

# The Woven Body: Embodying Text in Performance Art and the Writing Center

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**Abstract:** Drawing on Lindsey Allgood's scripts, journal entries, and images of a specific participatory performance piece she executed, we argue for seeing performance art as a form of embodied text. Such an assertion is particularly pertinent for postsecondary writing center praxis as it allows for the mindful intersections of the body and writing during the tutoring process, intersections harder to realize without a background in performance practices that rely on the body as primary tool of meaning making.

*Text: "participial stem of Latin texere to weave."  
--Etymology of Text, Oxford English Dictionary, n.1*



stART Norman (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NynqREh-VTM>)

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### ***The Opening Scene: Performance Art and a Lumberyard***

*In a hundred-year-old abandoned lumberyard, discarded wood beams and metal strips and poles rest in piles, semi-damp from a recent rain. Earthy smells of dirt and dust waft from scattered patches of overgrown grass. One can imagine these rotting materials' previous lives: a bench that heard secrets and recipes; the local drugstore countertop that felt coins still warm from a jean pocket roll across its surface; a family's well-worn kitchen table, proud of the child's etchings on one of its legs.*

*Off to the corner, in what could once have been a workshop or storage shed, wooden beams barely hang on to the framework, picked at by birds and mice. A few cats pounce about beneath the floorboards.*

*The words "Keep Door Closed" have been painted on the rusty, padlocked, corrugated metal door. It hasn't been opened for years. Earlier in the day, children knocked on the flimsy door, and giggled as the door vibrated, letting out a playful wobbly echo. Some people held their ears to the door, as if something or someone would speak to them from the other side. Some people peeked through the tiny cracks between the wall's wooden slats. Some just stood, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells, turning circles to soak in the whole space and imagining its story.*

*Dozens of bright pink, blue, and green pieces of paper flutter in the light breeze, stuck to the corrugated door with magnets. A pen dangles from a nail, passed around from person to person. On each paper, these people—community members—have written what they imagine exists or existed behind the door in the past, present, and future.*

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Our above introductory YouTube video and narrative capture the embodied experience of a May 2014 participatory performance titled *Presence: A Performative Exploration of Active Existence in a Place That Will Soon Not Exist* through the eyes of Lindsey Allgood, co-author of this essay and an artist, writer, teacher, and former tutor in the Writing Center at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Her interest in writing, art, and teaching also led her to obtain a Fine Arts Writing Fellowship, functioning as the liaison between the OU Writing Center and the Fine Art Department. Lindsey's performance was part of *stART Norman* supported by the Norman (Oklahoma) Arts Council. All performances were held in a hundred-year-old lumberyard slated for demolition. The city granted artists permission to reclaim the space temporarily to cultivate communal, cultural, and creative "placemaking" before demolition. Installations explored the idea of thresholds, which bring to mind new beginnings and places of exchange. During *stART*, Lindsey offered a participatory performance exploring thresholds. Lindsey gave participants a map leading to locations in the yard. At each location, participants physically engaged with the space through writing and other activities. By engaging with artifacts and immersing themselves in the physical experience of the lumberyard, Lindsey and her participants composed a text. We argue this text was their embodied performance. And this text, as our epigraph reminds us, was woven through the sensorial, embodied experience of performance.

In this essay, we detail Lindsey's participatory performance at *stART Norman*. Performance art, often called live art, is a time-based art form focusing on the body as medium, specifically the body as a destination and vessel through which, on which, and where art can occur. Performance art is rooted in the early twentieth-century Futurist and Dada movements, and it experienced a radically political reemergence in the 60s (Goldberg, 2011). Today, performers explore the blurred, liminal nature between art and life: where does the creative process end and everyday action begin? In *The Artist's Body*, Warr (2012) explores how early twentieth-century art drew inspiration from various disciplines: psychology, anthropology, and medicine, to name a few. The result of this "cross-fertilization of ideas and ideologies" (Warr, 2012, p. 11), as well as the physical atrocities of World War I, led to an interest in the body as a direct medium of expression. More specifically, Warr

examines performance art through, for example, painting bodies (such as [Mendieta's \*Body Tracks\*](#) [1982]) and extended and prosthetic bodies (such as [Stelarc's \*The Third Hand\*](#) [1980] and [Horn's \*Arm Extension\*](#) [1968]). Performances such as these question where the performer's body ends and the audience or spaces around the performer begin.

Today, performance art often focuses on ephemerality, technology, and site-specificity through scripted or spontaneous, collaborative, and improvised performances. Yet performance artists still often reject the traditional object as art, instead exploring the body's ephemerality and sensorial perception through time-based practice (Banes & Lepecki, 2007; Manco, 2010). For example, in [The Artist is Present](#) (2010), Abramovic, one of the more highly-regarded contemporary performance artists, sat immobile for 30-minute intervals, 6 days a week, for a total of 736 hours, at a table in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. She stared into the eyes of whoever sat opposite her. In [512 Hours](#) (2014), performed in London's Serpentine Gallery, Abramovic spent 512 hours interacting with the 160 participants at a time. Abramovic or her assistants would guide participants to different places within the museum and have them spend time focusing on a wall. Both performances reflect the time-based practice of contemporary performance art and the unscripted, yet loosely guided interaction with participants. This practice's roots stretch back to performance art of the 1960s, particularly when Ono invited participants to cut away pieces of her clothing in her performance [Cut Piece](#) (1965).

Through detailing Lindsey's participatory performance, we argue for viewing performance art as a form of embodied text. Using Witte's (1993) definition of a text as an "organized set of symbols or signs" (p. 237) and tracing the etymology of the noun "text" back to the Latin participial stem for "to weave," we argue Lindsey's performance illustrates the centrality of her and her participants' bodies during the invention and delivery of the performance as text. As performers move, write, think, they are weaving themselves into a greater cultural narrative. Facilitating this weaving process is, of course, the body of the performer, but also the space of the performance, tools used to prepare for and then execute the performance, and the audience. We build on Rowsell's (2013) argument that movement within such context as performance art "requires the body to enact text" (p. 110) by suggesting that during Lindsey's performance her and her participants' bodies were text while they were weaving text. This understanding of embodied text reshapes notions of writing for various stakeholders, particularly within the postsecondary writing center. While we acknowledge important work within writing center studies on the body, particularly linked with coding tutor and tutee gesture during a session (Thompson, 2009; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014), we view performance art as a dynamic form of communication in which the body *is* the communicative vessel unlike gestures which speakers often use as a complement to oral delivery. Through reshaping notions of writing, writing center stakeholders gain a richer theoretical sense of how texts circulate within performance as an art element, creative location, and learning tool. Pedagogically, this reshaping allows for the mindful intersections of the body and writing during the tutoring process, intersections harder to realize without a background in performance practices that rely on the body as primary mode of meaning making.

To create this argument, we first synthesize discussions within composition studies on the body's role during the composing process to sketch a theory for attending to the performing body as embodied text. Next, we offer a discussion of how Lindsey's embodied invention process and delivered performance reshape common notions of writing, specifically by highlighting the central role of bodies in the invention and delivery of her material. To do so, we pull from Lindsey's invention process—including script writing drafts, visual images, journal entries, and first-person narrative—and culminating performance. Finally, we offer practical writing tutoring implications by drawing from Lindsey's experience as a writing tutor working with a senior sculpture major in the OU Writing

Center and how Lindsey's background as a performance artist allowed her to position the body as a central mode for tutoring writing. This positioning markedly enhanced how she worked with writers in the OU Writing Center as a Fine Arts Writing Fellow for the OU Writing Center.

## The Performing Body as Embodied Text

We situate our thinking about Lindsey's performance within composition research devoted to the body's centrality during composing (Arola & Wysocki, 2012; Fleckenstein, 1999; Knoblauch, 2012; Perry, 2012; Rifenburg, 2014; Syverson, 1999). As one's cognitive schema are often refined through writing, composition scholars have additionally examined how the theoretical work on embodiment and composing influences pedagogy (Kazan, 2005; Kroll, 2013; Perl, 2004). Such work focuses on the fusion of the body and mind during composing, how our breathing and heartbeat impact how and what we write. As Fleckenstein (1999) argues "we write as bodies . . . We *are* our bodies; we are writing bodies" (p. 297). Following the logic of Fleckenstein's claim, Perry (2012) wonders in her [60-second webtext on dance and composing](#): "How do we distinguish between the physical and conceptual work of composing?" Perry leaves her audience to ponder this question, blurring the line between the physical and conceptual.

Activities where the body is a direct conduit for meaning making, such as art performances, particularly blur this line between the conceptual and the physical. Stressing the interconnectedness of the mind and the body, scholars have positioned writing as a method for facilitating and reflecting on bodily activity. For example, when teaching postsecondary ballet, Cooper (2011, 2013) assigns writing prompts as a way for her dancers to reflect on the movement of their bodies within the space of the dance studio. Not only does such reflective writing allow for metacognition and self-directed learning as Cooper suggests, but such writing highlights for dancers the interconnectedness of the mind and the body. Although hooks (1994) is correct in asserting that the mind/body dualism is part of academia (p. 191), the body undergirds the cognitive schemata of a large portion of students in American higher education, in particular performance artists like Lindsey.

Extending Syverson's (1999) argument that "embodiment grounds our conceptual structures" (p. 13), we consider the conceptual structures of performance art, how Lindsey's direct attention to her body and her participants' bodies facilitate the invention and delivery of text, and what a close-analysis of the embodied actions taking place in a century-old desolate lumberyard in Oklahoma means for postsecondary writing centers.

## Lindsey's Embodied Performance Art

Lindsey has performed throughout the United States and in the Netherlands. She explores the liminal spaces between physical, psychological, and emotional experience, particularly in terms of the feminine, and how these experiences help us shape our world. She is intrigued by moments of transition: when clean becomes dirty, and when gentle turns aggressive. In considering her audience, she imagines the psychological and emotional landscapes through which her performances will induce the viewer to travel. In her performance [Vessels \(2013\)](#), Lindsey tied 100 clear bottles full of wine and milk around her belly, neck, and arms and invited viewers to drink from her, invoking an intimate exchange between her and the drinker. In her audience-oriented participatory performance [TouchTasteSmellFeel\(2014\)](#), she invited gallery visitors to touch, taste, smell, and feel various objects: charcoal, chocolate, marbles, cinnamon, garlic, and flower petals. She audio-recorded the participants' responses of memories and emotions invoked by the objects, and she invited participants to interpret their experiences through sound with a variety of musical instruments.

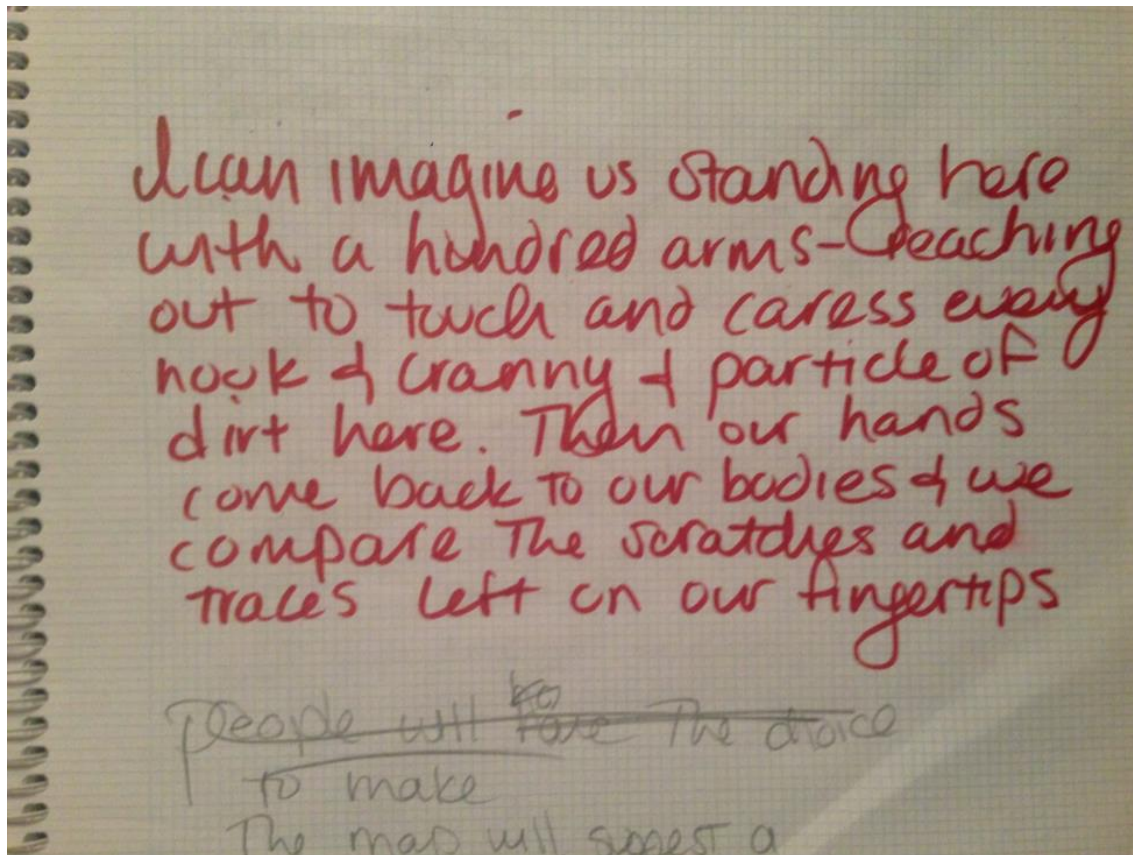
On May 1st, 2014, Lindsey held a participatory performance at an abandoned lumberyard in Norman, Oklahoma. This performance required a real-time visceral experience for Lindsey as she visited the location, physically inhabited the space and sketched how her body and others' bodies could move and physically transform a soon-to-be demolished location. Below is Lindsey's narrative on preparing for this performance.

### *Embodying Invention*

*The initial idea for this interactive performance came from my curiosity about how humans, as sentient and cognizant beings, fuse sensation and cerebral activity to make sense of their worlds, both immediate and through reflection.*

*During the brainstorming process, I spent time physically in the lumberyard. I lay on a rickety bench and sat in the grass; I pulled out old wooden and metal planks from giant piles and stacked them, improvisationally building abstract sculptures. I listened to the gravel and the creaks in the wood beneath my feet as I walked across the barn floor. I got my hands dirty, all while taking notes in a journal and drawing images that came to my mind about how I imagined people interacting with things and spaces in the yard (see [Figure 1](#) below). A few things became obviously important to me during the experience: the variance between being inside a manmade structure and in the open natural elements; the phenomenon of walking between two destinations; and the importance of being still and silent for intermittent periods between note-taking sessions. All of these phenomena required an awareness of my muscles, skin, breathing, and blinking, as well as the ability to develop a rhythm between listening, looking, writing, and drawing. I realized this is what I wanted to invite participants to do.*

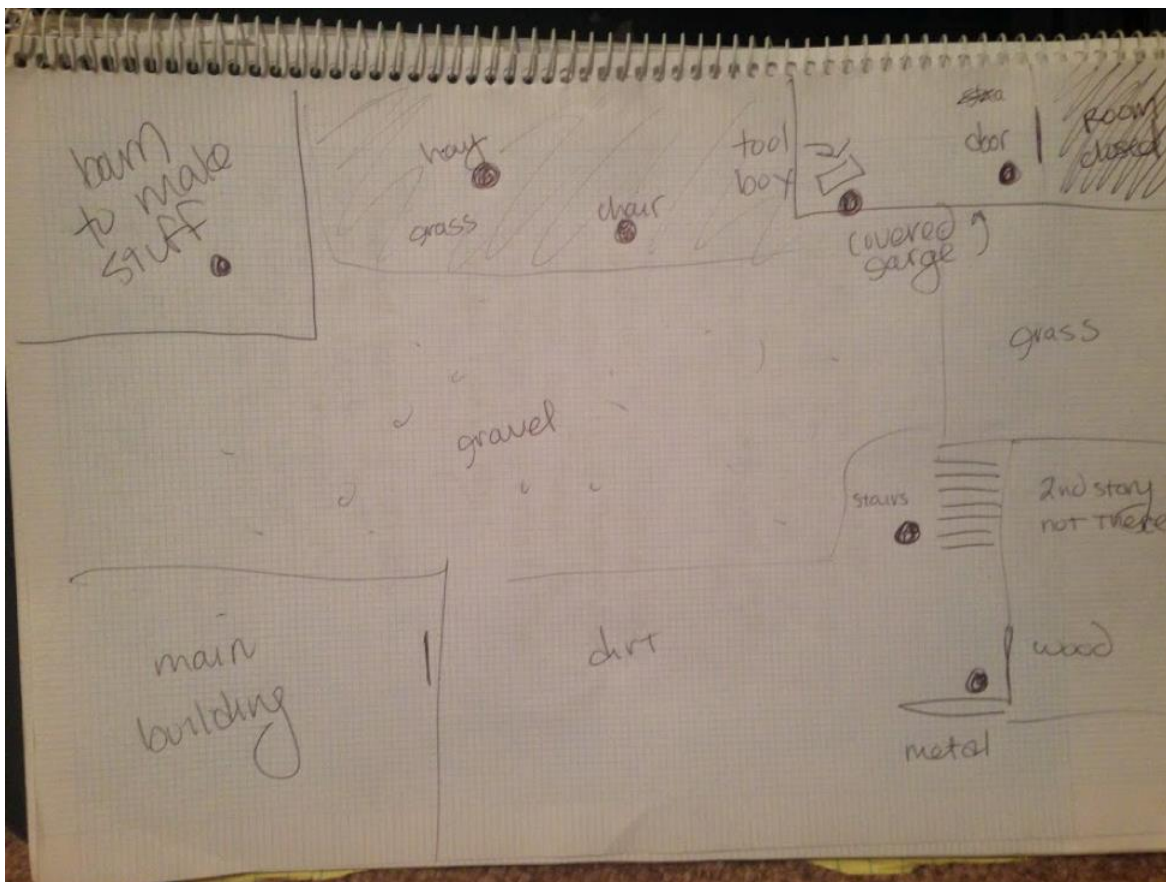
Figure 1



I chose various locations in the yard that would serve as destinations on the map for people to follow (see Figure 2 below). The destinations consisted of a small nook where wood meets a metal fence at a corner; a set of wooden stairs that led to a rotted, nearly nonexistent upstairs; a permanently closed storage shed door; a chair in the grassy yard; a hay bale; and inside the large barn where most of the old wood and metal was stored years ago. I chose these destinations based on my notes on the sensations I felt while spending time at them and my own stories and histories that the places conjured. I chose the places and spaces that felt, smelled, sounded, and looked most vivid, enticing, intense, and emotionally or psychologically charged. I hoped to give participants the opportunity to engage the body in conjunction with thought, memory, and imagination.

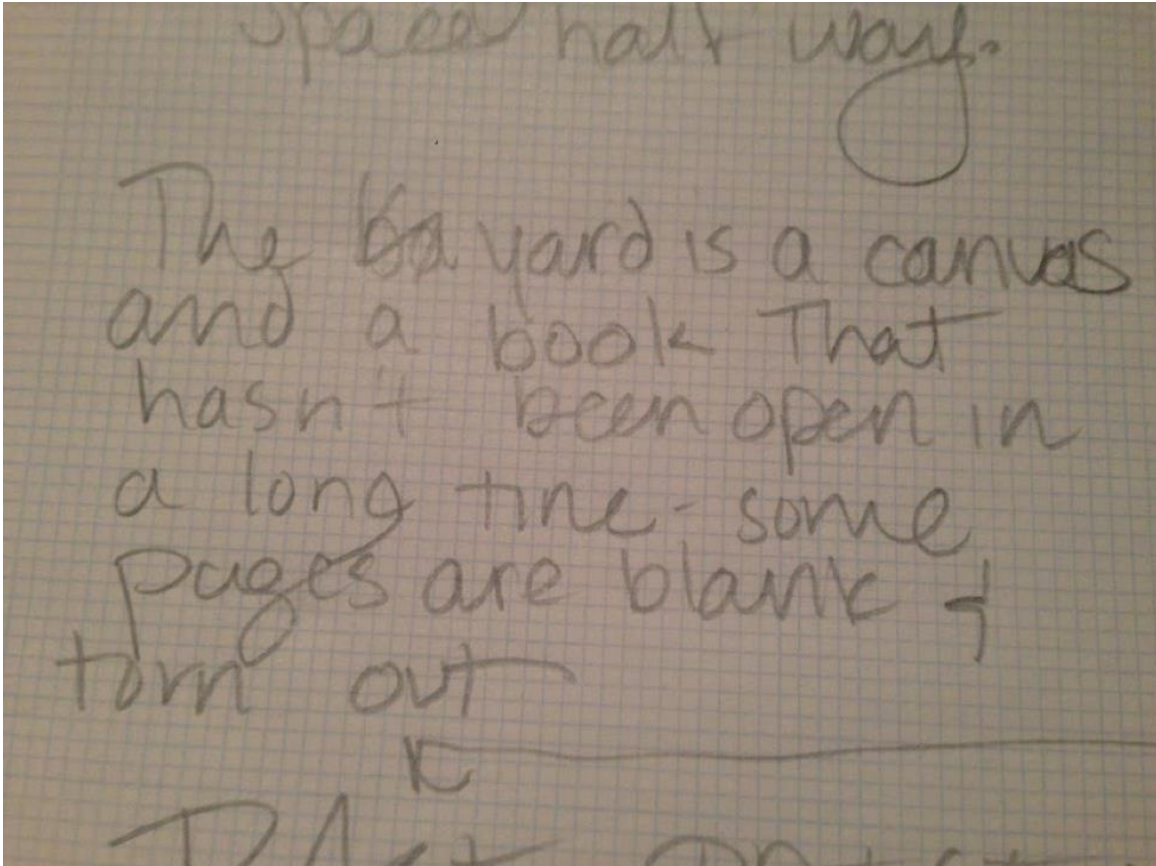
During my creative process, sensations and bodily expressions (and impressions) directly ground my brainstorming. In my studio, I generally talk to myself a lot when I'm inventing performances, along with scribbling stuff down on notepads or posters tacked to the wall, and rearranging materials in the room. Some might say it is a mess, but the various objects haphazardly scattered about are perfectly and sensibly organized to me. As with most artists—including writers—only through personal chaos can I freely play, which is a vital practice of my performance composition. As Nachmanovitch (1990) contends in *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, uninhibited improvisational play and "spontaneous creation" is liberating and nutritional to any sort of creation, be it for a sculptor, writer, musician, or auto mechanic (p. 5). This type of creating grounds the body in the mind's primitivity—where I believe the raw, unalloyed roots of ideas are conceived.

Figure 2



*As in the lumberyard, I often move around, sit crisscross, lie down with limbs spread, hands on chin, flicking my pen, muttering to myself, drawing lines between objects with my fingers, closing my eyes, taking a break every 5 minutes. For me, these actions induce "spontaneous and intuitive promptings" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 9), much like a child playing in the back yard is prompted to do a cartwheel or dive into a swing by something an adult can't quite put a finger on. An innocence and vulnerability exists in this mind-body interplay. It is important for me to be willing to let the spontaneity and intuition choreograph my movement as my thoughts materialize and intersect. I believe whether I place my hands on my belly, forehead, or the ground directly guides how my ideas birth themselves.*

Figure 3



*My invention process demands a sensitivity to the interconnectedness of my body, my thoughts, and the space around me. These elements are not only fused, they rely on each other—embody and are embodied by each other—to compose further sense of the world.*

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Like any writer, Lindsey works from an invention process. This process will eventually give rise to her participatory performance and calls on Lindsey to immerse herself in the physical location where she and others will enact a text. With her sketchbook, pencil, and red marker, Lindsey jotted down ideas. These ideas manifested themselves as complete, even stylistic, sentences (e.g., "I can imagine us standing here with a hundred arms—reaching out to touch and caress every nook & cranny & particle of dirt here [see figure 1]) or composed in such a rush that Lindsey didn't even take the time to erase her pencil marking, instead electing to scribble through them (e.g., "The ba yard is a canvas and a book that hasn't been open in a long time" [see [Figure 3](#)]). Her invention process also called on

her to map out her performance. While she is still engaging with inchoate ideas, Lindsey signals the importance of location to her art through spatially orienting her unfolding future performance on a piece of sketch paper. Lindsey needs to do more than pen quick sentences; she also finds herself needing to map out (in this case literally) the activity of her art.

Thinking about Lindsey's performance as a text invented through the body speaks to conceptions of invention within composition studies in three important ways. For one, Lindsey immersing herself in the physical space in which she and others will deliver a text draws attention to the importance of location during invention. Central to Lindsey's invention process was her direct interaction with the physical location in which her art was to be delivered, what Reynolds (2004) calls the "*where* of writing" (p. 176). For Lindsey, this location was spatially and temporally bounded. She could not invent this performance while sitting in, say, a Starbucks in Texas or a library in Kansas. She needed to sit, reflect, and write in the soon-to-be demolished lumberyard in Norman, Oklahoma. And the participatory performance as an embodied text was set to be delivered in a specific location on a specific date. Again, she and her participants could not replicate this performance as text at a different time and place and yield similar results. The location, month, time of year, weather, time of day, participant composition, and many other factors weighed in on the ultimate delivery of this performance. Lindsey's invention process illustrates the centrality of not only the scene of writing for the construction of text, but the necessity of inhabiting the scene where the text will be delivered. The location of invention depended on the location of delivery.

Second, a focus on the location of Lindsey's invention pays credence to theories of invention seeking to understand the larger contextual forces giving rise to text. LeFevre (1987) holds that the "thinking and inventing of any [writer] happens in large part because of the ways each has interacted with others and with society and culture" (p. 139). This argument expands the focus of invention from the individual to the larger ecology in which she invents. While LeFevre directs criticism toward Platonic conceptions of inventions, the emphasis on the individual writer during invention was shared by current-traditional rhetoric (Crowley, 1990; Lauer, 2004) and even the 1960s process movement (Bawarshi, 2003; Lauer, 2004). Though dated, LeFevre's argument still resonates with current understandings of invention. For example, the *College Composition and Communication* poster page on invention in the June 2012 issue relies on LeFevre when arguing invention is "an activity of a single writer composing in a social context" (p. 715). Bawarshi builds on LeFevre's push toward an ecological understanding of invention by arguing invention resides in "a larger sphere of agency that includes not only the writer as agent but also the social and rhetorical conditions . . . which participate in this agency and in which the writer and the writing take place" (p. 51). Focusing on Lindsey's invention process illustrates these "social and rhetorical conditions" suggested by Bawarshi. Such a focus also adds material conditions to Lindsey's invention ecology to the two conditions offered by Bawarshi. Material objects such as pen, paper and her limbs and eyes, play a large role in Lindsey's invention.

Yet an analysis of Lindsey's invention does more than support Bawarshi's and LeFevre's projections of invention. Lindsey's inventive practices illustrate the centrality of her and her audience's body to the activity of invention and anticipated activity of delivery. During invention, Lindsey called upon her own physical abilities. She notes that she sat "crisscross," as she does often in the OU Writing Center when working with writers. In the waiting-to-be-demolished space, she talked to herself, touched her hands to her chin, and closed her eyes. She also "believe[s] whether my hands are placed on my belly, forehead, or the ground directly guides how my ideas birth themselves." All these activities call upon a certain bodily action of which some may be incapable. A bodily disability precluding Lindsey from engaging with any of these physical activities would change her invention process and change the trajectory and ultimate delivery of the performance. Additionally, the



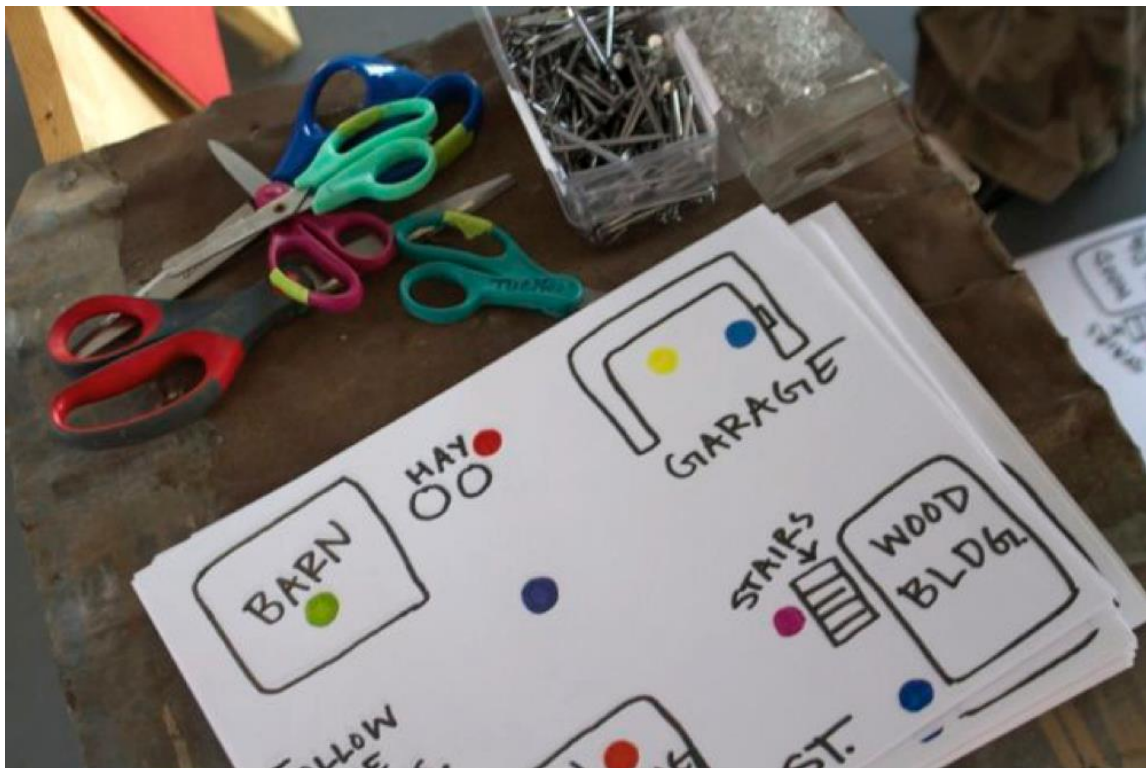
activities Lindsey planned for the audience to engage in also called upon specific physical capabilities. She constructed activities that invited her audience to write, touch, hear, speak, and walk. One activity invited participants to tie or nail something they were willing to part with to an object in the yard. Such an activity is developed through a specific assumption about the bodily capabilities of the participants. If we read her performance as an unfolding text, then we need to acknowledge how her text is constructed with specific understandings of her audience's physical abilities.

Taken together, this analysis of her invention highlights how her body and her audience's bodies were central to the process, how knowledge and future delivery of the performance as text are inextricably linked to the physical capability of the body and to the body in a physical location. Such an emphasis on physical location and bodily capability also shape how Lindsey works with writers in the writing center, as we show in the final section. Yet in this section, we conclude by suggesting the performance itself does not exist within the pages of Lindsey's sketchbook; the performance exists in the realization of her sketches. Tracing the trajectory of Lindsey's participatory performance art with attention to the role of the body within this trajectory focuses attention to the text's delivery. We return, again, to Lindsey's words and images.

### *Embodying Delivery*

*For the performance, I provided participants a map (Figure 4) showing different colored dots that corresponded with signs marking the various destinations in the lumber yard. I also provided a few supplies like writing utensils, paper, string, and scissors they would need to accomplish the physical and writing exercises.*

Figure 4



*As their first task, I asked people to choose something that they were willing to part with, and nail or tie it to something outside. This act invited people to embed their personal narratives into the space*

*directly, initiating a psychological and physical connection between the location and the participant. One woman cut off a hand-woven bracelet she had been wearing for years and buried it in the dirt. Before doing so she told me the story of where it came from: a dear friend made it on a mission trip to South America years ago. She said she was inspired to sacrifice something particularly special to her, not just a napkin from her purse, because of the way the activities pushed her to think about why she was where she was. In other words, being prompted to think metacognitively and act on those thoughts was a very emotionally-charged experience for her; she spent hours in the yard.*

*Participants were free to flow through the yard at their own pace and choose their own pathway, not following any specific order. At the dark blue sign (Figure 5) nestled in a corner where a metal fence met a wooden wall, instructions invited people to sit on a bench I found in the yard and spend time in the corner. Then they were to write down what they imagined happened and existed there in the past and what could happen there in the future.*

Figure 5



*A pink sign (Figure 6) hung from a set of wooden stairs that led to a non-existent second story of the rotting wooden building.*

Figure 6



*Instructions asked participants to imagine what was and could be upstairs. One mother had to physically restrain her child from running up the rickety stairs. I found this endearing and satisfying because the child felt so compelled to act on the feeling of embodying the textual story he was creating that he physically needed to move into the space he was recontextualizing and reconstructing with his imagination.*

*Across the yard participants encountered a yellow sign (Figure 7) nailed above an old rusty toolbox that I found in the garage.*

Figure 7



*Instructions asked participants to imagine who once owned the box and what was once inside. Several people responded with stories of hard-working grandfathers, denoting how the object and this particular space are inextricably linked to the community's historical heritage: diligent, tired farmers building their lives from scratch after the land run. This is a story with which most Oklahomans feel some connection.*

*A light blue sign (Figure 8) marked the rusty metal door that read "Keep Door Closed," and instructions prompted participants to imagine and write what was on the other side of the door on colored Post-Its, and then hang them on the door with magnets.*

*Figure 8*



*Adults and teenagers responded to this prompt energetically with poetic and wildly imaginative responses, involving ghosts and skeletons. I noticed that people spent a significantly longer amount of time standing in front of this door than with the other writing activities. The door seemed to serve as a frustrating barrier, but also a curious conduit that sparked creative action. The participant had to imagine him or herself on the other side of the closed door or at least imagine being able to see inside, which called for the participant to cognitively meet the writing prompt more than half way.*

*I encountered hay bales in the yard as well, and stuffed a red sign (Figure 9) into one that asked participants to pluck a piece of hay and put it somewhere else. This invited the person to interact with and reorganize the natural elements of the space in a reflective, playful, and personal way.*

Figure 9



*While I imagined people would tie pieces of hay in the fence or scatter the hay in the grass, most people interacted with the hay in more personally physical ways: a child stuck a piece in her hair; a woman simply blew on it and watched the single blade quiver with the pressure of her breath close to her lips. She probably smelled the hay. At this location, people felt free to merge their bodies with the physical environment. They happily jumped and lay on the hay bale. For most, this was next to the last stop, so they had already taken part in several writing activities. The writing activities seemed to prime participants to play and explore with the hay in more genuine, undistracted ways, not worrying if they looked odd to people walking down Main Street in downtown Norman.*

*Finally, a green sign (Figure 10) outside of the large barn invited people inside where a plethora of wood scraps, tools, nails, paint, and brushes waited inside for participants to come build whatever they chose, adding to the barn's existing structure, or making their own sculptures.*

Figure 10



*A man built a horse out of wood planks. A wire butterfly perched on a workbench; a triptych made of old doors and paint that honored the "everyman" employee of the lumber supply company hung from the rafters.*

*The prompts allowed mapped locations and objects in the yard to incite and conjure people's personal stories, desires, and even fears. As people offered their thoughts, the locations and objects took on these thoughts as part of their identities within the lumberyard. Simultaneously, participants' interactions with the locations and objects shaped their physical and cognitive knowing. In this light, the spaces, objects, and participants essentially began to embody each other.*

*As the event unfolded, I wandered through the yard sorting out small confusions and asking prompting questions to anyone who was stumped as what to write at any of the destinations. I acted as a guide and a tutor in a way. Most seemed intrigued, curious, and sometimes a little perturbed at being asked to contribute to "the art." I asked a lot from participants; they came to an art exhibition probably expecting a traditional gallery setting with art on the walls, and to play the role of casual observer. I challenged people to experience the space in a new way, to contribute to its essence and purpose, and to construct hypothetical and imaginative meaning for the space's existence.*

*I call the space living. The participants' acts of embodying the space demanded them to intermittently become embodied by the very fact that the yard is alive and susceptible to human touch and thought. While we can only step into a painting psychologically, we can physically become a part of a place as we contemplate and rewrite it.*

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As Lindsey notes, "participants came to an art exhibition probably expecting a traditional gallery . . . and to play the role of the casual observer." Such a role suggests common, ancient western understandings of delivery (*pronuntiatio*), which, as the Latin word suggests, emphasizes "modulations of the voice" and "proper stance and posture of the body" during oral delivery (Corbett

& Connors, 1999, p. 22). The emphasis on delivery in ancient western schools of rhetoric was on the rhetor, not the audience. The rhetor trained in Aristotelian artistic proofs to generate a response in the audience. The focus on oral delivery and positioning the voice and body during delivery continued into the elocution movement, specifically through the work of Thomas Sheridan and Gilbert Austin in the eighteenth-century and Hallie Quinn Brown at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Again, the emphasis was on how the rhetor could facilitate a particular desired response in the audience through vocal cadence, gesticulations of the hands, and other bodily actions. Lindsey's performance inverted traditional western understandings of delivery as being rhetor-focused by inviting the audience to construct the maturing and unscripted text of her performance collaboratively. Analyzing how Lindsey engaged the audience in the delivery of this unscripted performance and how the audience's participation opened avenues Lindsey failed to consider during invention, sketches a richer picture of delivery within composition studies.

With the introduction of various digital platforms and the move from strictly print document design, scholars within composition studies retheorized delivery through case studies of how writing operates within specific communities of practice (Ridolfo, 2004; Rude, 2004; Trimbur, 2000). Building on this work, we suggest that Lindsey's performance offers a case of how rhetor and audience jointly share the canon of delivery. Instead of considering how to deploy the artistic proofs to persuade an audience or espousing a linear view of delivery as "getting [writing] delivered to where it needs to go" (Trimbur, 2000, p. 189), Lindsey's performance illustrates how audience and rhetor share the rhetorical task of delivery. The delineation between rhetor and audience is collapsed: participants are invited to help give rise to the performance as text through nailing or tying a personal item to something outside; to imagine in writing where a set of stairs once led and where they could lead; to rearrange an old hay bale. While Lindsey spent considerable time inventing the performance as a set of loose guidelines and preparing the space for the audience, once the performance began, it was hard to identify the receiver and deliverer of the performance as text. In the case of Lindsey's performance, rhetor and audience depended on each other to manifest the delivery and its outcome.

Through its participatory and unscripted roots, performance art flattens audience and rhetor into a singular performer, similar to act of tutoring where the tutor and tutee collaboratively work toward stronger writing. Such flattening can be maddening for a rhetor valuing authorial intent. Yet Lindsey's goal as a performer is not to dictate how action will unfold; instead, she seeks to create a space in which action can unfold. The focus for Lindsey is providing the opportunity for performance as text to be delivered and that the performance as text is delivered, not who or how it is delivered. Returning to Trimbur's (2000) understanding of delivery as "getting [writing] delivered to where it needs to go" (p. 189), Lindsey creates space for this "need to go" and does not directly facilitate the process. A focus on delivery with an emphasis on the audience's role in delivering text should be of particular importance to composition scholars in the wake of a proliferation of digital composing platforms and the push toward studying a text's circulation of a text's delivery.

Reporting on findings from her five-year case study on the digital circulation of the iconic image *Obama Hope*, Gries (2013) contributes to the conversation within what she calls "circulations studies" (p. 333). This area of research examines how discourse is "produced and distributed" (p. 333) and how "once delivered, [discourse] circulates, transforms, and affects change through its material encounters" (p. 333). While delivery is the final canon of classical western rhetoric, circulation studies projects delivery as the penultimate step before circulation. Circulation, for Gries and others, is at the heart of understanding how a text operates within the public sphere. Yet just as performance art flattens rhetor and audience into a single authorial agent, we suggest an analysis of



how Lindsey's performance unfolding through participatory interaction shows how delivery and circulation are flattened into a single rhetorical phenomenon.

According to Gries (2013), the text's distribution is central to circulation. For performance art as represented in Lindsey's performance, text is delivered through distribution. The delivery *is* the circulation. Often delivery is seen as the explicit handing-over of text from the rhetor to the audience, and circulation is the "spatio-temporal flows" (Gries, 2013, p. 335) through which a text moves, the action of the audience passing the text along. However, during the *stART Norman* performance, through blurring the distinction between rhetor and audience, Lindsey allowed for an expansive understanding of delivery to include evolving circulation.

Finally, the audience and Lindsey collaboratively authored text through engaging and improvising with material objects. In the writing center, Lindsey often made use of everyday items (scissors, a rolling chair, tape, and colored markers) to facilitate a tutoring session. And in *stART*, through emphasizing what Micciche (2014) calls "writing's 'withness'" (p. 495) (i.e., stressing the need to compose text with material objects), Lindsey did not deliver a text to an audience who then turned around and circulated it in a linear fashion. Lindsey and her audience collaboratively gave rise to a text through engaging with everyday material objects. When new participants entered the "textual site" (Micciche, 2014, p. 498) of the lumberyard and followed Lindsey's written and oral directions, another text arose, then another. The text of this performance—the myriad moments of giving rise to language through embodying an organized set of symbols—was delivered through the body and with the body's interaction with material objects. Through watching and hearing participants struggle and make sense of the participatory performance, other participants found a foothold for engaging with the objects Lindsey provided and the objects that were already a part of the lumberyard.

Taken together, our analysis of Lindsey's May 2014 participatory performance reveals five points regarding invention and delivery:

- Invention is tied to physical location where the text will be delivered.
- Invention is constrained by the rhetor's and audience's physical capabilities.
- Delivery flattens the distinction between the rhetor and the audience.
- Delivery can encompass circulation.
- Delivery is facilitated through a pairing of the body with material objects.

Our final section pulls together the analysis of Lindsey's invention and delivery for stakeholders within postsecondary writing centers, particularly tutors. To do so, we pull from Lindsey's interaction with a senior sculpture major in the OU Writing Center. Through working with this sculpture student, Lindsey leveraged her understanding of how a body gives rise to text, and how the activity of writing is intertwined with the physical capabilities of the authoring self. Such understandings were more apparent to Lindsey, we argue, because of her long dedication to performance art. As this experience is Lindsey's, her voice speaks in the final section.

## The Final Scene: Performance Art and the Writing Center

As a writing center tutor, teacher, and performance artist, I often think of how our physical presence redefines and recontextualizes given spaces when we move through and within them. In the writing center, we do the same. Harry Denny (2010) talks about the WC as a performative space, in which we "know and present identity" (p. 2). I'm interested in the word "performative" in relation to knowing

our "identity" as it suggests that the writing center is a stage on which we create and embody our truths and narratives while composing. We perform ourselves as we compose.

But the writing center stage I'm thinking of is not a traditional raised platform with seating for an audience. In fact, this stage has no audience. In her presentation "Writing selves in the center: Possibility, play, and potential space," given at the Northern California Writing Centers Association Annual Conference, Sherri Winan (2008) also calls the WC a stage by redefining it as a place to improvise and collaborate, much like what happened in the lumber yard between participants, me, and the yard itself. This metaphor compliments Elizabeth Boquet and Michele Eodice's (2008) discussion of writing tutoring in terms of a jazz ensemble's musical improvisation session and the necessity of "soloing and supporting" or "taking turns" (p.16) giving and receiving information, advice, and creative thought. In the lumberyard, participants (writers/creators/composers) exchanged ideas and material objects.

In the WC, tutors easily slip into the unidirectional lecturer role, however briefly, to snatch the microphone and talk a little too much. Mastering the art of conversing with another writer about writing takes a fine-tuned sensitivity to the writer's physical and psychological situations. We, as tutors and teachers, must cultivate this 'sixth sense.' Writers have laid a potential text in front of us and we must develop new textual tools to read the writer *in relation to* the composition. These textual tools—reading and responding tools—we can cultivate are often semantic-less. When the writer nervously taps her foot, how do we respond? What do we offer from our own experience as writers to alleviate her writing demons? Perhaps more importantly, what is happening between the writer and her writing? Where and when do we need to intervene? Continuously answering these questions allows us to cultivate heightened awareness—that sixth sense—of the writer's needs and begin a collaborative dance with the student composer, the composition, and the tutor.

Winan (2008) offers her "Principles of Improvisation" that can function as these textual tools: "Say yes; accept offers; pay attention; make your partner look good; make mistakes; dare to be obvious; dare to be simple; dare to shut up; enjoy the ride." I have spent many hours brainstorming with musicians, fellow movement-oriented performers, and a dancer (and former writing consultant) during which these Principles were or would have been helpful. My experience with improvisation and collaboration with these artists also parallels my tutoring experiences in the WC.

One of my favorite things to do is to work with other visual artists, dancers, and musicians. Alicia, a fine arts senior and capstone student, came into our WC and showed me her tattered journal full of doodles and illegible scribbles that made complete sense to her as brainstorming text. She came to work on her thesis, the final writing project as an undergraduate, which is an expanded artist statement where the artist situates him or herself into a greater contemporary art context. She showed me photos of sculptures in progress on the social media platform Tumblr. But she struggled to *talk* about the concepts behind her art. I believe at this point I was able to tap into a few of Winan's principles, in particular paying attention, shutting up, and accepting an offer that Alicia likely did not even know she was offering. Subconsciously, Alicia was saying, "I need to make art to make verbal and written sense of my art!" As a fellow visual thinker, I did the most intuitive thing I knew. Together we drew pictures on giant Post-its with different colored markers that morphed into a collaborative drawing project. We did this *together* and we reoriented ourselves in the WC space and used the table, chairs, paper, writing utensils, and our bodies in new ways that met our needs. As we drew and jotted down words, we stood and circled the table, much like Alicia does in her studio. We switched markers as different colors became necessary, following some unuttered symbolic system.

Alicia allowed me to step into her composing/performing process as a writer. At the table, no performer or audience was present (neither of us were sitting in chairs!); we bounced off of each

other literally and figuratively, choosing different colors to symbolize different things, walking around the table to reach the other side of the giant montage we were creating; laughing at, but relishing in, our stick figures and thought bubbles. At the end of the session, this symbolic web of scribbles, dots, and awkward shapes evolved into a logical structure for Alicia. She left with a plan. We took turns on stage, watching each other, stepping back to take a breather, "anticipating melodic and rhythmic changes" (Boquet & Eodice, 2008, p.16) in each other's movements and markings. Then, when the moment *felt* right, we leapt back in to make our move with our markers. This session was successful because I was able to practice the Principles of Improvisation, and I was able to encourage Alicia in her own composing/performing process.

It's important for me to talk about those markers. They too collaborated and improvised. On the giant Post-its, purple and red took turns talking and listening to each other. They took turns being viewer and performer, just like Alicia and me. Writers and tutors (and tables, chairs, and writing utensils) can simultaneously be viewer and performer; writer and reader; speaker and listener; be active and passive; reveler of spoken word and soaker of silence. My session with Alicia not only opened me to redefining, or un-defining, the roles of tutor and writer, but we redefined our environmental elements, as well: the table became an easel, and the pieces of paper became canvas. Imagine what a paper clip could be!

In other words, since we were both able to open ourselves to a certain vulnerability, and to the possibilities of improvisation in brainstorming, we shed, shifted, and shared our roles in what became a rhythm. We became dancers, jazz musicians, writing tag-teamers, and academic collaborators. Ultimately, we experienced a radical phenomenological shift in thinking about how we can share physical presence—on or off the stage—with a fellow writer in the WC.

Another way to consider how we perform on the WC stage is to consider how we position ourselves in the environment, just as I asked participants to do in the lumber yard. How do we feel in the facility and what do we name it: a work space? An alternative home? A study nook? For me, it's all three. French philosopher Bachelard (1994), in *The Poetics of Space*, asks us to question *how* we inhabit and dwell in the places we frequent. He focuses on places we visit in childhood and places animals frequent: attics, nooks, bedrooms, shells, and nests. As with the participants in the lumber yard, when we let the WC become a potential space, or carve out potential spaces in our WC facilities, we become children again, wide-eyed with unadulterated wonder, our re-embodied, unmarked, unedited selves. When we embody this childlike self, we can more freely compose, and can more readily contribute creative energy to a place, altering its purpose and meaning for the better. In this way, we embody and are embodied by our WCs.

I think it's important to ask how we inhabit spaces, especially our WC and classroom. How do I inhabit my WC and how does my WC inhabit me? The notion of inhabiting and dwelling closely relate to embodying. When we inhabit, we are *in*. When we embody, we are *with, of, around, about, next to*, as well as *in*. In this sense, we can embody as many places that we want, and therefore create many identities as composers. In Winan's (2008) presentation, she discusses the importance of acknowledging the various theories of the self (we have one solid self or a universal self, etc.). It's important to be open to all interpretations of what the self is, because performativity and collaboration require an openness to discarding, changing, and sharing identities. She states, "When I say selves, I'm going to mean possibilities." Our body and mind are possibilities because they are fluid, transient, and symbiotic, just as the places that we inhabit and embody. We are allowed to embody spaces because our figurative membranes are soft and fluid. This organicity allowed the participants in the lumberyard to pause and soak in the sights, scents, and sounds and conceive a response to the writing prompts. The same concept applies to the teacher and tutor who is able to develop that "sixth sense" in the WC and in the classroom.

As I asked participants to do in the lumber yard, and as we can do in the WC and our sacred writing places, we embody these spaces. This is true because when we create, we have conceived an idea that is inseparable from the space we are in at the time; it comes from and is made of us as well as the space. Then, this creation determines the boundaries and heartbeat of the carved out space itself. Here, we hark back to the idea of embodiment as being *with, of, around, about, next to*, as well as *in*. To embody is to create and collaborate with student writers, other artists, and ourselves. More pointedly, to embody is to build together the spaces we define as ours: be it our WC, our classroom, or our own minds and bodies.

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