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## Sitting, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Yearning: Reflections on Scholar-Shaping Techniques

As a body in motion, the writing-and-written body puts into motion the bodies of all those who would observe it. It demands a scholarship that detects and records movements of the writer as well as the written about, and it places at the center of investigation the changing positions of these two groups of bodies and the co-motion that orchestrates as it differentiates their identities. This ambulant form of scholarship thus acknowledges an object of study that is always in the making and also always vanishing. It claims for the body, in anxious anticipation of this decade's collapse of the real and the simulated into a global "informatics of domination," an intense physicality and a reflexive generativity. (Foster, 1995, p. 16)

Let us begin with yearning. That is why we are here, why we write and read, pursue scholarly dialogue, struggle with students no matter how brain-washed or calloused, muddle our way through often sorry institutions of higher learning. It is also why we sacrifice the joys of dancing, hiking, and making love for endless sitting and peering into the small. We are pulled

forward by the erotic yearning whose patron saint is Diotima; she who flickers brightly in young children in preschool playgrounds learning to swing on the monkey bars ecstatic about finding out how to count beyond nine, and who often retreats into the shadows of the dim halls of grade schools and colleges, banished by Rote and Convention.

As Plato knew, and developmental scientists have studied in more intricate detail, that yearning is bodily, reflecting cascades of neuropeptides, tingling in the cells, a vigor in the muscles, a vibrancy in the breath, a strong heartbeat. It is prelinguistic, there in the womb. It moves through gesture and story into conceptual language.

How is that yearning schooled?

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A walk through the halls of a university, during regular classes or a conference, often has a funereal feel. Lifeless limbs, slumped torsos, dull faces, few eyes brightly attentive, stillness except for the mobile lecturer and shiftings in the seats. It's not the stillness that haunts, but the disengagement. The stillness in the reading room of a city library has a different feel. Or in a preschool when the children are drawing or listening to the reading of a story. Or in the meditation room, zendo, or movie theater. The stillness in these places communicates an interest, an engagement in what is there.

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I began my teaching career in 1962 in Los Angeles in an educational milieu under the influence of Carl Rogers and his experiments with student-centered learning. The Ford Foundation had given him a very large grant to work with the entire network of schools run by the Immaculate Heart Sisters, ranging from grade schools to their college, involving students, teachers, parents,

and administrators in regular group sessions. Having emerged from two decades within the medieval pedagogies of Catholic schools and seminaries, I was immediately aware of how radical Rogers' central idea was that pedagogy should be shaped and modified constantly by paying attention to what actually was happening among the students in response to teaching, that course design should be constantly readjusted to what was being learned from the students, particularly non-verbally—from facial expressions, postures, gestures. I began what has now become a 30-year project of implementing a wide range of experiments based on Rogerian philosophy. I learned from my first years of teaching to be a careful observer of the classroom situation, not just, or even centrally, how students performed on homework or tests, but whether or not they looked lively, when they perked up, when they were distracted. I engaged in many ways of rearranging the classroom situations and the content of the courses to evoke more active engagement on the part of students.

By 1967, I had begun to study a variety of body practices that helped me pay more nuanced attention to the specific use of the body in the classroom, not only individual usage, but more general body practices—typical styles and ranges of movement permitted for teachers, for students; the bodily arrangement of the classroom, desks, lectern, etc. At the same time, I began to develop a wider range of strategies—awareness exercises, simple body movement exercises, breathing exercises—to create a different sort of academic space.

With the additional help of Michel Foucault's analyses of the body in institutions, I became specifically aware that the comportment of bodies in the classroom was not a trivial accident, but a thoughtful design derived from very old notions of how the body anchors mainstream values about authority, community, and the nature of mind. Inspired by his project, I have

carried on my own study of the history of the body in the academic institutions where I have spent my adult life.

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Since 1989, I have held faculty positions in three small private graduate schools whose students are typically in second or third careers, with an average age of around 40. The schools all emphasize experimental learning and expressive arts. The atmosphere is informal compared to older and more prestigious institutions. Given that environment, I have found the responses to the following experiment, which I often do, revealing:

I will come to a classroom early and arrange the mobile desks into several rows, facing towards the front of the room. I leave. When it is time to begin, I return to the classroom. Without fail, the students have occupied the desks as I have arranged them. I begin lecturing in an atypical formal style seated behind a table in front of the room. After a short while, I ask them how they feel. “Bored,” “Stiff,” “Wanting to leave,” “Intimidated,” come the typical responses. It never occurs to them to change this very old school form unless they are explicitly invited to do so.

The results are instructive in showing how ready even adults are to be subjected to the external forms of shaping even though they are uncomfortable and distasteful.

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Marcel Mauss introduced the phrase "techniques of the body" to designate various body-shaping practices within a culture or particular community (Mauss, 1973). These include the most obvious and deliberate forms of body-shaping present in methods of exercise, dance, sports, physical therapy, etc. But more importantly, they also include everyday, non-thematized practices—infant-holding methods, the use of tools, walking, sitting. He called attention to this obvious but rarely noticed fact that simple activities which we tend to think of as "natural"—

sitting, diving, digging trenches—are highly evolved, culture- and gender-specific ways of shaping individuals according to the peculiar needs and aesthetic of that culture. These techniques accomplish two things. On the objective side, they give habitual shape to the plastic bodies of our birth. On the side of subjectivity, they help create our body-images, our felt sense of self, the body-schema. That body schema locates us within the perceived world; it forms the basis for our sense of our boundaries, where I stop and you begin; how responsive I am to outside information and how permeable to human intercourse. The shaping process is defined and transmitted in our social institutions: religion, the military, fashion and the media, sports, art, orthopedics. They reflect the tenacious forces of gender, ethnicity, and social class. Styles of shaping bodies parallel other expressions of a society's tastes in such forms as architecture, music, dance, and art.

Because of their constant presence in our lives, techniques that are practiced in schools occupy a crucial role in the development of our mentalities. Colleges and graduate schools, the main foci of this essay, are particularly important because it here is where future teachers learn their strategies of working with younger children and adolescents, and where the dominant notions of intelligence are created. Like the others, scholar-shaping techniques seem so natural and close-to-hand that it is hard to notice that they are highly structured repetitive practices with a long history, intimately linked to the anchoring in neuromuscular pathways and rhythms of fluid exchange of certain beliefs about mind, self, and the nature of society.

Early sources of these techniques in the West can be found in Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. But those practices were a far cry from the present. Plato's ideal of learning took place within a gymnastic ("nudic") homoerotic context. Bodily development achieved through

gymnastics and erotics was not extracurricular, but an essential developmental phase of the journey towards more abstract appreciations of reality. Aristotle's pedagogy, more modest, was peripatetic, or “ambulant,” in Susan Leigh Foster’s suggestive turn of phrase. Theory emerged from a matrix of moving, sensuously contacting male bodies.

But those approaches were vandalized, never really to enter the mainstream pedagogy of the West where clerically-garbed Christianity came to hold sway. The academic body practices to which most of us have been subjected have their origins in the medieval European universities, which themselves grew out of Christian monastic notions of reason and divine authority. The monastic orders had highly articulated notions of body practice aimed at channeling the passionate tendencies of devil-prone flesh to the superior knowledge of spirit embodied in absolutist religious authorities: abbot, bishop, and pope. Details of kneeling, sitting in chapel or chapter room, prostrating, walking, monitoring the eyes, and carrying the body through the various rituals of the Church were minutely regulated. In the notorious formulation of Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, the body of the religious was to be formed into an old man’s staff, a passive instrument in the hands of superiors who were directing the spiritual battles against Satan.

A strange bifurcation happened as the original universities—Bologna, Padua, Paris, Cambridge—became more secularized with the proliferation of disciplines. Scientifically minded faculties increasingly challenged the role of dogmatic content in their curricula, attempting to inhibit religion’s impact on emerging disciplines of physics, chemistry, biology, and humanities. But the body practices themselves, which substantiated the old religious ideals, escaped notice. Even with the secularization of the major universities in the 19th and 20th centuries, the traces

of the monastic body practices under the layers of impacts from industrial and electronic culture were never questioned, except by those on the margins: Montessori, Steiner, Dewey, Freire, and a few others.

Critical attention to these medieval scholar-shaping techniques against the backdrop of alternative emancipatory practices developed during the past 150 years, might create a more fertile learning environment, and a challenge to unquestioned intellectual sensibilities created by the traditional practices. In the present situation, it is important to note that the scholar's body is not only the plastic recipient of forms imposed from without; it is just as much, if not more, the locus of resistance and creativity. What might it be like to sense more fully and to move more freely in classroom space, to stand, to turn and look around, to sit in different configurations, to speak with each other with a more refined sense of each other's faces, movements, the felt sounds of each other's voices? How might we redesign seminars and lectures to emancipate ourselves from the sense of isolation perpetuated by intellectual pretensions and combat? What might we revision about the nature of "society" within that intercorporeal matrix? Would these moves make any difference in achieving the goals of education?

What are these practices? As Sherry Shapiro asks in her *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body* (Shapiro, 1999), where is the body in the curriculum?

There is, of course, the obvious location of "The Body" in higher level curricula of humanistic studies, the plethora of texts with "Body" in the title or subtitle, the endless conferences and debates about the current viability of Merleau-Ponty, Kristeva, Lacan, Derrida, Irigaray, ... And yet, what about the weary bodies that are required to sit there listening to all the babble, struggling to stay awake at night keeping up with the pages of high-level gossip about the

intellectualized, genderized, ethnicized, bruised body, that body right before our noses revealed  
in:

patterns of sitting in desks and chairs,

the ranges of body movement and gesture permitted lecturer and students,

tones of voice, calm, rushed, excited, pedantic, pleading, sarcastic, contentious,

compliant,

postures elicited by the furniture of the lecture hall or the seminar room,

patterns of bodily relations between teacher and students, students and students.

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It was an unseasonably cold week in May 1993 in the countryside a few kilometers west of Vienna where a small team of us Americans engaged in body practices had been invited to conduct a seminar for about 50 Austrian and German psychiatrists. Schloss Plankenstein, perched on a cupcake hill, owned by a cranky architect who had embarked on a many-year project of restoring it for a conference center, was decaying and stone cold.

I conducted an opening evening session in the great hall which had been arranged for the conference so that several rows of chairs were at one end, with most of the very large space open. As I often do, I began asking the professionally garbed middle-aged participants to sit quietly, letting themselves become aware of their bodies—their experiences of breathing, feelings in various regions of their bodies, tensions, memories and images, anticipations, . . . After some moments of quiet exploration of that inner world, I invited them to stand up and to begin to move slowly about the room noticing any promptings coming from their bodies about how to move. Within a few moments, many agitated movements and sounds started up. Soon

most of the people were shaking their arms about violently seemingly lashing out at phantom demons in the air; others, jumped up and down angrily. Harsh and loud sounds, filled with agony. I felt afraid of this extreme and unfamiliar reaction to an exercise I had done with countless groups, not knowing where it might end, or if it would on its own accord.

After about thirty minutes of these apparently disjunctive jerkings, sobbings, and yellings, the movements slowly began to subside, with the group finally coming to rest, their suits and dresses disheveled, soaked with sweat. In the reflective discussion that followed, they reported that the invitation to move about and pay attention to their bodily messages opened up long-stored angry memories of spending so much of their lives rigidly quiet in classrooms and lecture halls. Many of them were surprised to find out how overwhelmed by rage they were by just a few moments of quiet body awareness, followed by an invitation to follow the body promptings to move.

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Some time later, I participated in a conference at Cambridge of ninety philosophers whose commonality was that we were applying our philosophical education outside of academic philosophy departments. I was co-leading a seminar on the body and education with Joanna Hodge, a feminist philosopher from York. I typically do simple awareness exercises to use as substance for my theoretical investigations. But I found that difficult in this situation because the old lecture hall in King's College, with its high formal lectern, and rigidly placed desks left little space for any movement, even the smallest and simplest kind. Professor Hodge remarked that the design of these great universities left little opportunity for humans moving through them to leave their traces. The lecture halls, like the mind they embody, exist in some non-temporal space, unaffected by human experience.

Cambridge architecture is hardly trivial, being one of the breeding grounds for modernist

philosophy. The notions of self and community, as articulated by Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, can be taken more as a description of the sensibilities shaped by that environment than as a reasoned account of the nature of reality. The impact on bodies of the lecture hall and the unspoken rules of bodily comportment both reflect and augment the fragmented body-schema of Western social thought. Easy access to the intercorporeal scholarly community is hindered by the carefully divided chairs and desks, arranged in geometric rows, facing straight ahead, so that the students see only a few backs of fellow students and the lonely expert in front. The lecturer reads his or her preconceived lecture from an isolated podium to a genteelly quiet audience to whose bodily reactions he or she pays little attention in favor of keeping to the important thoughts. The students are absorbed in taking private notes, perhaps reading the lecture while the lecturer also reads it. To an alien observer of the visible behavior in the hall, a Hobbesian subjectivistic, individualistic description of the event would seem perfectly apt. Here is a person authoritatively speaking words supposedly mirroring interior thoughts to a collection of other persons who are absorbed in their own interiorities. What kind of connections might be imagined as taking place between these various ‘atoms?’ Since there is no felt and commonly recognized intimacy among the participants, no sense in which one truly experiences the other, “relativism” and “solipsism” are accurate descriptions of the situation. The extent of mutual comprehension can only be ascertained through social constructs of tests and consensus. “Solipsism” and “Relativism” are poignant abstract depictions of the alienated sensibilities created by these habitual physical arrangements.

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Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues studied the effects of academic forms on students in French universities. He describes the classical academic space:

It is in all its peculiarities in which the academic institution locates the teacher—the rostrum, the chair from which a French professor holds forth, his position at the point where all attention converges—that he finds the material conditions to keep his students at a distance, to require and enforce respect, even when, left to himself, we would decline it. Physically elevated and enclosed within the magistral chair which consecrates him, he is separated from his audience by a few empty rows. These physically mark off the distance which the profane crowd, silent before the *mana* of the word, timorously respects and abandons to the most well-trained zealots, pious lesser priests of the professorial word. *Deus absconditus*, remote and untouchable, protected by obscure and alarming spiritual ‘authorities’ (so many mythologies to him), the professor is in fact condemned by an objective situation more coercive than the most imperious regulation to dramatic monologue and virtuoso exhibition. (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 10)

The stark outlines of bodily education in Vienna, Cambridge, and Paris set in clearer relief the demands placed on scholarly bodies, which are blurred in the seemingly more egalitarian pedagogies of the United States. Despite long struggles for democratic structures in public education in the United States, the immigrant model of “Mind” stubbornly persists; it continues the Old World tradition that the higher the mental levels of education, the more irrelevant and ideally invisible are bodily activities. A healthy mind does of course require a healthy body, just as the classrooms should be clinically clean: but, like the hallways, the clean body is merely the container for the true work of academe: ethereal mental gymnastics.

We are coaxed to become so disconnected from our lived experience that it is difficult to grasp

the impact on our intellectual viewpoints of decades of sitting in such environments. Our plastic neuromuscular physiologies are profoundly shaped by them, especially during the early years when the protean bodies of highly mobile and curious young people are squeezed into the narrow, abstract molds of time and space within which they will move for the greater part of our lives. That mold creates an experiential matrix within which some intellectual notions seem more compelling than others. No surprise that we have little sense of intercorporeality when we get around to thinking about the nature of our social connections!

There is a strange chasm between preschool body practices and those of subsequent academic grades. Preschool educators and theorists are fully aware of the crucial role of the body in learning: playful and imaginative movement, flexibility, and sensory enrichment. Encouraging the native liveliness, endless experiment and discovery in children's bodies is a commonly held principle for organizing learning at these ages. At that age, the brilliant meaningfulness of preverbal expression is still a palpable reality. Those close to it take it into account.

Infants' initial interpersonal knowledge is mainly unshareable. . . , attuned to nonverbal behaviors in which no one channel of communication has privileged status with regard to accountability or ownership. Language changes all of that. With its emergence, infants become estranged from direct contact with their own personal experience.

Language forces a space between interpersonal experience as lived and as represented. And it is exactly across this space that the connections and associations that constitute neurotic behavior may form. But also with language, infants for the first time can share their personal experience of the world with others. . . . (Stern, 1985)

Cultivation of a lively body abruptly ceases at grade school, if not kindergarten, where formal content takes precedence over the embryological unfolding of native intelligence and curiosity

in the organism itself. The assumption, of course, is that with age comes a new kind of demand for learning, the development of an intelligence that requires quiet, centeredness, and discipline. The old preschool emphasis on the organic unity of the learning process is replaced by the dualistic division between the so-called central courses of the curriculum and the periphery—Physical Education, Music, Art, Crafts. And even there, when schools have funds for them, these bodily activities are often taught in formulaic rationalistic ways, geared towards performance and conformity to established forms of throwing, kicking, jumping, dancing, and drawing. The cultivation of the natural pleasures of physical expression are replaced by an outward focus on “the way things are done.” The squirming, gurgling, swinging, musical, boundlessly energetic bodies of the young are squeezed into Procrustean desks, long periods of stillness, and geometric time where they will be molded for the next 16 or 20 or more years until they emerge as full-blown members of the dimwitted community we now have, drained of the imagination, vitality, ingenuity, and resilience need to resolve the many horrible crises that face us as a species.

For those few of us who go on to become teachers, a different dynamic takes place.

We get to enjoy the high drama of the performance art of teaching, liberated from the former restraints on our movements and gestures.

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As with any analysis of social types, it is easy to forget the many exceptions: the lively seminar, the brilliantly crafted and inspiring lecture to hundreds of attentive students with well-designed visuals delivered by a contactful professor. These remarks are about norms, standard designs, and underlying philosophies which individuals often subvert. Yet even appearances of subversion bear scrutiny, because the role of the body has been so deeply misunderstood.

For example, the privileged small seminar conducted around the table, is a form with more potential for liveliness and participation. This may be a departure, or simply another way of the professor's maintaining a more informal authority, like the paterfamilias at the dinner table, benign yet unmistakably in charge. It bears careful analysis in the actual situation. Similarly with circular arrangements and others. Bourdieu casts his suspicious eye even on the most benign of locations:

. . . in a university which retains its traditional identity in all other respects, round-table teaching fails to stop expectations and attention converging on one individual. It is he who has guarded all the signs of professorial status, beginning with the privilege of speaking and the implied privilege of controlling the speech of others. (Bourdieu, 13)

### **Emancipatory Practice**

It was like the moment when a bird decides not to eat from your hand, and flies, just before it flies, the moment the rivers seem to still and stop because a storm is coming, but there is no storm, as when a hundred starlings lift and bank together before they wheel and drop, very much like the moment, driving on bad ice, when it occurs to you your car could spin, just before it slowly begins to spin, like the moment just before you forgot what it was you were about to say, it was like that, and after that, it was still like that, only all the time.

Marie Howe, "Part of Eve's Discussion"

What might we do with what we are given?

In writing this text, I kept bumping up against a certain frustration that has to do with my desire

to communicate in this short piece how to go about creating more body-friendly academic forms. It seems so simple to me, and yet I know that people like myself and Sherry Shapiro have spent decades learning the subtleties of these practices, the depths of supporting the native movements and perceptions of bodies, and of helping them press fresh words into the world. So I must face the fact that all I can do here is suggest lines of future collaboration between the many rich resources of body practices and those many teachers and students who feel a need for more lively and revolutionary learning.

Any significant changes in scholar-shaping techniques can be effectively implemented only as a result of widespread dialogue and consensus in which certain commonly held assumptions about the proper comportment of the body need to be called into question.

The need for such consensus has been brought home to me by many unhappy results from experiments I have tried over the years. For example, I have worked with my classes to transform a widely held mistaken assumption that getting up and stretching or moving quietly about the classroom or simply standing up for awhile are “distractions” from proper scholarly behavior. I have had some modest success in creating a more organic academic form where these kinds of movements are easily integrated both into lecturing and discussion. Students punctuate their sitting with quiet stretching, changing positions from chair to floor, walk quietly, etc. In such an atmosphere, where bodily movements are explicit themes of communal reflection, they cease being distractions and become sources of a more alert, less draining intellectual atmosphere. But when my students behave this way in other classes where there is no reflection on the somatic assumptions and no agreement on their appropriateness, they are seen as disruptive and even rude. In changing the physical setup of the various rooms we work

in, particularly the arrangements of furniture, we have been rightly criticized for being inconsiderate of other classes who prefer the more standard arrangements. The intensity of the negative feedback about the simplest of departures—standing quietly in the back of the room after a period of sitting, stretching, quietly walking about, altering the arrangements of desks and lecterns—has made me aware of how important the forms are in maintaining what is assumed to be the somatic basis for an academic community, and how these forms, like psychological defenses, are to be altered only with caution and respect.

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F. Matthias Alexander, the Tasmanian vaudeville actor who went on to create the Alexander Technique popular among actors and artists, developed a body practice which he called “inhibition,” using a sense somewhat unlike the most common usage. The practice is used to interrupt the mechanical flow of accustomed bodily reactions long enough to allow something new, hopefully fresh and more useful, to occur. For example, as one gets up out of a chair, the Alexander teacher, by the use of verbal instructions or a very light touch, interrupts the automatic habit of standing up. In that brief gap, something minutely different is allowed to happen, the moment of grace in Marie Howe’s poem when we have just the slightest opportunity to find what is fresh.

In his essay “Inhibition as a Good Word,” (Alexander, 1969, pp. 51ff.), he applies this notion to an author-client whose stress is so severe that he cannot carry on his work. Alexander suggests that during his working day he should deliberately *stop* and make a break at the end of each half-hour’s writing, and should then either do fifteen minutes’ work in breathing exercises, or take a walk outside before resuming writing. At first, the author did not follow

this advice, continuing to work four hours at a stretch without a break, stressed, depressed, and unproductive. As they discussed the situation, Alexander detailing the deleterious effects of such patterns of work, the author argued, “But surely, it must be a mistake to break a train of thought?” Alexander replied, “it should be as easy to break off a piece of work requiring thought, and take it up again, as it is to carry on a train of thought while taking a walk with all its attendant interruptions, and that this should be possible not only without loss of connection, but with accruing benefit to the individual concerned (p. 60).”

Alexander’s notion of “inhibition” is a very useful and easy-to-apply first principle for thinking about how to deconstruct the conventional scholar-shaping practices: interrupt any of familiar structure of the classroom or of bodily comportment, and observe what happens:

Inviting short periods of silence combined with sensory awareness.

Sometimes subverting expectations of bodily comportment. For example, sit in a desk in a place in the room where the teacher never sits.

Punctuate segments of a lecture or discussion with a brief simple group movement or awareness exercise, instead of just running on. For example, inviting the students to change their locations in the room, or their postures.

A second operative principle is to devote some quiet time to heightening awareness of scholar-shaping habits:

Experience of this posture

Breathing awareness

Bodily reactions to the teacher, to other students

Such simple techniques are possible even within the most rigid of classical academic settings. Like sculptors working with stone, and poets with debased languages, we can make something new from what is here. Even when operating in such an overdetermined somatic milieu as a formal lecture hall with five hundred students, we can turn our attention for brief moments to breathing, sensing, and very small body movements, so that the active role of the body is not totally submerged under the heavy oak and stone designed by monks and kings.

Intimately connected with those kinds of reflections are deliberate strategies of change. When one gets the hang of this, it is easy to construct various experiments to raise the consciousness of the body in the curriculum and to support it enormous resources for change:

For example, I find it very useful to have the students sit quietly and reflect on the shifts of bodily experience between outside the classroom just before class and inside; and periodically during the class to pause for a couple of moments to call attention to sensations.

Changing one's posture and location in the room.

Trying out very different bodily forms such as moving while the teacher lectures, stretching, lying, etc.

Encourage the use of quiet and simple shoulder-rubbing or head-holding to relieve the tension of working adult students who are sometimes in class for eight hours at a stint, having to return home to families.

Reflection on extrinsic factors with an eye towards deliberate change of structures:

furniture arrangement,

lighting

temperature, air circulation

ambient noise

In all of these techniques, the goal is more effective learning. The purposes of these bodily attentions are not psychological—for health or relaxation—but to help students be more alive and active in the learning process. The assumption is that when students are most vital, alert, relaxed and supple they will be most ready to profit from this particular classroom event.

### **Words and the Body**

I do not want to be a windowless monad—my training and trainers opposed subjectivity strongly, I have struggled since the beginning to drive my thought out into the landscape of science and fact where other people converse logically and exchange judgments—but I go blind out there. So writing involves some dashing back and forth between that darkening landscape where facticity is strewn and a windowless room cleared of everything I do not know. (Anne Carson, 1999, p. vii)

There is a circularity between emancipating the body from the burden of conventional scholar-shaping techniques and freeing academic language. For writing anchors the emancipation, makes each step out of the imprisoned silence real, carries it forward towards the next challenge. Emancipatory body practices without language become purely personal delights, like a good movie, unshared. Like the claiming of authority for excluded knowledges from women and tribal cultures, the knowledge of the sensitive and moving body needs to emerge into the world of language to gain its place in the social world. Making a place for the kind of fresh knowing that is born out of the experience of these practices requires breaking the straitjacket

of academic linguistic conventions, a body-friendly scholarship. We need more crossings between experienced movers and serious scholars whose writings bear distinct traces of lifetimes of the steps, leaps, and twirls from which they emerge.

Liberating the body from its weight so that it can follow its intellectual yearnings with flexibility and sensitivity.

Liberating the text from its weight so that it can more accurately carry forward the intelligence that emerges from bodily memory, sensing, and movement.  
Inhibition for bodily comportment and for academic writing.

The disruption of the onrush of paragraphs with topic sentences all logically strung together in an apparently seamless text laced with scholarly references for the supposed source for every phrase opens the space for the new and fresh words to emerge. The newly flexible scholar is freed to invite into that space echoes from remote regions of a new body, left out in the old curriculum. Discard high level gossip that buries fragments of serious and valuable thought under the toneless density of endless chatting about who said what when, why their words were slightly off, or really groovy, or what they might have been saying if they had a chance at the latest fashions. Like their bodily sources, the texts reflect the fears of entering an often hostile, unsafe world, where degrees, grants, and financial security are held up as threats. Underneath the formalisms, body and academic, lies anger about having to negotiate such unpleasant streets and conference rooms.

In the final months before his death, Italo Calvino reflected on the context of his life's work and wrote that "my working method has more often than not involved the subtraction of

weight. I have tried to remove weight, sometimes from people, sometimes from heavenly bodies, sometimes from cities; above all I have tried to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language.” (Calvino, 1988, p. 3) Those of you who read Calvino, know that by “weight” he did not mean “seriousness” or “gravitas,” but the ponderousness and heavy despair that easily beset us in the face of the unspeakable horrors of recent history, the kind of weight that keeps us from going on, even thinking of alternatives and pursuing them with courage. Commenting on Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he writes:

His novel shows us how everything we choose and value in life for its lightness soon reveals its true, unbearable weight. Perhaps only the liveliness and mobility of intelligence escape this sentence—the very qualities with which this novel is written, and which belong to a world quite different from the one we live in. (p. 7)

Anne Carson’s *Economy of the Unlost* juxtaposes Simonides of Keos, whose poetry had to be pared down to fit memorial stones, and Paul Celan, who had to fit his poetry into the German of his people’s executioners. Speaking of Celan’s post-Holocaust struggles, she writes: “although he described German as a language stuffed with falsity and gagged with ‘the ashes of burned-out meanings,’ he nonetheless chose this surface for his poetic work, paring it down to an idiolect that is so extreme a formation it bears about the same relation to standard German as a crystal of granite to a range of hills.” (Carson, 112)

Can we purge our stuffed academic texts of their burned-out meanings, so that their readers will be caught by the crystalline facets of our modest wisdoms, so our windowless rooms are cleared of what we do not know?

Schools are the factories of language; their pedagogies will be crucial in determining whether the move from the preverbal to the verbal creates an adult who is in contact with the world, or one who exists depressed in a chronic state of alienation and dissociation. The great fissure between those worlds is the region explored by the poets, novelists, and the creative non-fiction writers, where the density of language has the feel of gesture, kicking, and gurgling. Neither the human science texts nor the pop psychology books nor many of the rich intellectual texts successfully bridge the gap between the non-verbal and the verbal. It takes a great deal of communal work to do this, and like with body practices, inhibition is crucial, or Calvinic enlightening, or Carsonic excision. Eliminating the gossip, the attempts to impress, the extra burdens which obscure the brilliance, the stressful, the ambiguous. Liberating the body from chronically false facial expressions, stressful posturing, and liberating the text so that it elicits our deeply felt yearnings for knowing and thoughtful action.

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