent. Following yoga, I argue for a contemplative understanding of feeling as both *in* bodies and as relational and connective. Viewing emotion from a contemplative perspective frees us to teach emotional awareness as part of the writing process so that writers learn receptivity to their own and others' situated feelings. Far from promoting solipsism, attending to situated feeling attunes us to others and to the outside world of matter as it underscores the physicality of our knowing processes and the idea that understanding is itself material, not simply cerebral, in nature.

The third and final interchapter argues that writers can learn emotional flexibility through the yoga practice of breath control, or *pranayama*, which is understood to be a means of accessing and monitoring emotion. I analyze students' writing products and their reflective statements about their writing processes to show how *pranayama* can not only enrich their felt experience of the writing process and the physical ease and comfort with which they write but can also attune them to the materiality of knowledge making and the ways their emotions are implicated in this process. Students who use *pranayama* as a regular composing ritual begin to appreciate the body as a site of learning and begin to approach writing as a somatic experience. And students who self-consciously engage in these embodied writing practices develop, in turn, a greater metacognitive awareness of the writing process, reflected in their writings about writing. As students breathe their way into writing, they place new value on observing

the writing process as it unfolds, documenting and analyzing the felt experience of composing, which helps them become more generative and reflective writers. Particularly, students' increased mindfulness and flexibility results in developed focus and advanced coping mechanisms to deal with the negative emotions of the writing process. To illustrate how writers can increase their resilience and emotional flexibility by practicing yoga, I examine students' writings for the ways they connect breath and emotion and draw on studies of yoga to support their connections.

Finally, my Conclusion returns to the opening narrative of the prologue, creating less a tidy resolution and more a reminder of the circularity we must embrace as contemplative practitioners of writing and yoga. Reflecting on the practice of chanting at the end of yoga sessions, which I have completed many times as both a student of yoga and a teacher of writing, reminds me to leave my manuscript as I leave my practice of yoga: by acknowledging the ending as a beginning and as a point of union between bodies who have come together and leave each other with respect and compassion. It is on this note of connection and promise that I end.