

CHAPTER 5

PROCESS AS IMPROV

. . . we may know all there is to know about how texts work and how readers read, and we still may create documents that fail to communicate effectively.

– Thomas Kent (“Paralogic” 149)

Joke-writing is my thing, it’s like a passion. What it is, is basically: you have an idea, you write it as hard as you can, but at the end of the day, it’s like you gotta get it on stage. And it’s not a joke until a crowd laughs at it.

– Dave Attell (“Friday,” Bumping Mics with Jeff Ross and Dave Attell)

If you’ve ever been in the room when a seasoned stand-up is trying out new jokes, you have viscerally felt the composing processes by which stand up is forged. I once saw comedian Rob Delaney perform at Cincinnati’s Taft Theatre. I thought he was supposed to be in the main theatre—the regal, expansive, theatrical stage—but he wasn’t. Instead, he performed in the theatre’s basement. I was never clear on why the change was made—perhaps it had to do with the number of seats sold, perhaps Delaney himself chose the closer quarters of the basement with its lowered ceilings and rows of ragged chairs to get the feel of an intimate dingy comedy club. Regardless, the ad-hoc nature of this performance space seemed to encourage him to do what he did at the end of his well-crafted, essentially scripted show. He tried new jokes. And they didn’t really work—basically, they bombed. He told us after that the new bits didn’t work, not yet. He had kernels, but next time (probably for many next times) he’d need to try a different pace, fill out that part of the story and shorten this part, move more quickly to the punch line. Read the room, the city, the region, the particular bodies in the audiences at particular times. Repeat.

Comedians are of course funny in themselves. Comedians practice and refine their bodily control and performance chops, creating worlds that the audience can inhabit through description, gesture, timing, delivery. They too have particular ways of seeing their world and delivering those visions; they have penchants for the structure and the art of the joke, word-play, and the call-back. Said another way, as Dave Attell’s words above attest, comedians are at the core professional writers. But arts like stand-up comedy or theatrical improv—or writing more broadly—are far from solo performances. This is easy to see in improv as it most often commences with a suggestion from the audience from which the players build a scene. But ef-

factive stand-up too is just as relational an art as is improv, even though there is just one person on stage. Stand-up is built over time and by attuning to, reading, and adjusting to changing audiences—discerning between the sighs, gasps, chuckles, guffaws, and polite laughter in infinitely different rooms night after night. This influence is often imperceptible to any single audience member though. Nevertheless, it is the Other, the laugh, that serves as the final engineers of the joke. As Viola Spolin, foremother of the American improv tradition, states simply in her theory of improv, “Without an audience there is no theatre” (13).

We can say too without much of a stretch: without an audience there is also no writing. In other words, what comedians, improv performers, and postprocess rhetorician, Thomas Kent, equally recognize is that writing is not merely *staged* in social and material contexts—it is *susceptible* to those contexts and to others. And it is not *just* audiences that shape writing or stand-up: composing processes are equally subject to their places, moves, scenes, positions, objects, tools, privilege, props, presuppositions, resources, genres, language, capital, timing, and more. What I’m driving toward here is another way of saying what my claim has been all along: Situating a process (or a slice or sliver of one) in place and time exposes composing as a matter of physicalities, positioning, and positionalities. Situating processes helps writers become more responsive to the fluctuating contexts in which they find themselves; it helps writers respond on-the-spot to the presenting constraints immediate and distant. In short, situated processes are supremely contingent on where, with what, and for whom they unfold. Or, even shorter, process is improv.

Recognizing the on-the-spot contingencies of writing processes, though, is to embrace some measure of uncertainty. It is to accept that bombing on writing’s stage is possible at any time, no matter how much or how long we’ve worked on our craft (or our draft). Emphasizing situated susceptibility exposes what can’t be secured or learned in advance, the “ghostly” quality of processes that reveals that “writers are unable to control [or “consciously locate”] what influences them” (Jensen 15). And while that may be right and we might accept it, such a revelation also makes a problem for writing instruction. Teaching writing wants more secure outcomes than “you’ll have to see when you get there.” Teaching writing relies in some measure on the sustaining mirage that it basically serves as an “inoculation” (Kent, “Righting” xvii) guaranteeing total immunity from all “bad writing” in all future contexts. Teaching writing, especially as instantiated in first-year courses, pledges at least some allegiance to “general writing skills instruction (GWSI),” some complicity with the tantalizing myth that “writing is a set of rhetorical skills that can be mastered through formal instruction” (Petraglia, *Reconceiving* xi) and that those “skills [can] transcend any particular content and context” (*Reconceiving* xii).

Today, I do think that many pedagogues would agree that “there is no autonomous, generalizable skill or set of skills called ‘writing’ that can be learned and then applied to all genres or activities” (Russell 59). But how we, or if we, make that clear in our teaching practice is another story. And how we help others, like our writing students or faculty across the university, accept this situated and contingent view of writing remains a tremendous challenge, too. Compositionists have worked variously to do so: David Russell and others, for example, situate writing acts in complex and overlapping activity systems. David Smit, like many others thinking with a WAC/WID framework, disperses college writing instruction into specific disciplinary contexts, making writing studies professionals into in-context “facilitators” (12). Conversely, with their writing-about-writing approach, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs put writing instruction firmly in our own disciplinary context, calling for us to “teach the knowledge of our field” (“Reflecting” 6) rather than aim for skills or “how” to write. Still others dare to call the whole thing off: some advance a postprocess “postpedagogy” (e.g., Ceraso et al., Dobrin, *Postcomposition*; Dobrin et al., Rickert, “Hands”), which holds that writing is “too complex, too particular, too situated to be rendered in any repeatable and therefore portable way” (Lynch xiv), and as such “nothing exists to teach as a body-of-knowledge” (Kent, “Paralogic” 149). And moving in quite the opposite direction, still other compositionists have focused us on teaching for transfer (e.g., Anson and Moore; Nowacek), recognizing the uncertainties of context by helping writers secure means to make their know-how emerge anew in times, places, and contexts unforeseen.

I’m interested in this final chapter in the two latter responses to the deconstruction of general skills, and the ways that situating processes might help rectify them. Postpedagogy and transfer seem like polar opposites. Transfer aims to craft writing knowledge that can travel and reemerge in new ways across time and situation; postpedagogy undermines our ability to predict and control future (and present) writing situations. Either our instruction can time-travel or it is impossible in the first place, these two views would hold. At the least, these discourses do not interact—their assumptions (and citations or conference panels) do not overlap. In oversimplified terms, one (transfer) lives in circles of compositionists expressly focused on teaching writing; the other (postpedagogy) lives in circles of compositionists mostly focused on writing theory. But I argue for the benefit of their mingling, particularly in focusing writers on the immediacies and instabilities of where they are writing now—in the moment, on-the-spot.

Such embrace of context-contingencies, though, raises that big and familiar problem in writing pedagogy today: how can writing instruction teach writers to navigate situations that aren’t stable and that we can’t predict? How can we teach something so wiggly as context-contingency? I turn to theatrical improv-

sation—its practice and pedagogy as imagined by Viola Spolin, pioneer of the American improv tradition—as a final visual figure to imagine teaching with situated processes and to address this challenging question. Process as improv embraces writing as a situationally contingent art of figuring out how best to respond to unique rhetorical situations, conditions, and discoverable and unknown constraints. If we aim today to keep pushing the teaching of writing beyond demands for acontextual writing skills and aim instead to hone rhetorical and genre sensitivities, emphasize shaping contexts, disrupt privileged “standard” language performances, and so on, then teaching with processes must emphasize located, nimble, and on-the-spot responsivity. Imagining situated processes as improv is one such way to help us do so.

TRANSFERRING UNCERTAINTY: INVITING THE COLLISION OF TRANSFER AND POSTPEDAGOGY

The drive to expand writing instruction—to make its relevance or scope bigger—is one way to read the arc of composition and its teaching. This story might go like this: in the old days of current-traditionalism, instruction was trapped in dimensions of the page—the weekly theme built of careful penmanship, decorum, formality, and correctness. Then came process and instruction got bigger, more dimensional. It looked beyond the page, accounting more for spheres of human activity like development; cognition and thinking processes; language varieties and difference; voice, personal expression, or political expression. Then, recognizing that writing can never be just the action of one individual, instruction expanded again to encompass the social—communities, discourse, disciplines. Then too, seeing that social entities are never not implicated in the political, ideological, and cultural, came a critical orientation that situated everything: in communities of practice, political landscapes, writing in the disciplines, community literacies, workplace writing, activity systems, ecologies. And, with implicatedness came even more sweeping expansions to the *where* and *what* writing is: global Englishes, new media, the extracurriculum, writing across the lifespan. This story is, of course, a sketch—and a stretch. I’ve implied that the swellings of instruction’s scope have come just in this order (they didn’t); I’ve implied that this story is comprehensive (it isn’t). Nevertheless, the arc of this story creates some context for one recent and prominent crescendo of the drive to make our instruction bigger and to deal with the contextual susceptibility of writing: transfer.

Transfer—an interest in how (writing) knowledge, aptitudes, and learning might be applied or repurposed in contexts beyond the classroom—has been an express focus in composition studies for at least around ten years. But, as Chris Anson and Jessie Moore emphasize, the implicit *assumption* of transfer

has always been embedded in the ubiquitous first-year writing course in the very fact of its being required (3) and understood as a foundation for writing in the university. It's only more recently that this premise has been questioned and expressly investigated by composition scholars through critical questioning, reframing, and extensive and complicated research endeavors. That is, while transfer may now be a focus, it remains a struggle, as transfer scholarship is the pursuit of supremely "complicated" phenomena (Wardle). Even the term itself engenders debate, as "transfer" can imply ease or straightforwardness, an implied mechanization (Yancey et al. 7) or an oversimplified "carry and unload" association that is largely rejected but nevertheless clings to the term (Wardle). As transfer scholars make clear, to conceptualize, study, or teach for transfer involves getting a handle on a dizzying array of actors and factors, each which constantly change and differently relate to one another: individuals, histories, memories, tasks, institutions, contexts, classrooms, dispositions, habits, and so on. That is, transfer processes are not uncomplicated cause and effects; and those working on transfer as an emerging paradigm for college writing instruction are doing so with the recognition that transfer isn't easy, and neither is it one thing, predictable, or wholly controllable. But in the face of its challenges, even what we might identify as impossibilities, transfer scholars make us believe it is nevertheless worthy of the efforts.

Transfer pedagogues certainly take this nuanced position—that it is worth exploring the best or most likely ways to encourage transfer processes even while acknowledging that instruction may never be able to finally pin them down or surely secure them. Transfer pedagogies are future-oriented and their aims far-reaching, as the measure of transfer is the usefulness of instruction in *future* situations. To secure such trajectories, transfer emphasizes the writer herself as an active knowledge-maker with some measure of agentic control exercised in instruction through various means: question posing about "writing situations and developing strategies for examining unfamiliar writing contexts" (Anson and Moore 341), rhetorical knowledge and concept building (e.g., Beaufort), and reflexive practices including meta-awareness, "reflective processes," meta-cognition (Moore and Anson 8), and "mindfulness" (Anson, "The Pop" 532). Transfer pedagogues ask in short, "how can we help students develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw upon, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings?" (Yancey et al. 2) and assumes that writers—armed with strategies, concepts, reflection, mindfulness—can be empowered as agents of transfer (Nowacek).

In their 2015 pedagogical project outlining a "teaching for transfer (TFT)" curriculum and its qualitative study and evaluation, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak pose the question above, viewing writers as potential transfer agents. Their TFT curriculum builds upon a bedrock claim: given that re-

search has demonstrated that transfer often doesn't happen because students don't expect it to and also that transfer may be complicated but it has been shown to be possible, first-year writing curricula ought to expressly teach *for* it (12). And teaching for it, according to these pedagogues, means helping writing students build a conceptual "passport" (33) that can help make writing "travel" or "boundary crossing" into new writing situations better, more satisfying, and instructive (33). This passport vision of writing instruction—a framework which forefronts students' acquisition of, reflection upon, experience with, and subsequent stretching of "key concepts" (76)—is a flexible repository for students' learning about and mindfully practicing writing. The passport helps "ensure[s] students can theorize about and practice writing using key terms and concepts learned in the course" (58) but also supports writers "moving forward to new contexts, where through 'retrieval and application' of prior knowledge they can write anew" (137). In addition to focus on concepts, the TFT curriculum engages students in reflective processes which help them develop a working theory of writing, a method that helps students develop "as reflective writing practitioners who are able to abstract their theories and employ them in new contexts" (58). Through comparative qualitative study of the TFT curriculum with an Expressivist course focused on voice and agency (5) and a cultural studies, media-focused course (5), the pedagogues find not unsurprisingly that the TFT approach "is shown to provide more conceptual grounding to students" (35) and therefore, better realizes transfer.

Yancey et al. offer a compelling vision of first-year instruction, one that speaks not just to the goal of transfer but also to several priorities driving writing instruction today: genre awareness and writing in multiple genres (56), reflective practice (4), teaching key disciplinary concepts or building a "language for writing" (34), and situating and specifying discourses instead of teaching over-generalized "academic discourse skills" (1). TFT makes good sense—it makes sense that students are more prepared to see how their learning might apply in future writing situations if they are expressly and repeatedly asked to do so. If students imagine how new writing knowledge (whatever that is) squares with or complicates what they previously knew or if they are asked to modify their practices in new writing situations, then they are more likely to take this adaptive posture outside of our classrooms. The TFT curriculum thus focuses on stacking the odds for successful transfer by designing a climate for writers to practice it. In this way, we might say Yancey et al. maintain in their curricular vision a "glass as half full" perspective on transfer, to put it in David Brent's terms: these pedagogues acknowledge the complexities of transfer but maintain "that it can happen under certain pedagogical conditions" (Brent 404).

In their glass-half-full vision, Yancey et al. focus their attentions most on equipping the writer. The notion of building the writer's passport creates a stable

locus for instruction, a focus on what the instructor might arm the writer with that might help prevent future disorientation. And there is always more a transfer researcher or pedagogue might consider about the learner herself, including “less explored writerly factors such as language preferences, the degree to which certain habits and practices have become sedimented, and aspects of writers’ identities, cultures and prior experiences in particular communities” (Anson, “The Pop” 539). One writer famously and exhaustively considered in the transfer literature is Dave, the subject of Lucille McCarthy’s 1987 case study of how this writer wrote, and struggled, across the curriculum.

Dave is famous in our literature for being lost. McCarthy documents how he struggled unevenly as he wrote in his composition, biology, and literature courses with the pervading feeling that writing in each of those courses was profoundly different. He was a “stranger in strange lands,” it seems, because Dave believed “that he had no prior experience to draw from” to help him (qtd. in Yancey et al. 29). But Dave’s feeling of disorientation was unfounded, as from McCarthy’s perspective, “we know he had had related prior experience” (29). In other words, Dave may have just failed to see the *opportunity* for productive transfer of knowledge. Yancey et al. see this missed opportunity too. They read Dave’s difficulties as an “inability to call upon prior knowledge and, more generally, to frame the new in any way relating to the old” (29). And though they don’t say so explicitly, one assumes that Yancey et al. would believe that Dave *could have* been instructed out of his feelings of struggle and disorientation in different writing situations. A TFT approach might have stepped in to orient, guide, and equip Dave with a beefy conceptual framework that might have eased his sense that writing in these classes was so different.

I don’t quarrel with this assumption; Dave surely would have benefited if his composition course helped him develop flexible concepts for writing situations (rather than focusing more so on overgeneralized “academic discourse” skills or essay forms). But I wonder also if Dave wasn’t on to something in his feelings of being lost.

Dave’s disorientation reminds me of another writer profiled in a 2016 study of transfer: Chris Anson’s “Martin.” Martin is an accomplished academic and a prolific writer, by all accounts an expert. But this mastery is shaken when Martin undertakes the job of writing game summaries of his son’s Pop Warner football games for a local paper. Martin does a lot of things, even *everything*, right in trying to acquire this new genre, all things we would want our own writing students to do. He revises a first draft based on feedback he solicited from his kids (who laugh at the draft’s ornateness and academic-feel); he carefully studies the final edits made to his first revised and submitted summary in order to try to discern the conventions; he studies the genre “almost obsessively” (Anson,

“The Pop” 530). Martin’s summaries demonstrate his many competencies—“sophisticated vocabulary, expert control of syntax, a penchant for smart phrasing, organizational skills, rhetorical savvy, impeccable grammar” (531). But, in this particular context, Anson emphasizes, “such ability was beside the point” (531). Writing aptitudes are not, it seems, measured as qualities “in Martin” nor “in” his writing. The measure is much more “in the context”—in the moment, in this new rhetorical situation, in the response and changes by those controlling Martin’s writing, in the constraints controlling the genre at that moment, in that newspaper, with those particular editors. Even though Martin tried valiantly to read the nuances of writing in this context and made powerful even extreme efforts to adapt his writing knowledge to perform fittingly in this new context, he ultimately evaluates his performance on these summaries at best as a “self-determined level of C+” (531).

The question is *why*? Why is “Martin,” a veritable writing expert with a well-equipped “passport” doing all the right things to study and adapt to this new context, unable to feel success or acclimation in this writing situation? In a “spoiler-alert” twist, Anson reveals at the study’s end that *he* is actually Martin. Anson’s detailed self-study injects healthy skepticism into transfer, pouring out considerable volume to come much more to a “glass half empty” view (Brent 401) and leading him to several insightful implications. For one, Anson’s nagging disorientation demonstrates the need for what he calls a “principle of uniqueness” (Anson 541) applied to our constructs of ours or other writers’ selves, knowledges, and contexts. Rather than assume stabilities, “we must see every writer, and every context into which the writer moves, as a unique amalgam of situation and human agency” (Anson, “The Pop” 540). And just as the writer is never an orderly locus of rationally filed and deployable knowledge, neither are contexts, genres, or discourse communities stable and codifiable. Discourse communities, for instance, are not unified and clearly demarcated entities; they are better seen as at best “a fragmented social collective” (Anson, “The Pop” 537) that may or may not offer up finally legible conventions.

But this fluctuating uniqueness is in my read not the most significant take-away. Anson doesn’t much feature in his study those individuals who ultimately arbitrate, control, and change his summaries. Indeed, Anson pieces together *on his own* the specific changes made to his first summary in order to try to discern patterns and generate situation-specific knowledge about the expectations. Anson’s dogged pursuit of the genre’s logic is admirable—again, a process we’d hope our own students would do. But Anson’s self-determined inability to ultimately master the summaries, his inability to successfully transfer even in spite of his highly credentialed “passport,” makes me wonder: what if there was never a logic, not even a complicated and convoluted one, buried in the situation to be found at all? I won-

der too about those ghostly editors—what would they say about their evaluation and edits to Anson’s summaries? Could they explain why they made the edits they did? Were they prompted to, would the logic they articulated in hindsight be the same that provoked them in the first place to cross out that phrase and replace it with this one? That is, what if there wasn’t really any consistency in these writing situations that could yield conventions for Anson to discover and enact?

Certainly, the challenges experienced by Anson, and Dave, support the notion that writing in new contexts “require[s] continued situated practice and gradual enculturation” (Anson, “The Pop” 541), even more gradually than we may expect. But it is also true, I am underlining, that their experiences show that “full” enculturation may *never happen* and even may be impossible. Given all Anson tried in order to please the editors and avoid the red pen, we can conclude that he may never be able to overcome the slight discourse differences or idiosyncrasies held not just by different *people* editing his summaries, but different people holding those idiosyncrasies differently at different times with different drafts read in different environments and states of mind. Full acquisition of this new discourse—or, his sought-after “A+” performance on those summaries—might only ever occur if Anson *himself* occupied the empowered position of editor. To the point: given a fundamental changeability in every situation, a measure of disorientation or failure in writing *may never be finally nor fully overcome*. Disorientation may just be a *part* of what it is to experience writing. The most credentialed of “passports” and express efforts to transfer still cannot fully safeguard against feeling lost or failing to write successfully in one situation or another.

I am now deep into transfer skepticism; more than even half-empty now, I may have tipped over the transfer glass entirely. More skeptical views on the transfer question hold that instruction can never fully prepare students for specific workplace communicative contexts. Though instruction may be able to approximate some of those demands, this perspective holds, a gulf necessarily remains between the instructional and any “actual” context (Brent 401) in which writers might find themselves. But it’s not just that Anson or any other writer must acquire conventions and processes in the same context in which they are attempted. Instead, Anson’s case raises the implication that—no matter their preparation or detailed study of a context, no matter how reflective they are or the extent of their training and mentorship (both prior and in context)—writers still may fail. That is, “no matter how much we know about writing conventions or the writing process or the elements of style, we nonetheless may miscommunicate” (Kent, “Righting” xviii).

As is likely clear, in pushing to forefront this uncertainty, I am taking on a “postprocess mindset” (Kent, “Righting” xvii). Kent emphasizes the “interpretive complexity” (xv) of any communicative situation, one constituted by tri-

angular interactions among two or more language users and “a world of objects and events” (xiii). While language users, like Anson and Dave and the rest of us, do gain useful guidance from prior experience, interpretations, knowledge of conventions, and the like, the sticking point for Kent is that these guides never *ensure* that communication in any scene will be successful or effective. This instability is there essentially because all contexts are fundamentally “particular and unrepeatable” (Kent xiv) in their relations to varying writers, interlocutors, and material conditions, all which change moment to moment. And this changeability ensures that the Other’s interpretation and the communicator’s intent will never completely align. As such, all we can ever do is “*guess*, generally in a highly effective manner, about the meaning of one another’s discourse” (emphasis added, Kent xiii). And while guesses can be educated, they will never stabilize sufficiently into a reliable process, procedure, or *a priori* strategy. Instead, guesses are only ever “fleeting,” (Kent xiv) because every *situation* is only ever fleeting—different, contingent, susceptible, changing slightly moment to moment, and built upon interpretation, rather than stable conventions that hold still “out there” to be discovered.

This last point is how the “postprocess mindset” bleeds into a postpedagogical one. Postpedagogy aims the baseline of postprocess—again, “that nothing exists out there to ensure successful communication” (Kent, “Righting” xvii)—at the very premise of teaching. Postpedagogy questions if there is really a set of “somethings” out there to be learned, and that once those things are learned, then “satisfactory communication is more or less assured” (Kent xvii). Kent describes this common view of teaching as an “inoculation conception” (xvii) of writing, a belief held by many (especially those outside of writing studies) that instruction provides a vaccinating concoction precipitating total immunity from all “bad writing” in all future contexts. Kent’s image of inoculation reminds me of Yancey et al.’s passport metaphor. I do think the passport is more skeptical or tentative than the inoculation myth—a passport only gets you across borders and isn’t the *only* necessary condition for “successful travel.” But in spite of these differences in figure, I think Kent would be similarly skeptical of the transfer passport as it assumes that writing is amenable to systemic logic that is accessible, demystified, containable, portable in a passport, and remixable in new situations. Postpedagogy undermines this perceived travel security.

So why mingle these pedagogical discourses? Why attempt to put them into conversation? In short, I invite postpedagogy in here to more deeply situate transfer (even if some postpedagogy would resist such use out of hand). The disassembling energy of postpedagogy, though, can (de)constructively reimagine teaching and transfer. For instance, Kent’s work has had much to say (as I detail more below) about how postprocess shadows our pedagogical scenes differently,

scenes that will roll on anyway in spite of their contingencies (recognized or not), and our lack of control over them and over writing (again, recognized or not). As discussed previously, in his discussion of paralogics and ethics, Sidney Dobrin dismantles conceits of mastery, systemization, and the narrowed boundaries of pre-set and reinscribed knowledge in our instruction, especially in process teaching. Thomas Rickert's vision of post-pedagogy "declines to participate in the dialectics of control" ("Hands Up" 314) and "commodification" (315). As the uncertain and paralogic nature of both writing and teaching explodes pedagogy's drive to control and codify, in Paul Lynch's words, "we might encounter teachable moments, but no pedagogy can reliably occasion them. The best we can do is create the conditions in which they might occur" (xiv-xv).

Postpedagogical relinquishment of mastery and its focus on "conditions" sometimes end in calls to stop talking in terms of pedagogy at all. But at the same time, I notice, these claims do not seem too far off the insights of some transfer and other contemporary pedagogues, who also emphasize the need to face up to the many unknowns in writing experience and instruction. For instance, Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle's "writing-about-writing" pedagogy, which focuses on our own disciplinary knowledge, is based largely on accepting all that we actually *don't know* about writing, even in nearby academic contexts:

Our field does not know what genres and tasks will help students in the myriad writing situations they will later find themselves. We do not know how writing in the major develops. We do not know if writing essays on biology in an English course helps students write lab reports in biology courses. We do not know which genres or rhetorical situations are universal in the academy, nor how to help FYC students recognize such universality. ("Teaching" 556-7)

Also stressing what writing teachers cannot know, Matthew Kilian McCurrie questions career and college "readiness" as a guiding standard for education today. What can "readiness" possibly mean, McCurrie asks, given that rapid change seems to be the only constant in work and communication domains today? (Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner pose a similar question about skills and in light of ongoing "environmental, geopolitical, social, cultural, and economic" instabilities (126)). Novel and uncertain is the future students need to be "ready" for, as labor statistics project they may have more than ten different jobs before they're 40 and that "almost 70% of those jobs that don't exist today" (McCurrie). Given all that we don't know, the writing teacher surely cannot be the knower of or gateway to all modes and scenes of communication; she cannot "simply continue to tell students what we know and expect them to master it" (McCurrie).

Postpedagogy and transfer, in this way, are not so different. But postpedagogy willingly, even eagerly, risks the baby and the bathwater of writing pedagogy's entire enterprise. Postpedagogy exposes how certain constructs of teaching and learning interfere—those that, for instance, presume there are reliable conventions “out there” to learn and to take along for successful future writing “travel.” Putting postpedagogy on the transfer skepticism scale releases steady surety so thoroughly baked into to instruction's, including process instruction's, traffic in outcomes, strategies, and system. Postpedagogy can, in other words, help us imagine teaching (situated) writing (processes) with a baseline of uncertainty and contingency.

Teaching for transfer *with* situated uncertainty would change how we understand writing and learning writing. For one, it adjusts the view of Anson's and Dave's feelings of disorientation. Dave thought that writing in each of those classes was entirely different. As McCarthy and Yancey et al. read it, Dave instead could have seen those contexts similarly, or at least as more navigable, if he had been able to repurpose or remix what he already knew about writing. That's certainly still true. But, at the same time, Dave's perception of those differences is apt and valuable. Dave was right when he discovered that writing in college was not one accessible thing or even multiple, but basically still rationally navigable, things. Dave's sense of difference might have led him to reconceptualize writing as a deeply challenging and always different enterprise requiring continuous realignment and unsure attempts in situations with varying interlocutors that never hold still. That is, Dave's disorientation might have led him *both* to seek ways to transfer his writing knowledge *and* to complexly reckon with the notion that *difference* is a—maybe *the*—primary characteristic of writing, much more so than sameness or codified strategies that can traverse contexts. Dave might have discovered just how much one needs to discover about the contexts in which their writing is situated. Dave might have learned, too, that challenge and feeling lost in unfamiliar compositional terrain is, well, *normal*.

Anson's self-study already leads him to skeptical awareness of context-specificity and difference. Being unable to become excellent at that summary genre leaves him cautious on transfer, warning against approaches that suggest writing's messiness might be fully atomized by instruction. Anson rightly warns of the “dangers of simplifying and mechanizing the kinds of knowledge that facilitate transfer” (541). Knowledge may indeed help writers more ably navigate the “vast topography of discourse,” but, Anson stresses, “it does not create new, situationally determined knowledge” (542). Anson's study shows that what writers bring along with them to a new context isn't necessarily the key; teaching for transfer might also help writers experience *on-the-spot* what they don't know and need to know more about where they are writing. Situating writing processes in

our instruction, in some of the ways I imagine in the previous chapter especially, is one such method to begin doing so.

Injected with postpedagogy, Anson's experience resolves into productive and deep skepticism: situational knowledge, or better, those situational *guesses*, will not offer themselves up systematically or clearly or possibly at all. Failure is always an option in writing no matter how much instruction or experience or reflection tries to guard against it. Yancey et al. are interested too in failing and transfer, naming "failure" at their study's end among six issues they see as needing more attention. They think it is important to investigate how "challenge and failure facilitate transfer" (145), as they believe that those who can see writing failures as opportunities to learn, or those that will "make use" (145) of failing would be more apt to identify as writers. Significantly, the researchers reframe failure in writing as "critical incidents" (135); not as a lack or an impasse or disorientation, but as a challenge that prompts "learning in ways that perhaps no other mechanism can" (135). Failures here are opportunities. Challenges, if approached "critically," become more learning that in turn decreases the odds and occurrence of future failures. And ultimately, this logic suggests, with enough learning, all future failures could be avoided. Failures here, in other words, become moments to seize further control of writing.

It is a common and valuable trope to help learners shift their views on writing and failure, to recast miscommunications as not a worthless or "meritless performance" (Yancey et al. 135) but "failure-as-opportunity" instead (135). Resilience and reflection are desirable qualities in learners, and in writers. But arbitrating failure is still never going to be in any single writer's full control. Writers do learn from less-than-successful attempts—potentially from all attempts. But still, writing will never not be an asymptote: we approach the axis of mastery, but for infinity we'll never touch it. Writing is radically interpretive and relational, contextually bound, and *different*. Failures—small ones, grand ones, C+ performances—are a *feature*, not a bug in writing's enterprise. (And this strikes me as a terrifically important revelation and message especially for students who seem to fail often in writing as it's measured and monitored and policed in schools. For one it doesn't kowtow to the myth that writing is a bootstraps endeavor. One cannot *alone* engineer successful communication. Writing is always ours and it is always not ours.)

Teaching writing (processes) *from* uncertainty does not mean that teaching is impossible; it does not mean that there is nothing one can learn about the art of writing; it does not mean that writers can't learn anything about writing from their purported failures. It does not negate in any way the efficacies of teaching for transfer. It makes them stronger.

But teaching writing *with* uncertainty is recognizing that all writing acts are not controllable, that writing is a collaborative contextualized act in which mean-

ing is only ever approximated in exchange with others, never transmitted. Writing, like teaching, is *experience*: action, response, reflection, as Paul Lynch puts it, processes that yield knowledge but “guarantee[] nothing” (Lynch xxii). But, luckily, “uncertainty does not undermine wisdom. In the realm of praxis, wisdom without uncertainty is not wisdom at all” (Lynch xxii). To teach for transfer as context-contingent guessing is to see writing and its processes as improvisation.

PROCESS AS IMPROV

I’ve had occasion for several years around the holidays to see a Second City show at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. It’s a combination of scripted play and improv comedy, a show that exposes a fundamental truism of rhetoric *and* improv: play to your audience. With jokes about Jerry Springer; the woes of all the local sports teams, their owners, and stadiums; and more recently, the downtown streetcar, Second City’s performers earn laughs by knowing what the audience will identify with. Laughs fill the theatre by virtue of adaptation and apperception. Indeed, this traveling Second City show carries the spirit of its origins as an American improv group that has always been local.

The story of American improv starts with community work—a vision of theatre performance that connects audience and actors as players, and the stage with shared lived experience. Its origin story most often begins with the work of Viola Spolin, who through her Works Program Administration work in Chicago around 1939, began working with children on theatre games focused on “problems of the neighborhood in which the people who attended Settlement House lived” (Feldman 128) and which developed spontaneity, physicalization, focus, collaboration, self-realization, and creativity. Building upon Spolin’s social work, years later, Spolin’s son, Paul Sills, met David Shepard in Chicago and circumstances manifested such that they collaborated on a new kind of theatre, which would, in Shepard’s initial vision, be “close to where people lived so they could come without dressing up . . . where the circumstances would be informal; and where they could see plays that had to do with the life they led, and not with another class or another culture or another country” (qtd. in Feldman 129). Eventually, this work and involvement with other collaborators evolved by 1959 into Second City, the longest running American improv theatre group. Second City has yielded many stars in comedy and continues to provide workshops and education in its communities, keeping with Spolin’s vision of improv as foremost a way of being, a collaborative human art and experience that puts in close collaboration players and audiences.

Improv and its teaching—especially as a both a “worldview” and an “anti-authoritarian” art (Tung 59) by the preeminent improv “teacher-director” Viola Spolin—is an apt figure for situating writing processes and, more broadly, for

writing pedagogy after the deconstruction of general writing skills instruction. I mean by “figure” a concretized image, one like the “picture postcard” but enabling rather than inhibiting. Improv emphasizes how practicing writing is local acts of on-the-spot learning and best attempts. Improv as a final figure for situating processes emphasizes vulnerability: that all acts of writing involve risk in which bombing is always a possibility, and that processes are profoundly vulnerable to forces on ranging scales in excess of the writer alone.

I’ve long been interested in comedy, joke writing, and stand-up as a written and performed art built on deep audience awareness and attunement, as well as robust and ongoing revision. And as I hope is utterly clear now, I am arguing for writing processes as performative, embodied, emplaced and improvisatory *action*. But this connection to improv solidified for me ultimately with a passing reference in Kent’s discussion of postprocess. He writes:

[w]hen we write, we elaborate/passing theories during our acts of writing that represent our best guesses about how other people will understand what we are trying to convey, and this best guess, in turn, will be met by our readers’ passing theories that may or may not coincide with ours; this give and take, this hermeneutic dance that moves to the music of our situatedness, cannot be fully choreographed in any meaningful way, for in this dance, our ability to improvise, to react on the spot to our partners matters most. (*Post-Process* 5)

I see in Kent’s comments how writing and improv are physical and located, relational, emergent, and beyond the control of any single actor. Both require being *in* the moment and *in* the situation; they demand reading, listening, living, and responding to situational elements. Improvisation and writing are, simply and artfully stated, “openness of contact with the environment and each other” (Spolin qtd. in Tung 59). The most important choices and conditions in writing and in improv are those *right here*: what we can discern as constraints in the moment, in the space, with others. And both arts are conducted routinely with contingency built-in: we cannot know what reactions might be coming or how our partner players and audiences may act or respond. In raising improv, I don’t exactly mean to invoke it as a metaphor for effective teaching (e.g., Sawyer, *Structure*; Talhelm) though in the course of this discussion, I will consider the writing teacher as expert versus collaborator. I also don’t mean improv as a call for theatre exercises in the writing classroom (e.g., Barker; Esposito; Paden) even though these approaches are too valuable. Instead, like compositionists have with many other kinds of bodily arts, I look to improv to help me further imagine situating processes: as embodied, dialogic, and contingent activity.

Seeing writing practice as akin to other bodily arts is a now familiar move in composition. Some, for example, have linked writing to meditative, yogic, or otherwise inward-looking feeling and focusing practices (e.g., Campbell; Gal-lehr; Perl; Wenger). Others have made connections to music and jazz performance (e.g., Clark; Dixon and Bloome; Elbow, “The Music”; Haas and Witte); or to athletics and physical training (e.g., Hawhee; Chevillie; Rifenburg); or to live performance of various kinds (e.g., Bell; Fishman et al.; hooks; Love). Recently, Jennifer Lin LeMesurier invoked dance and its pedagogies to reconsider writing instruction, especially genre pedagogies (293). LeMesurier emphasizes context and the “performative immediacy” (293) of feedback in dance training, connecting the bodily uptake of learning dance as a way to expose the situated and embodied knowledges activated and inseparable from genre performances (293). I value the ways LeMesurier exposes in writing and in dancing relations between the writer/dancer and her contexts, and how feedback is collaborative and *in situ*. The adaptive, emergent nature of dance and its instruction is similarly why I turn to improv. And, like LeMesurier, I see improv as illuminating on two planes: first, the bodied work of dance and improv uncovers the phenomenology of writing processes as living performance; and, second, the pedagogical philosophies informing these arts are instructive for our own pedagogical thinking. At the same time, I see characteristics in improv that distinguish it from other bodily arts. One is the improviser’s relationship to performance audiences *and* to their stage collaborators, without whom there can be no writing and no improv. Other embodied arts like athletic or musical performance do not seem to entail interlocutors or social susceptibility in the overwhelmingly collaborative ways that improv or writing does (in fact, some of these arts, like Perl’s focus on the felt sense and the body, can feel focused entirely inwardly). Another distinct characteristic of improv is its endless possibility. The improviser/writer works in a wildly open system with all possibilities in language and scenario. What worked yesterday will never work in the same way today because too many contingent factors differently constrain a given performance. Improv, writing, and the teaching of both arts, in sum, must find ways to teach for difference. The improv pedagogy of Viola Spolin, I argue, is instructive for our writing pedagogies in our present disciplinary moment: one *after* postprocess, postpedagogy, and the deconstruction of general skills.

As with my view of situated processes, at the center of Spolin’s improv teaching and practice is *experience*. She opens her discussion of the theory founding her improv instructional practice asserting that,

Everyone can improvise. Anyone who wishes to can play in the theatre and learn to become “stageworthy.” We learn

through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything. This is as true for the infant moving from kicking to crawling to walking as it is for the scientist with equations. (3)

I hear Peter Elbow in these comments: everyone can write (and improv) without teachers. Experience is the guide. Spolin's "experience," moreover, strikes in two ways: first, more conventionally as repeated practice but also, more importantly, experience as *living* and observing and reflecting, or experience in the phenomenological sense. Or perhaps, in Dobrin's terms, in the sense of direct "participation" in communicative interactions ("Paralogic" 147). Or the experience of writing processes as lived, bodily action in place and time, a perspective I've framed in previous chapters with phenomenological and ontological perspectives (e.g., Ehret and Hollett; Leander and Boldt; Yagelski).

In practice, experience in Spolin's improv is about presence and focus, observation and description. For example, her first introductory exercise called "Exposure" puts half the students on stage and half in the audience and presents a simple prompt for action, "You look at us. We look at you" (Spolin 53). After palpable discomfort sets in, stage players are given an easy task by the teacher-director, like to count the seats in the theatre. This task becomes the felt introduction to the "focus" that is so central to each of Spolin's games. After the exercise concludes, players describe every moment as it unfolded in their bodily experience, as prompted by nonevaluative questioning: how did you feel at first standing on stage and looking at the players in the audience? How did your stomach feel? How did you feel when you were counting the seats? (Spolin 54-55). Through structured bodily experiences and nonevaluative descriptions, in this exercise, players begin to *feel* how focus, as the core of improv practice, is forged by *doing* something within the space where they are (and not in thinking about what comes next or the next line to say). In turn, focus on *doing* begins to mitigate fear, overthinking, uncertainty, and discomfort. In oversimplified terms, students slowly acquire improv by doing it and by describing it. I see similarities in my own practices of having students observe slices of their writing processes and describe them.

In Spolin's view as well, experience is embodied and emergent as it is also implicitly *emplaced*: "Experiencing is penetration into the environment, total organic involvement with it" (Spolin 3). Improv is inconceivable if it is not situated in place; improv is inconceivable if not unfolding and emergent, a series of tightly connected choices plucked from infinite possibilities. So too writing processes. In his study of everyday conversation as collaborative and improvisational, R. Keith Sawyer demonstrates through a simple eight-line improv scene how each

short line “provides its own unlimited possibilities” (*Creating* 13) from which “a combinatorial explosion quickly results in hundreds of other performances that could have been” (13). But exposing this kind of situational possibility and contingency in writing processes feels almost impossible. As Nedra Reynolds puts this problem: “we can follow a pedestrian through a street to see the moves she makes, the turns she takes, but we can’t follow a writer into a text—or it’s proven very difficult to ‘study’ how writers write” (166). Writing (n.) covers its tracks, severed from the emergent time and place of its production.

Chris Kreiser, in his discussion of improvisation and writing, helps further address this situated unfolding, or the improvisational quality, of writing. Kreiser discovers his connection between improv and writing instruction differently than I as he explores Quintilian’s understudied comments in the *Institutio Oratoria* about extemporaneous speeches, what constitutes improvisation, and the relations among preparation, skill, and performance. Kreiser takes from Quintilian what he identifies as an emergent model of improvisation (88), a working concept that helps him to overhaul his peer review workshop. Dispensing with the familiar review model in which students exchange drafts to tinker with a draft’s surface features or defer to the sense that the text is probably fine the way it is, Kreiser instead opens space for emergent possibilities through whole-class collaborative “interviews with the author.” Like the ethos of Jensen’s archival process journeys, as students proceed slowly through an author’s draft, they locate specific choices and ask the author why she made them. Students, author, and teacher all work together to imagine many possible alternatives, or multiple ways the choice might have been otherwise. In so doing, “the whole class improvise[s], collectively harnessing a developed repertoire of communicative moves, making choices within and for a particular rhetorical situation” (98). This is a powerful intersection of writing and improv as this practice embodies an essential rhetorical maxim: not just the faculty of writing acceptably in a situation, but of observing the *possibly* persuasive in each case. And Kreiser’s methods expose how effectiveness doesn’t just measure how a text *on its whole* is or is not suitable to its situation, but how *within* a given text, choices are impinged on by location, timing, and the possibility to be otherwise. In other words, he shows how process is perpetually susceptible to environmental forces at the level of tiny textual choices considered in collaboration with others.

And though he doesn’t emphasize it, in Kreiser’s methods too is an important leveling of participation imperative in practicing processes and/as improv. Kreiser, the writing teacher, serves in these author-interviews mostly as a participant, playing possibilities right alongside students rather than directing them. In improv instruction, as in writing, the role of the teacher is much considered. Most often, the teacher is a problem to be solved, just as they are and have been

in process, writing-about-writing, postprocess/pedagogy, critical and liberatory, expressivist, and other writing pedagogy discourses. As Charles Deemer says in 1967, the writing teacher is a “flagrant misnomer” (122). The contingent arts of writing and improv complicate common images of teaching and learning. As highlighted throughout my discussion, the (process) writing teacher can no longer if ever be master, authority, knowledge or standards bearer. Because contexts and factors and Others change, teachers cannot give a reliable “framework that explains the process of collaborative interaction” (Kent, *Paralogic* 165). So if we accept (and I think we do) the situatedness and susceptibility of writing, then the “nature of how we envision teaching is obsolete” (Dobrin, “Paralogic” 134). But of course observing need for a different role for the writing teacher has been one (repetitive) thing in the long history of composition; enacting it remains another. In a way, Viola Spolin too argues that improv teaching is postprocess and postpedagogy. In fact, she says explicitly, “Do not teach. Expose students to theatrical environments through playing, and they will find their own way” (42).

But what does that mean? What does it really mean to ask writing and improv teachers to “not teach,” to call them to “relinquish[] their roles as high priests” (Kent, *Paralogic* 166) and become instead “facilitators” (Smit 12), or “collaborators” (Kent, “Paralogic” 151), or “mentors” engaged in one-on-one dialogue (Breuch 143-144), or “co-workers” or “students themselves” (Kent, *Paralogic* 166)? And too, how can we afford to deconstruct writing teacher mastery in these ways given Downs and Wardle’s seemingly opposing but important call for writing teachers to be nothing less than credentialed disciplinary experts?

In her recent (postprocess) iteration of this call, Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch laments that descriptions of postprocess dialogic co-instruction remain too “broad and abstract” (144) to see how it might work. Others, including David Smit and Thomas Kent, focus on immense institutional change as the only change capable of repositioning the writing teacher as collaborator or mentor. For them, writing instruction should no longer be centralized but permeate across the curriculum with writing “professionals” situated as “facilitators” (Smit 12). For Downs and Wardle, the institutional problem is of a different sort: as they worry about the ongoing minimized positioning of first-year writing a service course, they imagine a more conventional view of a disciplinary expert teaching and a disciplinary novice learning. So as we wait for concrete co-instructional practices, or for the “glacial” pace of institutional change (Kent, *Paralogic* 170), or for our “full disciplinarity” (Downs and Wardle “Teaching” 578), and as we all continue trying to defeat the myth of universal writing skills, Spolin’s vision of the improv teacher-director can guide us at least a little, helping to resolve some of this seeming tension among expertise, impossibility, and getting out of the way in the teaching of writing.

In improv, there are no teachers and no students at all, only players. As Spolin emphasizes,

The need for players to see themselves and others not as students or teachers but as fellow players, playing on terms of peerage, no matter what their individual ability. Eliminating the roles of teacher and student helps players get beyond the need for approval or disapproval, which distracts them from experiencing themselves and solving the problem. There is no right or wrong way to solve a problem: there is only one way—the seeking—in which one learns by going through the process itself. (iii)

Especially important here is the work to arrest the drive of what Spolin calls “approval and disapproval.” This drive, “years in building” (9), is reflected in the “authoritarianism” (Spolin 8) permeating myriad social domains and roles: parent, teacher, employer, and so on (8). Approval/disapproval in the scene of learning has us asking and needing to know, is this good or is this bad? Am I good or bad? So ingrained is the desire to get approval, Spolin warns, that attitudes and language around approval/disapproval “must be constantly scourged” through “constant surveillance” (8) on the teacher-director’s part to ensure that she does not tread back into these familiar grooves of judgment. And this monitoring, it should be underlined, is not just to avoid language of criticism, but equally to avoid praise and approval. Praise, in many ways, is worse as it inevitably signals progress in the teacher’s terms and not the students’ own (Spolin 8).

To break the approval/disapproval paradigm, evaluation or assessment processes become especially important to Spolin’s improv. Evaluation occurs routinely after players have finished each performed scene or theatre game. Evaluation focuses on “direct communication made possible through non-judgmental attitudes” and questioning through “objective vocabulary” with “group assistance” and “clarification of the focus of an exercise” (Spolin 24). That is, non-evaluative and descriptive questions are posed to the players, including the teacher. All participants in this discursive process use the focus and aims of the given problem as the guide. As demonstrated above with the “Exposure” exercise, the teacher-director poses objective, descriptive questions about what the audience observed on stage (e.g., Was concentration complete or incomplete? Did they communicate or interpret? and so on). Evaluation is thus non-evaluative, contextual, and collaborative as the “teacher-director does not make the evaluation but, rather, asks the questions which all answer—including the teacher” (27). The student audience and the teacher-director are only able to engage the evaluation if they are so focused as to be also “in” the scene or work on stage and

involved themselves in the choices of the players in that performative moment. Thus, for evaluation processes to be effective “the teacher-director must become the audience together with the student-actors in the deepest sense of the word” (28).

Continuing emphasis on proximity and involvement, Spolin describes how “teaching” also happens through what she calls “side-coaching” (28), or interjections from the teacher-director contributed “in the same space, with the same focus, as the players” (28). These are nudges that call players’ bodily attention to where they are and what they are doing as a scene unfolds. Side-coaching is still non-evaluative and non-directive in that it does not tell what a player should do next, but instead gives voice to the “realities” unfolding in the scene (“See the buttons on John’s coat!” or “Write with a pencil, not your finger!”) or calls players to attune to the performance space (“Share your voice with the audience!” (29)). Because side-coaching is dictated by the very same situation and rules the players are inhabiting and constrained by, the teacher-director cannot rely on tropes or maxims or “disappear behind a veil or aphorisms regarding the . . . process” (Kent, “Paralogic” 151). Side-coaching is only ever spontaneous, on-the-spot, in the moment—a command fitting only to the moment it is uttered. For Spolin, as for Charles Deemer’s pedagogy of the happening, the improv and writing class must be “a class of students actively aware and participant, a class that does not swallow the ‘teacher’s’ remarks but *considers* them” (Deemer 123).

But with descriptive nonevaluative language and collaborative discussion and diagnostics of scenes, what guides improvement? If the teacher-director ruthlessly avoids evaluation, “good/bad” language, both praise for achievement and concern for mistakes or failures, how could growth possibly be achieved and measured? As Spolin poses this question in a manner more abstract, “How can we have a ‘planned’ way of action while trying to find a ‘free’ way?” (9). For Kent and other postprocess thinkers, this kind of decentered unpredictability means teaching is “impossible.” Writing is just too situational for there to be anything to teach, this view concludes, so the writing teacher must transform into a “collaborator” with relinquished authority dispersed across the curriculum. For Downs and Wardle, calling for instructors to be disciplinary experts and students to be novices would appear to conflict with postprocess deconstruction, even as they are too working toward the same (postprocess) goal of dismantling general-skills instruction.

However, these views are not necessarily contradictory. The writing instructor should, even must, have a range of knowledge and expertise—about language, grammar, language attitudes, composition research methods and findings, pedagogical histories and methods; threshold concepts like genre, kairos, exigence; process practices and habits, to name just a very few areas. At the same

time still though, that disciplinary expert, for all she knows, cannot claim expertise over the behaviors of language, writing situations, or situated processes in the world. Writing teachers, as anyone, cannot anticipate entirely what writers will encounter (Downs and Wardle, “Teaching” 556-7). The writing teacher or disciplinary expert, no matter their training, will never be a master of processes nor be able to define them in advance for our students or for themselves (just ask Chris Anson). The situational contingencies of writing in the world will always exceed even the most thorough and extended regimes of instruction. Said another way, being a disciplinary expert is not the same as being a misstep-free master of all writing acts themselves. As Dobrin says, “We cannot master discourse” (147). None of us. We are *all* only players. We and our students can become varying degrees of expert in the knowledge of writing studies, but that doesn’t ensure that we will practice writing in context without any failure or miscommunication, disorientation or uncertainty.

This characteristic uncertainty of writing and of improv means that the direction that *all* players must follow, including teacher-directors (as disciplinary experts or co-collaborators or something else), “is the demands of the art form itself” (Spolin 18). It is the very situation—the situatedness of writing and its processes—that is the “master.” Said another way in Spolin’s words, the master is the “needs of the theatre” (9) itself, “for the teacher too must accept the rules of the game” (Spolin 9). In Kent’s terms, similarly, this means that “*good writing* and *good reading*” cannot be objectively judged from some distanced position. The only measure is the “good sense” of some particular utterance in “some particular situation” (Kent, *Paralogic* 170). The demands of the *situation* in which writing finds itself, not the teacher’s or writer’s alone, must be met. Through improv, we see that writing can never be arbitrated between just teacher and student, no matter how dialogic that relation may be. Writing and its instruction is simply more collaborative than that: players (students *and* teacher-directors) inhabit, describe, and dialogue together with the given situation in which play unfolds, working to discern the dynamics of scene, genre, audiences, tools, discourses, purposes and so on. Writing *in its situation* is the guide.

In casting situated processes as improv, I linger on the stage—but not Donald Murray’s formal public stage for the performance of professional writers. Instead, I picture writing processes as a living stage of players, objects, responses, influences, constraints, Others. Situated processes as improv are never just our intentions, habits, or strategies alone. They are attempts, our best guesses as to what might work in the moment in which we find ourselves and the materials and spaces at hand. I hope my discussion of Spolin helps my reader picture differently the potentials of process instruction—our assessment, our relationship with genre, conventions, the rhetorical situation, and our images of the writing

teacher as *at once* a disciplinary expert *and* a player equally alongside our students. It is our responsibility as writing teachers to play our teacher-game too according to the demands of the situation. There may be some baseline writing facilities that might more easily cross boundaries—perhaps broad skills of fluency and language convention, or guiding schemas about genre, audience, adaptation (which each, at some point too, become *profoundly susceptible* to writing's *wheres*). Ultimately though we must recognize that “what we call writing ability may be very context-specific, a matter of knowing what we need to know or be able to do in whatever situations we find ourselves” (Smit 166). In other words, what we may call writing is improv.