

OUR BODY OF WORK

Embodied Administration and Teaching

EDITED BY
MELISSA NICOLAS AND ANNA SICARI

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1

INTRODUCTION

Institutional Embodiment and Our Body of Work

Melissa Nicolas and Anna Sicari

MARGARITAS AND RESEARCH

This book started, as so many wonderful collaborations do, after a long day of conferencing and a couple of margaritas at a noisy hotel bar. Anna was interviewing Melissa for a research project, but talk quickly turned to our lived experiences as female teachers, scholars, and writing program administrators.¹ Energized by our conversation (and perhaps the slight buzz from the tequila), we theorized from the everyday personal stories we were sharing. As we talked about Melissa's research and Anna's dissertation, we recognized not only our shared research interests but also the ways our bodies influenced our everyday work and informed the very conversation we were having. In increasingly animated dialogue, we acknowledged that our actual flesh-and-blood bodies, what Margaret Price (2011) calls "fleshy presences," impacted our work every bit as much as the institutional structures we worked in. Indeed, even the ebb and flow of our conversation was informed by our exhausted bodies running on caffeine, overwhelmed by the busyness of the conference.

At the time, we were surprised at the stories we were telling. While we knew the stories were true—yes, as a newly minted assistant professor, Melissa was mistaken for the administrative assistant, and, yes, as a graduate student and as an assistant professor, Anna has often been told that smiling and performing the role of "Miss Sunshine" will be important to her success—we came to realize we wanted to hear more stories like ours, stories like those told in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 2008) or in *WPA: Writing Program Administration's* 2016 "Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/ in Writing Program Administration and Writing Programs," because these stories take fleshy presences seriously.

A fleshy presence, as Price (2011) explains, is our material self: the blood and bones and organs and tissues that create the contours of our

bodies. We believe in the importance of having open exchanges about embodied experiences in the academy in order to have more complicated and nuanced conversations about intersectionality and identity and how racism, sexism, colonialism, classism, and ableism (among many other isms) stem from patriarchal systems of power. Yet, too often, we do not have these conversations for fear they are too personal, not academic or professional, because of the shame associated with having certain bodies and/or the knowledge that no one will listen.

We are listening. Through discussions about the embodied work of WPAs, this collection, relying heavily on narrative and intersectional standpoint theory, participates in and extends conversations in writing center, WPA, pedagogical, composition, and feminist research and extends calls, particularly from women scholars of color (see Craig 2016 and Kynard 2015, for example), to embrace intersecting areas of study and research in order to better interrogate the body as we strive to make the academic structures we work within more inclusive and accessible.

ON EMBODIMENT

When we began this project, we used the term *embodiment* to describe the emphasis we wanted to place on fleshy presences, but as chapters started coming in and we dove deeper into the literature, we came to understand *embodiment* is not easily defined. As Abby Knoblauch (2012) explains, the terms “embodied” and “embodiment” are employed by different authors—and sometimes the same author—to mean different things at the same time (50–52). Indeed, Knoblauch identifies three categories of embodiment: *embodied language*, *embodied knowledge*, and *embodied rhetoric*. *Embodied language* refers to the “terms, metaphors, and analogies that reference . . . the body itself,” while *embodied knowledge* is a “knowing through the body” and *embodied rhetoric* employs embodied knowledge, as well as “social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself” (52). The delineation of these types of embodiment is a useful heuristic.

For example, composition studies is ripe with embodied language: essays have “body” paragraphs and writers give “birth” to ideas. And as has been well documented, composition itself has been rhetorically embodied as feminine, relegating it to second-class status and gendering the construction of unjust labor practices (e.g., Enos 1996; Holbrook 1991; S. Miller 1991; Schell 1997; Strickland 2011). Using embodied rhetoric, scholars have emphasized the need for reading bodies ethically (Johnson et al. 2015). As well, scholars use embodied rhetoric

to describe feminist writing program administration (Barr-Ebest 1995; Goodburn and Leverenz 1998; Kazan and Gabor 2013; Miller 1996; Ratcliffe and Rickly 2010), and, increasingly, women's leadership (Cole and Hassel 2017; Detweiler, Laware, and Wojan 2017). Scholars have raised awareness of the rhetoric of whiteness in the field (Craig and Perryman-Clark 2011; García de Müeller and Ruiz 2017; Inoue 2016), as well as ableism (Nicolas 2017; Vidali 2015; Yergeau 2016) and heteronormativity (Alexander and Rhodes 2012; Denny 2013; Waite 2017).

In *Our Body*, we are most interested in Knoblauch's second category: knowing *through* the body. Knowing through the body is an epistemology of a fleshy presence, knowledge mediated through the very muscles, bones, and skin of our physical selves. This epistemology builds on Kristie Fleckenstein's (1999) case for the somatic mind. She writes, "The concept of the *somatic mind*—mind and body as permeable, intertextual territory that is continually made and remade—offers one means of embodying our discourse and our knowledge without totalizing either. *This 'view from somewhere' locates an individual within concrete spatio-temporal contexts*" (281; emphasis added). This "view from somewhere" acknowledges the body is required for meaning making. To argue otherwise—to believe the body is solely constructed through discourse—is to erase the actual physical body that exists in time and space because "embodiment is required for meaning and being" (284).

The view from somewhere is what Katherine Hayles (1993) suggests is the difference between bodies and embodiment. For Hayles, "The body points toward the normalized and abstract, whereas embodiment refers to the contextual and enacted" (156). The body is constructed and coded (inscribed) through discourse, but *embodiment* requires that discourse and materiality, time and space, individual experience, cultural assumptions, and so on be *incorporated* into and read *through* the body. For Hayles and Fleckenstein, embodiment refuses abstraction and assimilation because embodiment is necessarily about individuals' experiences in space, time, and place—what Price (2011) might call a "*kairotic*" space. Embodiment is a fleshy epistemology, a knowing through, of, and with the body.

Despite the growing scholarship on embodiment, one of the reasons conversations about fleshy presences are still happening in conference hotel bars instead of in the pages of our journals and books is that stories about our corporeal realities are still coded as too personal, too messy, or even just too anecdotal. Indeed, how many of us have been told we can't actually be experiencing what is happening to us because humans are postracism, -sexism, -ableism, -colonialism, and so on? Or because

our institutions have strict policies and penalties for such isms?² We believe at least some of this dissonance can be attributed to what we see as the conflation of *institutional bodies* with *institutional embodiment*.

Institutional bodies are *a priori*: without bodies, institutions, classrooms, and writing programs would cease to exist (see Porter et al. 2000, for example). Like other *a priori* knowledge, we don't think much about it. For example, we don't question, debate, or negotiate the mechanics of $2 + 2 = 4$; we just go about our day knowing it is so. It is the same with institutional bodies. We know a class needs students and a teacher, so we go about our days simply assuming those bodies—*anybodies*—are teaching and learning and administering. It is easy for institutional bodies to be everywhere and nowhere because their fleshy presence is assumed and beside the point; institutions need bodies but pay little attention to embodiment.

The aim of this collection, however, is to draw attention to *institutional embodiment*. Institutional embodiment is a kind of *a posteriori* knowledge gained through individuals' experience of and within the institution. Institutional embodiment is about the ways fleshy presences show up, even if they are not expected to (more on this in a moment). To be *institutionally embodied* means to be recognized as *someone* who takes up space and time and place; *someone* who has a fleshy presence. Indeed, this collection pushes back on the idea of institutional bodies, *anybodies*, as generic placeholders. Too often, *anybody*, as Rosemarie Garland-Tompson (1997) explains, is “male, white, or able-bodied[, and their] superiority appears natural, undisputed, and unremarked, seemingly eclipsed by female, black, or disabled difference” (20). She calls these unremarkable bodies “normates” (8). Normates are *institutional bodies* because they are everywhere and nowhere; they are idyllic, not flesh bound; they are pervasive in our discourse yet refuse to be pinned down. The normate is an Aristotelian version of perfection against which *nobody* will ever measure up. *Institutional embodiment*, however, calls attention to the ways *individual* bodies—fleshy presences—inhabit, interact with, and create institutions. Focusing on institutional embodiment allows *everybody* to become visible.

An interesting thing happens when we shift our view from *anybody* to *everybody*; we begin to notice which bodies stand out, which bodies are marked. Marked categories are the ones we call attention to (see Ahmed 2012; Morrison 1992). So even when we do consider individual fleshy presences, cis, male, white, hetero, abled men are still considered the “norm” or baseline against which all other fleshy presences are judged (Cedillo 2018). For example, the expectation of an unmarked body is implicit in

most common diversity statements at the end of job ads that encourage “women and minorities” to apply. If women, people of color, members of the LGBTQIA community, and persons with disabilities were expected to show up, there would be no need to encourage them to apply.

This fact is perhaps no more evident than in the case of graduate students and contingent faculty. Without these groups of *anybodies*, it is highly unlikely compulsory first-year composition would exist, at least in the form it takes today; there just wouldn’t be enough teacher bodies to put in front of the student bodies. As the authors in our collection make clear, while institutional bodies are essential, very often institutional embodiment is at best overlooked and at worst openly disregarded. For example, in “Graduate Student Bodies on the Periphery” (chapter 5 of this collection), Kelsie Walker, Morgan Gross, Paula Weinman, Hayat Bedaiwi, and Alyssa McGrath remark,

Whether it’s about their groceries, their mental health, their physical well-being or professional support, graduate students are expected to make do, or, failing that, to do without. It is assumed such conditions are, if not ideal, at least temporary. Yet such experiences, absorbed and unspoken, inscribe themselves upon the graduate student body: as anxiety, depression, hunger, exhaustion, fear, or even illness, all of which are exacerbated by financial instability and professional precarity. (97)

What Walker et al. are describing is not only the apparent disregard institutions have for the material conditions of their graduate students but also the tacit acceptance that the way things are is the way they are supposed to be: “if not ideal, at least temporary.” The role graduate students play is vital not only to our programs but also to the larger departmental and college structures they support. Nevertheless, the health and well-being of those graduate students—their fleshy presence—is less of a concern (if a concern at all) than the need for their institutional bodies to do the labor (see Strickland 2011).

Institutional disregard for (or at least ineffectiveness with) dealing with the health and safety of the bodies that live therein is not just a problem for graduate students. In chapter 9, Shannon Walters describes what it was like to be responsible for a writing program during the trauma of a mass-shooting scare on her campus. With no clear guidance coming from her university, she concluded that “the question [of how to respond] boiled down to a question of security, but it involved *everyone* making their own call, managing their own anxiety, and weighing their own personal thresholds of precariousness” (203; emphasis added). While the threat of a mass shooting is an extraordinary event, institutional disregard for individuals is apparent in the everyday as well.

Lauren Brentell (chapter 9.1), Nabila Hijazi (chapter 6.1), and Ryan Skinnell (chapter 8.2), for example, discuss the emotional and personal toll research takes on our bodyminds. In chapter 10, Rebecca Gerdes-McClain tells the heartbreaking story of Mina Shaugnessy's early death from cancer as a possible result of the tremendous burden she carried as a female scholar and writing program administrator. Likewise, we also read stories from Julie Prebel (chapter 10.1) and Maureen Johnson (chapter 10.2) about the impact their own cancer diagnoses have had on their academic life, and Denise Comer (chapter 9.2) shares her "Embodied CV" that juxtaposes her personal life and physical and mental health with her academic responsibilities.

By focusing on institutional embodiment, our authors' stories highlight ways a focus on fleshy presence complicates normative understandings of institutional bodies. In particular, as Sarah Ahmed (2012) explains, "Bodies stick out when they are out of place. Think of the expression, 'stick out like a sore thumb.' To stick out can mean to become a sore point. To inhabit whiteness as a non-white body can mean trying not to appear at all" (41). For example, when there is one brown person in a "sea of whiteness," the brown person stands out (41–43); in a sea of hearing people, a Deaf person stands out; in a sea of straightness, a queer person stands out; in a sea of mental health, mental illness stands out. Who stands out is like a game of "Which one of these is not like the others?" The goal of this children's game is to choose the picture that is slightly off, that doesn't look like the other ones. The pictures that are alike are the "normal" ones, and the one that has some variation is the "wrong" or "abnormal" one. Most often, the wrong or abnormal bodies are the ones that belong to people who do not occupy places of privilege. As Isaac Wang (chapter 2) explains, his body both stands out and is erased by the colonial practices that emphasize helping students write better Standard (white, European) English. Likewise, Jacquelyn Hoermann-Elliot (chapter 8.1) describes how her pregnancy marks her as an outsider, causing her to scrutinize her "own words because [she] know[s] being with child is synonymous to being seen as having only half a brain (or less) in the academy" (185).

According to Melanie Yergeau (2016), writing studies itself is predicated on the idea of real students not measuring up to idealized students. Hyberableness and standardization play such a central role in the field that to decenter the normate might threaten its very existence. Yergeau argues, "Without inaccessibility, we would not be rigorous. Without inaccessibility, we would not have placement. Without inaccessibility, we would not have assessment. Without inaccessibility, we would

not have literacy. Without inaccessibility, would we even know ourselves as a discipline?” (158–59). In other words, the standard for traditional ENG 101 is based on institutional bodies and normative educational experiences. When students who do not have these bodies and these experiences present themselves to the academy, the institution tries to erase their embodiment by measuring them against a narrow standard, with the goal of making them *unremarkable institutional bodies*.

But, as disability and queer theorists remind us, there really are no ideal bodies (see, among others, Denny 2013; Dolmage 2014; Price 2011; Vidali 2016). Christina Cedillo (2018) writes, “Individuals whose bodies are perceived as non-normative are framed as unreliable rhetors who cannot speak to more than a thin sliver of experience, even though every individual’s embodied identities determine their unique experiences and navigation of academic spaces. All bodies are not identical; neither are their needs, expressions of movement, or preferred modes of reception.”

In this collection, Triauna Carey (chapter 6) discusses how the micro-aggressions she has experienced as a Black graduate student and TA frame her as an unreliable narrator, causing her to doubt herself and her place in the academy while also making her angry with the white powers that be. Likewise, Stacey Waite (chapter 4) and Alex Gatten (chapter 4.1) illustrate how their queerness complicates their institutional identities and often causes them to question their institutional place.

Our Body captures some of the intricacies and nuances of embodiment. Whether implicitly or explicitly, our authors take a feminist standpoint, believing that who we are in relation to our research matters and that all attempts to know are socially situated (Harding 1986). Most of our authors also engage with intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993; also Craig 2016; Kynard 2015) as they draw on multiple locations and identifications of their bodies (social, cultural, racial, economic, institutional, and so on). In these ways, our authors are participating in writing and feminist studies’ embrace of storytelling as a valid way of creating meaning. For example, *Living Rhetoric and Composition: Stories of the Discipline* (Roen, Brown, and Enos 1999) contains nineteen stories from well-known scholars describing how they came to be teachers and scholars of writing. *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 2008) and *How Stories Teach Us: Composition, Life Writing, and Blended Scholarship* (Robillard and Combs 2019) are just two of many additional examples of how personal story is valued in our field. To date, however, there has been little attention paid to interrogating what it means to inhabit the world of writing studies from the perspective of institutional embodiment.

Recent work done by scholars Shereen Inayatulla and Heather Robinson (2019) showcases the need for this kind of fleshy epistemology. Inayatulla and Robinson draw from their own autoethnographies as they seek to render visible the “underrepresented statuses of the communities to which [they] belong and the labor [they] undertake in [their] administrative roles, both of which are rendered invisible because of the ways in which [their] intersectional identities are erased, conflated, demeaned, or hierarchically positioned” (4). Their “auto-theory of administrative practice” (6) could not exist without their reflections on institutional embodiment, and they, too, discuss the need for intersectional feminist research because so much WPA work has been centered around white feminism, echoing similar calls from WPA scholars invested in antiracist work such as Genevieve García de Müller and Iris Ruiz (2017), Collin Craig and Staci Perryman-Clark (2011), and Carmen Kynard (2015).

Our authors carefully situate their work from their own standpoints and through various critical lenses, such as critical race, queer, feminist, decolonial, and disability theory. As Vinitha Joyappa and Donna Martin (1996) write, “Feminist scholarship draws upon the wisdom of different disciplines, while simultaneously offering a critique of knowledge and methods on patriarchal understandings” (7). The various theories incorporated by our authors highlight their different bodily experiences and truly embrace the idea of “learning WITH (emphasis added) difference” (Garcia 2017) while also creating a necessary fleshy epistemology that is, at yet, underdeveloped in the field.

OUR OWN FLESHY PRESENCE

As we were working on this book, we (Anna and Melissa) kept having moments when our own bodies were getting in the way. Of course, viewing our bodies as “getting in the way” of our work is the polar opposite of the argument we are making with this collection. We bring this contradiction to readers’ attention to highlight just how commonplace it is to disregard our own embodied experiences and to acknowledge how truly difficult the work we are asking readers to do is in our day-to-day reality. We got sick; we were hospitalized; we had stress-induced work stoppages and slowdowns; we dealt with hostile work environments, job searches, moves, and a host of other professional and personal life issues that demanded things from us physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. We hit points at which we decided putting this collection out was just more than we could handle. And yet. And yet we couldn’t escape

the fact that the reasons we wanted to quit were exactly the kinds of issues we wanted our book to discuss. We wanted a book that addressed, not elided, the realities of having a fleshy presence expected to perform in institutionalized ways. More important, we wanted a book that produced knowledge from the body, *especially* when the body got in the way.

When we were sipping margaritas, we imagined a rather small but important audience for this collection: women TAs, gWPAs, and new WPAs (both staff and faculty). Our foggy goal was to create a primer of cautionary tales and sage advice for our comrades who were learning to navigate life as women in the academy. What we did not want to do, however, was create a collection of “overcoming” narratives (Dolmage 2014), such as those in *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 2008). In the introduction to their book, Michelle Ballif, Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford attest that their goal is to “demonstrate how women have succeeded,” to share stories of successful women in order for them to “serve as models for other women academics in a sea of gender and disciplinary bias and to have a life, as well” (3). We feel as though *Women’s Ways of Making It*, in its attempt to be inspirational, does not do enough to complicate the realities of institutional embodiment. As just one example, only two of the nine “heroic” women covered are women of color. All appear to be cis het, and none identify as women with disabilities.

We were hoping to collect and share the stories we would have liked to read when we were new to the field, mostly as a way of creating solidarity: “This did not just happen to me”; “This is a larger problem than that person, that department, that university.” And after our initial CFP went out, we did indeed receive many such compelling stories. But as we took our first stabs at theorizing what we had, two overlapping truths emerged.

First, the essays we originally received did indeed speak to the audiences we imagined. Graduate students and new WPAs would certainly benefit from engaging those chapters as part of their preparation and introduction to the field. The second truth, however, was that our collection was milky white, straight, and abled; there were just two voices in our first round of submissions that belonged to people who did not resemble us: cis, white women with tenure-track jobs.³ After we processed our role in perpetuating white, and other, privilege(s), we made a concerted effort to dismantle that privilege by reaching out to authors who did work on embodiment from a multitude of intersectional perspectives. These outreach efforts resulted in the wider array of voices represented herein.

While we have tried to work through our implicit biases, we are all too aware that as the coeditors we were the decision makers regarding what voices have been given authority in this book; we are aware of our cis het whiteness, our tenure track-ness, and the privileges these bring, and we are still very much “in process” in terms of understanding how to challenge ourselves to do better. We have not made space for *everybody*. During the selection of essays for this collection, we were critically self-reflexive about what voices—what bodies—we were drawn to, what stories resonated with us, and then we tried to actively resist solely relying on what felt comfortable in order to include a kind of diversity we hadn’t seen in print before. We invite readers to have this conversation with us: Whom were we not able to see? Whom did we not hear?

Second, opening our thinking about what “counted” as an embodied perspective was the drive for us to think more broadly about who our audience would be. While the essays in this collection speak mostly about WPA work, the topics they address are of interest to anyone concerned with intersectional identities and how those identities influence our positionality in the institution. In this latter sense, this collection can play an important role in graduate composition courses more broadly and can also aid more experienced teachers and WPAs with understanding the complexity of twenty-first-century intersectionality.

OVERVIEW

The chapters in this book are based on real people’s lives; therefore, some of this work might resonate with you in uncomfortable ways as it takes up issues of harassment, exploitation, abuse, mental illness, death, and pain. We want you to know about this possible discomfort not to dissuade you from reading deeply, but as Ahmed (2015) reminds us, “so often th[e]se conversations do not happen because the difficulties people wish to talk about end up being re-enacted within discussion spaces, which is how they are not talked about.” Instead of turning away from or discouraging these discussions, we and our authors gently invite you to embrace these issues in order to render the “Body, Visible” (Daniel and Lewis, chapter 7) and to create a much-needed space in the field to talk about the body.

As part of our commitment to creating space for many bodies, we invited two kinds of submissions: short, personal narratives and what most would consider academic essays. What you hold in your hands—or see on your screen, or listen to on your audio device—is organized around nine themes we saw emerging in the work. For each thematic

cluster, we paired a more traditional essay with two or three shorter pieces in an effort to showcase multiple standpoints on similar topics. While the groupings represent the way we (Anna and Melissa) make sense of the work herein, we encourage you to work through the book in whatever ways makes sense to you. And, truth be told, our thematic organization belies the fact that every chapter speaks to multiple other chapters; when embodiment is the topic under discussion, there are no neat, linear, or clearly demarcated boundaries around our stories. From thinking about what embodiment looks like for students, particularly marginalized students, to understanding how their own bodies do not fit institutional expectations, the authors in *Our Body* respond to Hélène Cixous's (1975) call to "write the body."

A quick glance at the themes in this book—discomfort and pain, surveillance, liminal spaces, resilience (ah! hope!), emotional pain, the culture of whiteness, relationships, trauma and pain, cancer and death—suggests a heavy read. And, as we mention above, there are messy and painful moments in these chapters, just as embodied life is sometimes messy and painful. However, we also see this work as cautiously hopeful by participating in Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's (2012) call for transformative research. The bodily experiences our authors commit to print create an archive of embodied knowledge beyond the abstract because this knowledge stems from their material realities. Many of the scholars in this book explore the ways that, even when their bodies do not fit institutional expectations (usually unspoken, often implicit), they have found strategies of resistance and tactics to navigate the academy.

The need to "move forward," however, is something this collection also critiques, as some authors balk at the idea of making the best out of a bad situation, instead discussing the problematics with progress narratives and linear and lateral moving. Progress does not have to mean, should not mean, forgetting, ignoring, or re-rendering the body invisible. We find these conversations remarkably relevant as the planet is rethinking "regular" life due to COVID-19 and learning how to revise the future so our bodies are better listened to. We find hope in the current embodied research many of the graduate students in this collection are taking up, as their work highlights how personal research can be and how important embodied research is for enacting any type of institutional change. We respect and admire how willing they are to write and study their own painful, difficult, and often traumatic experiences because institutionalized ways of being can be excruciatingly hard to notice, much less change. Individually and collectively, the authors in this collection rise to that challenge.

Theme 1: Discomfort and Pain

Isaac Wang argues for creating opportunities for decolonial alliances by locating the body through listening for whiteness because of the ways bodies of color do not fit the white racial habitus in the academy. This critical listening attunes the body (*everybody*) to the negotiations and compromises WCDs and WPAs of color might need to make in order to get to where they need to be through code switching and passing. Wang writes about the discomfort of these experiences and what dwelling in these moments can look like for “incremental changes that allow the next generation of students and scholars of color more freedom to embody difference” (41). Rebecca Rodriguez Carey’s “An Embodied Life: My Postpartum Writing Story” takes an entirely different approach to embodied discomfort, as Carey explores embodied writing while being pregnant and a mother, finishing her dissertation, and entering a new job. Both chapters encouraged us to rethink moments of discomfort, and pain, as potential sites of strength.

Theme 2: Surveillance

Complicating and possibly even challenging Wang’s concept of embodied listening for whiteness and his use of passing, Stacey Waite’s chapter discusses the importance of her visibly queer body, a body that sticks out in normate spaces. In the chapter “What on Earth Am I Even Doing Here? Notes from an Impossibly Queer Academic,” Waite questions whether or not it is possible to truly queer a writing program, and she discusses the political surveillance her English department has been under for their commitment to social justice, as well as the ways she has been policed and surveilled. For Waite, institutional embodiment challenges her to question how she can reconcile the demand for an institutional body (a WPA) and her embodiment as a queer academic. She powerfully ends this chapter focusing again on her presence: “My body, my presence won’t change everything, but it will not be moved out of view—no matter how many times the normative pull of institutional surveillance swallows me whole” (57). Taking on Waite’s theory of queer pedagogy, Alex Gatten discusses the disruptions of their transitioning body and the new curriculum they helped develop for their writing program in the chapter “Nonlinear Transformations: Queer Bodies in Curriculum Redesign.” Gatten, too, poses that the body can never be separated from the work. This grouping ends with Anna Rita Napoleone’s “Embodying Structures and Feelings,” a chapter that explores the laboring body of

a working-class mother; she writes, “The personal and the professional mesh together. There seem to be no boundaries” (68).

Theme 3: Liminal Spaces

Trixie Smith, along with Wonderful Faison, Laura Gonzalez, Elizabeth Keller, and Scotty Seacrist, return to the writing center and tell a multivocal story of institutional embodiment from the perspective of a writing center director (Smith) and the graduate students (Faison, Gonzalez, Keller, and Seacrist) working with her. Smith complicates a linear narrative by telling her story in multiple scenes, all of which raise important questions for her about her embodied work as an administrator and a lesbian woman. Wonderful Faison questions how her writing center can make her feel safe as a lesbian woman yet, at the same time, unsafe and uncomfortable as a Black woman (echoing both Wang’s and Waite’s discussions). Gonzalez asks why multilingual students are viewed from a deficit model when, by the logic of multilingualism, they possess sophisticated language skills. Keller tells of a tutorial wherein she and a student from the Middle East spent a significant amount of time discussing how bodies smell because the Middle Eastern student received the message that Middle Eastern bodies smell “different” than American bodies. (Keller’s discussion of the “otherness” of bodies that are considered “foreign” is a theme that will emerge again in chapter 5.) Seacrist rounds out the chapter by detailing the ways his voice is perceived as “effeminate, lispy, faggoty” (78). His voice quite literally says things about his sexuality that he cannot control.

As WPAs who work closely with the graduate students in our program, we were encouraged to see work from scholars such as Trixie Smith bringing in the voices of their graduate students, as well as important work from so many graduate students who responded to our call. Graduate students live in liminal academic spaces; their bodies are constantly under surveillance from their own students, from their professors, from their mentors, and from the very discipline they are trying to join (also see Nicolas 2008). Nonnormative graduate student bodies must negotiate additional layers of complexity in trying to find a place in the institution, and, as seen in other chapters, graduate students are not any more immune to nonacademic stressors than anyone else. In “As Time Moves Forward,” for example, Dena Arendall describes the traumatic experience of losing her father while working on her dissertation. In the following chapter, Jasmine Lee discusses the exhaustion of life during her first year of a tenure-track position and the embodied

difficulties of this transition in “An Academic Career Takes Flight, or the First Year on the Tenure Track, as Seen from Above.” We see these stories as powerful when read together because they all address the liminal spaces of finding a place in a center, program, or an institution, particularly for transitory bodies.

Theme 4: Resilience

In chapter 5, “Graduate Student Bodies on the Periphery,” Kelsie Walker, Morgan Gross, Paula Weinman, Hayat Bedaiwi, and Alyssa McGrath share their experience of institutional embodiment through overlapping themes of “foreign bodies,” institutional passing, and the needs of bodies not being met institutionally, echoing work done by contributing authors Wang, Waite, Smith et al., and R. Carey. This chapter also explores the exploitation of contingent institutional bodies and suggests ways senior WPAs and faculty mentors can learn from them in order to create more inclusive spaces for the next generation of graduate students. Bedaiwi describes her (mostly) white students’ reactions to her as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, while McGrath identifies the precarious position she was in as a graduate student who was pregnant at a university that did not have pregnancy leave for graduate students. Walker and Gross discuss the financial hardships and exigencies facing so many graduate students who receive no funding or not enough funding to meet basic living expenses. Weinman concludes the chapter by discussing her “model-minority” status as an East Asian woman. The authors of this chapter view their embodied narratives as necessary resources for institutional reform and hope administrators take note of these stories in order to better understand where financial support and time might be most effective, as graduate students are “the next generation of institutional leaders” (108).

Concerns about finding the time and energy to write while balancing multiple responsibilities also resonate in the narratives in this grouping. Elitza Kotzeva writes about finding time to write before more domestic duties of doing laundry and walking the dog, exploring her material exigencies and noting how the demands of her position as a tenure-track faculty member are different from her graduate students. In “Writing the Body,” Janel Atlas describes her pregnancy loss and how this experience became the genesis of her dissertation.

This cluster highlights several different positionalities of resilience while navigating institutional and personal embodied experiences.

Theme 5: Emotional Pain

Picking up Bedaiwi's discussion in chapter 5, Triauna Carey explores the microaggressions she has experienced as a Black graduate student and TA, which cause her to doubt herself and her place in the academy while also making her angry with the white powers that be. In "‘Never Make Yourself Small to Make Them Feel Big’: A Black Graduate Student's Struggle to Take Up Space and Navigate the Rhetoric of Microaggressions in a Writing Program," Carey calls on WPAs to take a critical look at the ways microaggressions occur in their programs and, even more poignantly, calls on WPAs to be self-reflective about the ways they themselves may participate in committing microaggressions and/or promoting a programmatic culture that allows microaggressions to pass unchallenged. Similar to Waite's earlier plea and Wang's hope for institutional change, Carey urges: "As scholars, educators, and researchers of color, we must use our writing, classrooms, and research to share our experiences . . . as graduate students embodying these experiences, we must take up space, especially in spaces that were not originally intended for us" (128). While Carey highlights the emotional labor of dealing with microaggressions on a daily basis and the impact of not being the person expected to "show up," she emphasizes that the impact of people of color taking up unmarked spaces in the academy is powerful, much like Waite's claim that the mere presence of her body makes a difference.

While Carey discusses her emotional labor as a marginalized graduate student, Nabila Hijazi writes on her emotional labor as a researcher as she interviews Syrian women refugees about their experiences with language programs. Hijazi, a Syrian Muslim woman, shares her own experiences back home (in Syria) with these women as they talk, and their stories intersect and collide. We see Hijazi's embodied research as powerful and hopeful, as we believe much insight will be gained into ways we can better our writing and literacy instruction for all bodies. We end this grouping with Jennie Young's essay, "Out of Hand," which describes how emotional pain manifests physically. Emotional experiences are, in complicated and different ways, embodied experiences, and these chapters offer readers an opportunity to dwell on their own emotional and embodied institutional stories.

Theme 6: Culture of Whiteness

Chapter 7, "Bodies, Visible," stays with the idea of institutionalized marginalization by challenging the white racial habitus (Inoue 2016) of

first-year writing programs. In this chapter, Josh Daniel and Lynn Lewis argue that pervasive neoliberalism is only concerned with institutional bodies, and they take up the need for graduate students to be institutionally embodied through mentoring programs and writing program outcomes. Daniel and Lewis's chapter illustrates how T. Carey's call (in chapter 6) can be taken up through intentional programmatic changes. Similar to many of our authors, Daniel and Lewis end on a note of hope, as they believe the embodied positions they occupy as administrators allow for opportunities to make marginalized bodies, both the first-year students they serve and their graduate instructors, more visible in the program through collaboration and engagement that challenges a pervasive neoliberalism. We also see a programmatic culture of whiteness problematized in both Mary Lourdes Silva's "Dancing with Our Fears: A Writing Professor's Tango" (ch. 7.1) and Jasmine Kar Tang's "Do Not Disturb—Breastfeeding in Progress: Notes from a Lactating WPA" (ch. 7.2). Silva points out the ways students are often complicit in racist assessments as she describes the consistent negative evaluations she receives and the ways she has had to revise her curriculum to read "more white." Tang discusses the intersectional components of her identity as a WPA, new mother, and woman of color and the ways she has had to navigate space as a WPA.

Theme 7: Relationships

Programmatic revision, like that discussed in chapter 7 by Daniel and Lewis, is the subject of Michael Farris's "The Circulation of Embodied Affects in a Revision of a First-Year Writing Program." In this chapter, Farris offers a brief critique of the "distributed-grading" FYW program at Texas Tech University that, he argues, erases how writing and the teaching of writing are institutionally embodied acts. Through sharing his own administrative philosophy, informed by queer and feminist thinking, Farris argues that writing and the teaching of writing are ontological endeavors, warranting attention to the bodies that make up our programs. Farris then shares revisions he made to the program and the ways he makes institutional embodiment central to the work of rhetoric and composition at TTU. Through sharing his own affective ways of being, Farris explores how teaching "happens through relationships, through bodies being thrown together in new . . . ways that can elicit new opportunities for engagement with writing and with each other, for potentially new ways of being in the world and being with each other" (179).

Jacquelyn Hoermann-Elliott also addresses how teaching happens through relationships in “More Bodies Than Heads: Handling Male Faculty as an Expectant Administrator.” In this chapter, she talks about the complicated ways her exposed vulnerability as a pregnant WPA has helped build relationships with graduate students while exposing gender biases male faculty still have against women in supervisory positions. In the closing chapter of this cluster of essays, “About A Lucky Man Who Made the Grade,” Ryan Skinnell writes about the relationships and people he ignored—including his relationship with his own physical body—as he was writing and revising his monograph, identifying the isolation and lack of self-care that can come with academic deadlines and pressure. This group of essays offers perspectives on embodied relationships we form as academics and WPAs and can help us, as readers, learn “new ways of being . . . with each other.”

Theme 8: Trauma

Chapter 9, “A Day in the Life: Administering from a Position of Privileged Precarization in an Age of Mass Shootings,” highlights what is expected of the institutional body of a WPA and then explains why the everyday labor required of WPAs is unrealistic when we take into account the institutional embodiment of those doing the work. Utilizing a disability studies perspective of precarity, Shannon Walters discusses her position of “privileged precarization” as a tenured woman WPA and mother. Complicating the “mundane precarity” of pregnancy, Walters situates her second pregnancy while she was a WPA within the context of the threat of a mass shooting on her campus. By situating the everyday and local in a larger national conversation on gun violence, Walters shows how vulnerable we all are as bodies inhabiting different spaces and argues that we must learn from precarity. Walters’s call is especially poignant now, in the face of a global pandemic in which *all*bodies live with/in precarity.

Likewise, Lauren Brentnell, in her chapter “When Discomfort Becomes Panic: Doing Research in Trauma as a Survivor,” discusses her need to privilege her own mental and physical health over a research-intensive academic position as she realized her research on trauma was retraumatizing her, ultimately causing her to position herself on the job market for teaching positions instead of research ones. Denise Comer’s “Embodied CV (Abridged),” like Brentnell’s chapter, describes how trauma and pain impact our research and cleverly illustrates what our CVs cannot and do not say about who we are as embodied beings.

These chapters highlight what we can learn from trauma and research, particularly if we pay attention to the embodied experiences associated with such work.

Theme 9: Cancer and Death

On the theme of precarious bodies and WPA work, Rebecca Gerdes-McClain offers a unique take on institutional embodiment by examining the work of Mina Shaughnessy. In “WPA and Embodied Labor: Mina Shaughnessy, (Inter)Personal Labor, and an Ethics of Care,” Gerdes-McClain does not retell the common narrative of Shaughnessy’s articulation of what would become basic writing. Rather, Gerdes-McClain argues that Shaughnessy’s “embodied labor experiences suggest martyrdom in the form of meeting . . . unrealistic labor demands” (220). In this chapter, we are presented with a case study in institutional embodiment that demythologizes one of our heroines. The importance of this case study is that it allows us to see Shaughnessy as an embodied WPA struggling to meet the unfair and unrealistic expectations placed on institutional bodies. Gerdes-McClain offers an intervention into the normalizing practices of overwork through Virginia Held’s ethics of care. While the story she tells is disheartening, it is also an apt cautionary tale, as it brings to the fore the harsh realities of the often-conflicting demands between what our institutional bodies are supposed to do and what our embodied selves can actually perform, ideas that resonate throughout this collection.

Julie Prebel’s “Somatophobia and Subjectivity: Or, What Cancer Taught Me about Writing and Teaching Writing” is a poignant retelling of Shaughnessy’s story through a different person’s body. Prebel writes about being diagnosed with cancer and her subsequent treatments while she was working. While she tried to be an *anybody* in her tenure file, she realized she could not remove her embodiment from the process because there were delays in her scholarly production. Like Comer (ch. 9.2), Prebel needed her own version of an embodied CV in order to give an accurate and truthful accounting of her embodied life on the tenure track.

Similarly, Maureen Johnson discusses her diagnosis of triple-negative breast cancer three weeks before her PhD graduation ceremony and the ways her cancer diagnosis and treatment removed her from her research on body positivity, just as Brentnell (ch. 9.1) needed to move away from trauma research.

This thematic cluster ends with chapters that explore death. Michelle LaFrance explores the death of a friend and student, and Elizabeth

Boquet writes about the death of her mother. Both of these narratives paint a loving, caring picture of the ways fleshy presences come into and out of our lives, forever changing the ways we experience our own embodiment.

As we state earlier in this introduction, without bodies, institutions would cease to exist. And yet, institutional embodiment, that is, the way real people take up the work of institutions, is a topic in much need of theorizing: let's look, really look, at the marked bodies that show up to do the work and the knowledge gained through our bodily experiences and interactions with/in the institution. We believe all the authors in this collection highlight the complexities of writing and thinking with bodies, and the possibilities of embodied writing and research make us hopeful institutional change is possible.

CONCLUSION

During a particularly stressful week when we were discussing this collection, Melissa said perhaps what we really need to do for institutional change is to just blow things up. Sadly, we are all working in a time in which explosions both actual and metaphorical are happening daily.⁴ Violence is real and rampant. People are being killed or incarcerated, and children are being put in cages by a government only concerned with white (usually cis/het) male bodies. Words are being used to incite, anger, bait, and threaten on a national and international level. Institutional, colonial, and patriarchal attachments to white, able-bodied straight men help perpetuate these abhorrent conditions. And our institution—the academy—is not immune. As the authors in this collection so skillfully describe, recognition of institutional embodiment is still very much an ideal, necessitating the need for institutional passing. But institutional passing is not sustainable.

If we had any doubts about the need for this collection, they have been erased as we revise this introduction under mandatory stay-at-home orders brought on by COVID-19 while protests against anti-Black racism, police brutality, and systemic racism are occurring across the nation in response to the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Sean Reed, and David McAtee, among countless other institutionally sanctioned murders of Black people at the hands of the police. In a way too poignant and painful, a virus that can infect *all* bodies has brought institutions, both small and large, to a standstill because the flesh-and-blood people who make up these institutions are in real physical, psychic, spiritual, and emotional crises; at the

same critical time, it is the people, the bodies, that suffer the most from this virus, the Brown and Black bodies, that are also the ones fighting another pandemic of police violence and are calling on our institutions to respond and take action.

Due to these intersectional crises, our institutions have been forced to think about embodiment in ways heretofore unimagined or actively resisted. For example, many of the things people with disabilities have been asking of universities for decades, such as flexible schedules, work-from-home options, multiple content-delivery formats, assessment choices, and the like—things we have been told were impossible just a few months ago—have suddenly become not only possible but necessary. A cynical person might say that only when there is nothing to shield privileged bodies from harm (i.e., no vaccine), no institutional walls to protect them from infection, no normal, only then do institutions take notice and take action. Somewhat similarly, institutions and the writing programs housed within them are heeding long unanswered calls by scholars of color (see *College Composition and Communication* 2020, for example) to look at our own mission statements, practices, and policies to better understand how exclusionary the academy is to the bodies of those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colors (BIPOC). Only after the horror of George Floyd's brutal murder made national headlines did the same calls for antiracist resources, pedagogies, and assessments seem to get—at least in these very early moments of the current antiracist/#BlackLivesMatter moment (late spring 2020)—white people's attention. A cynical person might say it takes protesting during a pandemic for institutions to take notice and take action. A cynical person might even say this response, too, will slowly fade as we carry on in a "back-to-business" fashion once the media and white people lose interest in combating structural racism. The cynics are not wrong, and we find much can be gained from cynicism.

But we consciously choose not to be cynical.⁵ Like our authors, we want to hope. We want to believe these pandemics will open conversations about fleshy presences, about institutional bodies and institutional embodiment. We hope our current crises change institutional DNA to the point at which a collection like this one is redundant. We want to believe institutions can, in fact, change (see Porter et al. 2000) and be better spaces for BIPOC's bodies, disabled bodies, queer bodies, women's bodies, *all*bodies. The only way such change can happen is if we listen to these bodies and learn from fleshy presences.

We hope the words in this book, the words grown from a fleshy epistemology, challenge readers to do better. Some readers may be angered

by some of the essays or feel drained, tired, and exhausted; some readers may find chapters that resonate with their own experiences. No matter the reaction, we believe the field must rethink and rework our practices if we wish to create a more ethical discipline. Like Stacey Alaimo (2008), we agree that “ethical practices do not seek to extend themselves over and above material realities, but instead emerge from them, taking into account multiple material consequences” (238). Our authors explore what it means to take into account the multiple material consequences of bodies that remain on the margins in order to transform our practices and make our work more ethical and therefore more livable. To say it another way, we hope the questions this book invites become part of our body of work.

NOTES

1. We use the terms *writing programs* and *writing program administrators (WPAs)* to denote a wide range of writing programs from first-year composition to writing centers to writing-across-the-curriculum programs, as well as other writing-based programs.
2. For a compelling account of how nonwhite bodies are surveilled, discounted, disregarded, insulted, and otherwise traumatized in the academy, see #BlackintheIvory on Twitter (Davis and Woods 2020).
3. It is important to pause here and ask, What about our original call was not inviting, inclusive, or trustworthy? In what ways did our call signal, to the very authors we wanted to hear from, that this collection might not be a place where their work was appreciated? While we can never know for sure—so much time has passed it is doubtful people will remember the original call—one possibility is that the voices we wanted to hear from were wary about sharing their experiences because all too often those voices are relegated to the margins, tokenized, or ignored completely. As editors, we should have done more in the call to acknowledge this warranted w(e)ariness and commit to respecting the work that would be shared with us. Our future CFPs will reflect this realization.
4. During the process of putting this collection together (about three years), there have been more than two dozen mass shootings. During the week this footnote was written, there were two mass shootings: one in El Paso, Texas, and the other in Dayton, Ohio. A third active shooter in Virginia was stopped before he could hurt anyone and bring the total for the *week* to three events.
5. Is the freedom to make a choice about whether or not to be cynical part of our (Anna and Melissa’s) white privilege?

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