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Affective Materialities: Places, Technologies, and Development of Writing Processes

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Abstract: Extending research on the relationships between materiality and process, this article examines how writers' preferences for particular materials—places, technologies, objects—develop over time. With a specific focus on how materials affect writers and how writers are affected by their writing tasks, this article considers how writers' histories of turning toward and turning against materials shape their writing processes. The findings of this research show that writers' material practices register both materially and affectively and are echoed in writers' processes years later and shape how processes evolve as writers learn to write in new contexts.

Introduction

A renewed focus on the materiality of writing—the where-ness of writing, the thing-ness of writing—has invited a re-examination of the writing process with focus on writing *in situ*: the material contexts where writing takes place. Through this renewed focus on process as related to technology (Yancey and Davis; Takayoshi), place (McNely et al.), and combinations of the two (Pigg, "Emplacing"), scholars have revealed that writers develop and enact a range of preferences in the materials they choose to employ during the writing process. Thus far, such examinations have most often focused on writing processes at a particular moment in a writer's life, one often associated with an identifiable writing task or session: for instance, a freelancer's use of multiple social media platforms to invent his online persona (Pigg, "Coordinating"). Others have examined a wider range of materials (places, people, technologies, animals, objects) but still in service to a particular moment: for instance, undergraduates', graduates', and professors' processes of completing assignments and scholarly projects (Prior and Shipka) and scholars' processes of completing books and dissertations (Micciche). To date, however, no study has actively documented or theorized how these scenes of writing come to take shape over time—how writers come to develop preferences for the materials they adopt and discard as part of their evolving writing processes.

In this article, I take up this task by providing accounts of two writers, Maggie and Silvio, using a case study methodology.{1} Through Maggie's and Silvio's cases, I show that writers' material practices are more than choices born out of idiosyncratic preferences or from practical concerns like: managing attention (Pigg, "Emplacing"); aiding memory (Prior and Shipka); or enacting identities (Alexis "Material"). Rather, practices have both a material and an affective history that influences and echoes throughout writers' evolving processes. While the notion that process evolves is not new, this study shows that writers' evolving material practices are also shaped by an affective history of repeatedly turning toward and against materials, resulting in an accumulation of affect that binds or "sticks" writers and materials together (Ahmed, *Cultural*).

Before outlining Maggie's and Silvio's cases in detail, I first outline the concept of affect on which this study is based: specifically, affect as an evaluation (Ahmed, "Happy") that sets life into motion (Stewart) while binding what affects and what is affected together (Ahmed, *Cultural*). Then, I provide a review of research on materiality and process to suggest further the value of examining materiality and process retrospectively. Finally and in concluding, I consider what a focus on affect indicates about the development and evolution of writing processes over time.

Affective Materialities

As Julie Nelson has noted in her article examining affective and emotional realities of new media, affect and emotion are terms that are too often used interchangeably in composition studies research. It has also been the case that emotion has been given more extensive consideration than affect (for example, by Susan McLeod in *Notes of the Heart* and by Laura Micciche in *Doing Emotion*). Further, where affect has been considered, there has been a dependence "on emotion's vocabulary and qualification to explicate affect" (Nelson, n.p.). In bringing together affect and emotion, Nelson offers a productive starting place for defining affect as a capacity that "materializes as people turn toward or against an object, relation, or discourse." This act of turning toward or against, as Nelson notes, is informed by Sara Ahmed's notion of affect as an evaluation of something as good or bad based on its causing pleasure or pain: "To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn to things" ("Happy" 31). Or, put differently, affecting and being affected sets life in motion, animating relations among people and materials: "Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" (Stewart 1-2).

In this model of affect as the potential for motion—for turning—and as the action of evaluating or turning, an object affects when, placed in relation to it, a person can and does evaluate it by turning toward or against it. It is also important to note that, and as Ahmed theorizes elsewhere, the affective capacity of an object does not lie in the object itself but is "an effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs" (*Cultural* 90). Affect accumulates through years of contact, a process or chain of effects that Ahmed refers to as "stickiness": "stickiness involves a form of relationality, or a 'withness', in which the elements that are 'with' get bound together" (*Cultural* 91). While turning brings into focus momentary choices writers make, stickiness gestures toward the long-term relationships that evolve as bodies and materials affect and are affected by one another.

Materiality and the Writing Process

As Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle have recently written, materiality has been an emphasis of humanities and social sciences scholarship in the first decade of the twenty-first century (1). Within composition studies specifically, place and technology have been an ongoing focus of inquiry into writing's materiality. As Nedra Reynolds has argued, "writing's materiality begins with the *where* the work of writing gets done, the tools and conditions and surroundings" (167). Thus far, research examining *the where* has attempted to identify the materials that writers employ in service to completing a specific writing task while examining the importance and effects of those materials on the writing process. Perhaps the most prominent contribution to this research is Paul Prior and Jody Shipka's examination of environment-selecting and -structuring practices (ESSPs) that writers use to create coherence between their consciousness—which, according to Vygotski, includes "inclinations and needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotion" (qtd. in Prior and Shipka 208)—and the writing task. Through their examination of ESSPs and the materials that writers relied on to select and structure their environments (for example, high school bands, a Buddha statue, a TV and VCR, notebooks, monk chants) through drawings and interviews, Prior and Shipka show that writers develop a unique set of material practices that emerge relative to "their tasks, the centrality of writing to their lives and work, and their own personalities and preferred practices" (227). Hannah Rule reinforces these links between place, process, and other spheres of life that were first articulated by Prior and Shipka in her recent *CCC* article. Also using a multimodal research methodology of photos and recorded video, Rule brings into focus particular items writers include and interact with as part of their writing process: items that "sustain engagement" like drinks, food, and blankets; and objects that help writers "feel connected in their space to the outside world" like televisions and windows (419). By extending Prior and Shipka's research both methodologically and theoretically, Rule highlights the incidental nature of the writing process as "susceptible to environmental forces and never in writers' full and autonomous control" and not a "steady (if recursive) march of only intentional activity that reliably results in a textual product" (405). Both of these examinations of process bring into focus both the range of objects and the range of practices that writers employ in their scenes of writing activity—especially when those scenes are emplaced in locations where writing bleeds into other spheres of life: for instance, cooking and baking near dining room tables; cohabitating with partners near home offices; and taking care of dogs near writing sofas.

Beyond these scenes of writing where domestic, professional, and academic lives blend, a different approach to examining process has considered how mobile networks have altered the material conditions of writing, allowing writing to move while shaping environments along the way (Rivers). Through mobile technologies and associated cultural practices like dwelling (Reynolds), writing often takes place outside of the home and in public spaces like airports (Smith) and coffee shops (Faris). Examining these issues of process and materiality in semi-public writing locations, Stacey Pigg shows that a primary goal of the writing process for writers in the 21st century is fostering the attention and persistence needed to complete their writing task. To realize this goal, writers rely on material practices to manage the "social availability" made possible by always-on networks "while maintaining proximity to needed people and materials" (Pigg, "Emplacing" 252).

Although these public writers share a common goal, their processes are nevertheless individuated, highlighting differently that processes emerge relative to writer's preferences, the writing task, and other spheres of life. For instance, among the two writers that Pigg studies, there was a stark contrast in how each payed attention to notifications and accessed the internet to cultivate persistence to finish their writing tasks. Kim, a coffee shop writer, frequently accessed the internet throughout her writing process to check notifications from her Twitter and Gmail accounts (Pigg, "Emplacing" 267). In contrast, Heijin took care not to access the internet when writing and studying: only checking her social media feed when she walked away from her desk for a break after a long (5-6 hour) period of sustained attention (265). It is through these contrasting effects of a particular technology, in this case, the internet, that suggests writers' pasts influence current processes. Pigg identifies this link as "embodied, material memory" that "lends stability to distributed processes such as learning" (252). The practice of *checking* affected Kim and Heijin differently because when Kim checked, she was tapping her material memory of professional life before enrolling in graduate school where she "was on the Internet all day," thus bringing stability to her process of writing and learning through a familiar practice (267). Although this link between Kim's past and current process concerns habituated practices rather than those that are consciously employed, this case study of Kim's writing routines suggests that material practices persist in the lives of writers, even if not a conscious part of their writing processes, indicating that practices have a history that reaches further back than past research has suggested.

Examining a different distributed practice, the formation of a writing identity, Cydney Alexis also finds a link between past and present material practices. Through her examination of locations ("Material Culture") and moleskin notebooks ("Symbolic Life") through the frame of material culture, Alexis has found that writers rely "on the power of objects" to shape and become interwoven with their lifelong processes of imagining and performing their writing identities (33). As Alexis indicates, this process of identity formation begins early, often with a particular object or location at the center of writers' development:

> Becoming a writer is composed of many instances in which one both imagines what writers do and performs similar acts. A chief way that this imagining occurs at a young age is through goods. Writers lean on chosen objects such as desks, pens, knick-knacks, and notebooks to begin to occupy a desired self and to practice it alone and, perhaps more importantly, for and with others. A practice of writing, then, cannot be understood without considering the various tools and settings with and within the habitats in which writers work—beginning with the kitchen in childhood, the bedroom in adolescence, and numerous other sites, both public and private, as adults. ("Symbolic Life" 49).

Thus, as Alexis argues, writers orient to the act of writing early by imagining and performing what writers do by choosing "goods" or materials that reflect what they believe successful writers use. Although Alexis' research does much to consider how process evolves throughout a writer's development relative to particular objects, it raises the question as to how material processes might emerge differently if a writer, for instance, does not identify as a writer and therefore does not attempt to perform a writerly identity through an object like a moleskin notebook or a writing location. Because Alexis' research traces writers' development through the persistence of particular objects like moleskin notebooks, desks, and tables throughout their writing development, what role does the past play in an evolving writing process as writers adopt and disregard materials to address new writing situations? Likewise, in relation to research on material practices relative to a particular task, how does this lifelong evolution of material writing processes interact with more immediate concerns like tuning consciousness, fostering persistence, and sustaining engagement?

To consider how material practices evolve in the lives of writers in the absence of a desired writerly identity and a consistent set of materials, I consider the affectivity of material practices as a catalyst and guide for the development of writing processes and as a means by which writers choose and evaluate the efficacy of writing materials. In these two senses, affect is considered as the means by which material practices emerge and evolve in the lives of writers. For the study of material practices as they evolve over time, affect provides a way to trace how writers initially choose —or turn toward—materials to employ as part of their writing process and how scenes of writing develop and evolve as particular materials "stick" together and then "stick" to writers (Ahmed, *Cultural* 91).

Methods: A Retrospective Case Study Analysis of Materiality and Affect

This study of the affectivity of material writing practices was focused through three research questions:

1. How do writers come to adopt the technologies and environments they employ as part of their writing processes?

2. How—if at all—do the technologies and environments that writers adopt early in their lives change over time?

3. How does the way writing feels to writers inform the technologies and environments that they adopt and use as part of their writing processes?

To address these research questions exploring material practices with specific focus on the feeling or affectivity of writing and the development of process over time, I conducted an IRB-approved study at a large southeastern university beginning in Fall 2015. The study involved a convenience sample of eight students recruited from three different sections of an upper-level digital writing course that serves as one of three gateway courses for the English Department's writing major. I recruited participants by visiting the classrooms of three different instructors, describing the study, and asking for volunteer participants. The study involved four phases, each resulting in a different set of data: a retrospective interview; a process-sketch with an interview; a 90-minute observation of their writing; and a final culminating interview about the observation.

This study's first phase, the retrospective interview, asked participants to chronologically recount particular moments of learning to read and write both in school and outside of school. Beginning with their earliest memory, informants described the tasks, environments, and technologies they used to read and write in childhood, middle school, and high school, noting along the way how the act of writing felt in that particular environment. In the second phase of research, participants produced process drawings—much like Prior and Shipka's ESSP drawings—of a recent writing task: taking note of the materials included in that scene of composing and how the act of writing felt in that environment. The third method, the direct observation, took place in a media lab on campus wherein I asked participants to work on any writing project—school related or not—for 90 minutes. During this direct observation, I recorded participants' screens using Quicktime and took field notes of the informants' off-screen practices like writing in paper notebooks, checking their phone, or listening to music.

Finally, to conduct the culminating interview, I adapted Kevin Roozen's text-based interviews to better understand purposes and effects of the "textual activities" I observed during the direct observation by showing participants the fieldnotes and the screen recording and talking with them about the purposes and effects of their practices ("Tracing" 322). Through these culminating interviews I was able to discern how the media lab differed from their usual scenes of writing and what significance those differences had on their writing processes.

After collecting these data, I transcribed the interviews and coded the transcripts using a scheme of five aspects of writing practices: technology, affect, prior practice, environment, and sociality. To develop this scheme I drew on existing research on writing practices (for example, Pigg; Reynolds; Prior and Shipka). In addition to the scholarship reviewed in this discussion, this frame of five practices drew heavily on Margaret Syverson's ecological model to conceptualize writing practices as emergent and enacted by writers through examination of how writers "situate themselves; how they interpret their environments; and how they use their interpretations to engage in purposeful activities and interactions" (Syverson 26). Later, during a code-checking procedure with a senior colleague, definitions of these codes were clarified to reflect data collected from participants. Specifically, affect was defined at the start of this research as a kind of preference based on the work of Robert Zajonc, a psychologist who identified the formation of preference as a kind of affective response that can occur with minimal cognitive recognition (qtd. in Fleckenstein 450). After code-checking revealed that affect neither necessarily preceded or resulted from an interaction with a particular environment or technology, affect was clarified to refer to the accumulating potential for writers to turn toward and become bound to materials. Then, my colleague and I developed a procedure for double- and triple-coding which revealed previously unseen relationships across the five codes: particularly, the relationships between technologies, environment, past practices, and affect.

These processes and code-checking and double- and triple-coding resulted in three findings about the informants' processes. First, although the specific furnishings and technologies that participants employed changed over the course of their lives, their preferences for certain kinds of material conditions like well-lit rooms, windows, and particular sounds stayed relatively consistent. Second, participants described how they interacted with these materials with relative consistency despite their incorporation of new technologies; their addressing of different audiences and purposes; and in most cases, their transition from living and writing at home to living and writing on a college campus.{2} Third, for all of the participants, affect played a significant role—for both good and ill—in their evolution as writers, informing both the materials they chose and the material practices they employed both at particular moments in their lives and over the course of their writing development.

In the following discussion of findings, I use Maggie's and Silvio's cases to illustrate the relationships between technology, environment, prior practice, and affect to show that writing processes have a material and affective history that influences writers' evolving processes. Maggie's and Silvio's cases were chosen because each features a different affective reality that influences each writer's evolving material processes. At the center of Maggie's process and her material-affective history are a complex of positive affects or "good feelings" like "comfort and

support" that have shaped Maggie's process: influencing both the materials Maggie turned toward to support her writing as well as her writing identity (Micciche 50). In contrast, Silvio's affective history is marked by a complex of affects generally understood as negative—boredom, tediousness, frustration, distraction, and hurry—that, at different moments, he turned toward and against through materials (technologies and environments) to help him complete his writing assignments. By developing these cases that exemplify two different affective realities, my purpose is to indicate that different kinds of affective realities—good and bad, positive and negative—influence writers' processes. My purpose is also to highlight how histories of material practices are shaped by the affective dimensions of writing.

Maggie's Mobile Writing Sanctuary

Maggie came from a middle-class background where her parents emphasized the importance of reading and writing, and, as a result, Maggie read at a level more advanced than her peers at an early age. Discussing her earliest memory reading in elementary school, Maggie described her frustration at not being given a difficult-enough book to read at school: "I was asking the teacher for a harder book, because I was bored with that book, so after reading a couple of pages of it, I was trying to show her that I knew how to read already."

Her mother, a software engineer, also emphasized the importance Maggie's digital literacy in childhood; as Maggie recounted, "My Mom taught me how to use a computer when I was two-years-old. My parents were both engineers. My Mom was a software engineer, so computers were a big part of my life ever since I was very small." Early on, Maggie's mother had her and her siblings use "educational [computer] programs" so that they would learn "educational stuff and how to use a computer."

Because of the importance of literacy and digital literacy in her home, Maggie was an avid writer from an early age, using both print and digital technologies. Her earliest memories reading and writing took place at her bedroom desk where she used paper notebooks and a computer to write both for school and for fun: mostly fan fiction and fantasy stories. Recounting one of her earlier memories writing fantasy stories, Maggie first mentioned her bedroom desk where much of her writing happened in middle school.

> When I was 11 I had an idea at school. Me and my friend were talking, and we decided we were going to write a book. When I got home, I decided that I was going to write it, and I had a Windows 2005 computer or something. I don't even know if that year is right. I had a Windows computer, a desktop one with the thick back to it. And I was writing a novel, and it was called *Psychic Girls*. And it was about two girls that got chemicals spilled on them, and it turned them into supernatural people. And so I was writing that every day at my computer in my bedroom.

A few years later, as Maggie recounted writing a fan fiction sequel to the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, she described her choice to rearrange her bedroom into a "closed-off" space by moving her desk to the other side of the room to create a cubicle.

> It was the same bedroom [where I wrote *Psychic Girls*] but different because my desk was on the opposite side of the room from where it was [before]. I made a little cubicle in my bedroom where my desk was. And I had a stereo on my desk also at that time. So I would play the radio when I was on my computer.

Her cubicle, as Maggie described, gave her a feeling of ownership over her writing environment where she could realize her preference for feeling closed-off from the rest of her environment.

> It felt like my own space. The only thing was that my back was facing the door, so I was looking over my shoulder a lot, because I just didn't like people being behind me while I was writing. It was like a closed-off space.

In addition to her cubicle being her "own space," Maggie also described it as set apart from the rest of the house, a "writing sanctuary" where she felt "really focused" on her writing task.

> I felt like I wasn't distracted. I felt like I was really focused. A lot of times my Mom would yell across the house for me to come help her or something, and I wouldn't hear her, because I was just in my writing. I guess I just liked it, because it was my writing sanctuary.

Affectively, her bedroom cubicle, her *writing sanctuary*, stuck even when she was given a laptop that allowed her to mobilize her writing process. Upon receiving a laptop in her third year of high school, she chose to continue writing at her desk in her bedroom writing sanctuary: “I had a Windows laptop my last two years in high school, but it was usually at my desk, because I was used to writing at a desk.” Despite her continued use of her desk in high school, Maggie nevertheless felt the transformative potential of her laptop: “I can feel like I can be on the go, and I feel more portable when I write.” It was only later when Maggie moved away to college that she realized the potential of her laptop to mobilize her process.

In college Maggie continued to write, taking many writing studies and creative writing courses while carrying two writing internships among a range of other writing activities: posting to a personal blog, posting to her social media accounts, and writing nonfiction essays for publication in the campus’ undergraduate writing journal. Despite her background writing fantasy and fan fiction stories and gaining still more knowledge and experience as a student, Maggie reported that writing in these new contexts was more stressful and pressure-inducing than she was accustomed because of what she had learned about writing since coming to college.

> I think that when I was younger, there was a lot less stress. Then, the purpose was fun and creativity, and it didn't matter how good or bad it was. Now, there's a lot more pressure—I've learned—I've been through so many creative writing classes like in my program and in summer programs and everything, so there's a lot more stress and pressure now, because I know all of the rules. You can break them if you know how. But I guess there's a lot more pressure to produce good work.

The new stresses and pressures she felt from writing in these new contexts was likewise reflected in her writing process. Describing her transition from writing in her bedroom to beginning to find a writing location in college, Maggie described how feeling the stress from her writing task motivated her decision to stop writing at a desk for the first time in her life and begin trying other writing environments: specifically, her kitchen counter and her couch.

> I stopped [writing at a desk] when I had my first college apartment. I had a little 500 sq. ft. apartment, and I had a kitchen counter that I would write at. And I just like that more for some reason. I don't know. The desk feels really serious for some reason maybe. So I would get stressed out and not do anything. And I would just end up on Facebook. So I guess the couch is a way to trick myself into thinking I'm not doing work even when I am.

Eventually, Maggie took her process elsewhere: writing in coffee shops on couches and at café tables and in her boyfriend’s apartment on his couch.

Like other mobile writers (for instance, those included in Pigg’s study), Maggie brought a set of items with her to each location to support her writing process: in this case, her computer, backpack, purse, and cellphone. Each item she brought with her supported her writing process by providing her “a sense of security that I have all of the things that I need.” Perhaps more significant than the specific items she carries with her, however, was the spatial arrangement of these items. When sketching the scene where she completed a comic strip project representing the differences between Plato, Aristotle, and the sophists for her “Rhetoric” class, she indicated that the items in her ensemble were placed in a cubicle-like arrangement around her (Fig. 1).

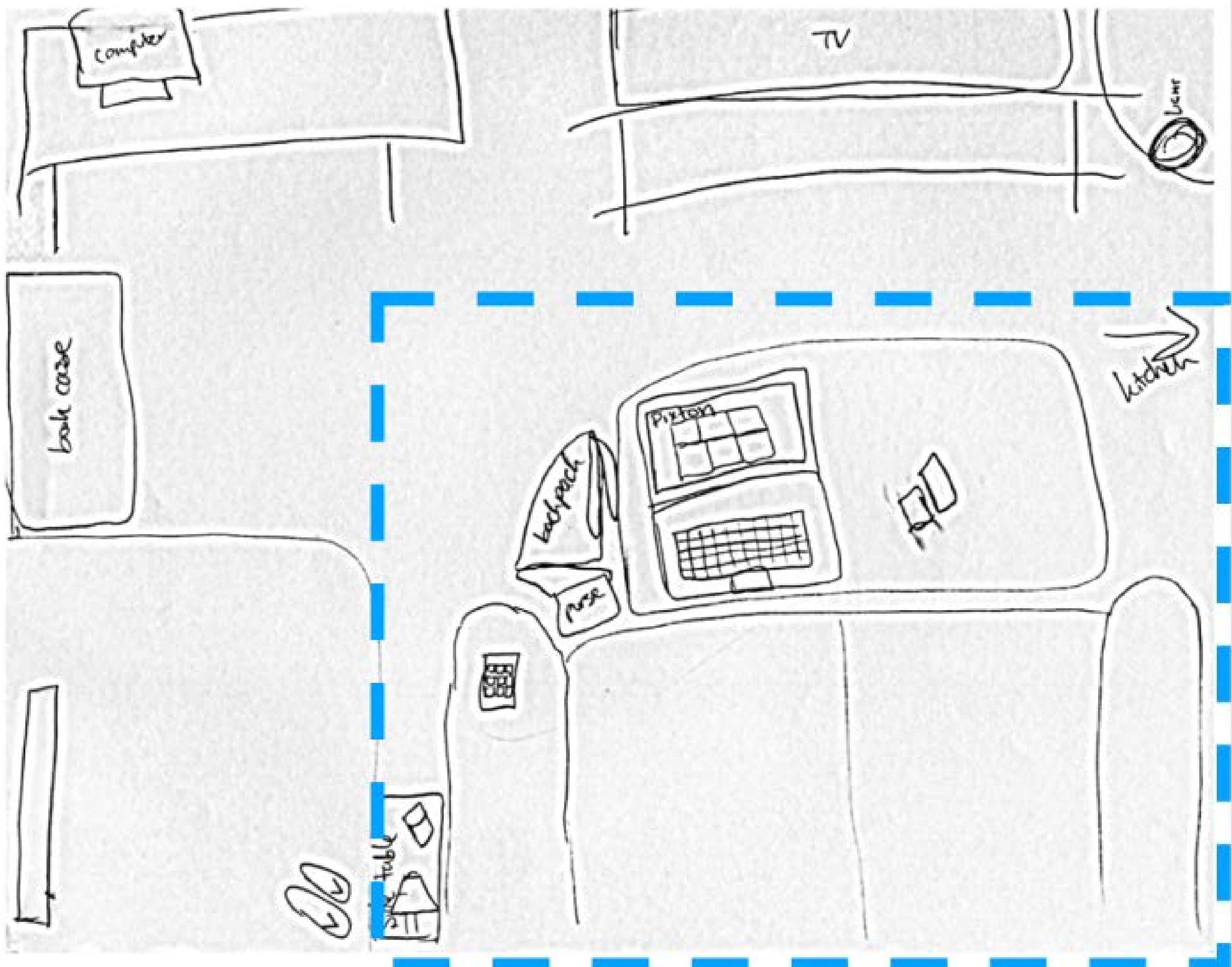

Figure 1. A drawing that Maggie produced of her purse, backpack, computer, and phone arranged around her writing space in her boyfriend's apartment. The image has been annotated to emphasize the cubicle-like arrangement of items that Maggie sketched.

Maggie later indicated that this was a consistent part of her writing process: the arrangement of her purse, computer, phone, and backpack around her in a cubicle-like arrangement. Describing a trip to a local coffee shop to write on a Saturday afternoon, Maggie said that, like the cubicle in her childhood writing sanctuary, setting out these items gave her the feeling of ownership over her writing environment.

> When I was there on Saturday then I set up my computer, and I tried to find a table with an outlet close to it. So I plugged into my computer. I put my purse behind my computer. And I had my coffee on the other side. And I had my phone on the table or on my lap or something. And I had by backpack off the table, leaning up against the table leg. So I'll set up my environment like that. And once I do that, it's mine.

Thus, although her process evolved materially to included new locations and new technologies, her spatial practices echoed those of childhood, or to put it differently, her writing sanctuary stuck with her as she needed to foster new affective realities for her college-level writing.

Beyond the stickiness of her childhood writing sanctuary, perhaps more significant is how her mobile sanctuary affected her differently once she turned toward it to support her process in college. As previously noted, Maggie found writing in college to be stressful, and materials that she had previously relied on—like desks—exacerbated the stress and pressure she felt from the writing task. In contrast, the mobile sanctuary that she set out in coffee shops and her boyfriend's apartment made writing feel less like "work." Describing the feeling she received from having her phone, purse, computer, and backpack with her when she wrote in public places, Maggie said, "Informal is definitely the word I would use. The place is—It's so casual, I feel relaxed when I'm writing." In addition to providing her a way to initiate her writing process by setting up her environment to make it hers, being affected by her mobile ensemble

also became a prominent part of Maggie's process, culminating in a working theory about good writing which she articulates in terms of a balance between the comfort of familiar surroundings and the excitement of strange places.

> And I feel like it's the same with any—if you get too comfortable with your environment or your writing, then you won't come out with original stuff. So it's a way of making a strange place feel a little bit more familiar, so I can have a balance. I can write and feel comfortable in a place that's new and an exciting environment at the same time.

And as Maggie recounted, being affected in these ways benefitted her process. Describing how her Saturday trip to the coffee shop went, Maggie reported that sitting outside surrounded by her materials, "definitely put me at ease, and I felt super creative that day. I sat out there from 10AM to 4PM." Thus, by turning again to her writing sanctuary in college, although in a different location with a different set of materials, Maggie was affected positively. She not only found focus as she had in childhood and mitigated the stress of the writing task as she had on the couch in her first apartment, she "felt creative," realizing the affective potential of her mobile sanctuary to help her invent discourse.

Silvio's Scenes of Distraction, Urgency, and Accountability

Silvio and his two brothers were raised in a bilingual and religious household in South Florida by their mother and father: a background inflected in Silvio's programs of study in college, particularly his minors in Religious Studies and Spanish. Also a writing studies major, the bulk of Silvio's writing experiences were school-based, often in service to preparing for state exams. Outside of school, Silvio described a few sporadic attempts at journaling and religious devotionals spread throughout middle school, high school, and college. Additionally, he described using Skype, text messages, and Facebook to communicate with his college and high school friends as well as his family in South Florida and Honduras.

Silvio's earliest memory of writing was journaling in the fourth grade as part of his preparation for The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Although his journaling was for test prep and was graded for word count rather than content, Silvio liked this exercise because he was given the chance to explore topics through "a stream of consciousness sort of thing." When writing those journal entries, Silvio was instructed to write quickly and to keep writing:

> We would journal every day, because our teacher thought it was important for us to practice our writing skills for the FCAT. That was the reason. But also because it was a great way for us to explore different topics. She would say, "Never stop writing." It was a stream of consciousness sort of thing. She wanted to get us in the habit of writing whatever we want—writing what's on our mind. And I liked that.

When Silvio began middle school, the FCAT exam continued to drive Silvio's writing instruction, but his preparation took the form of worksheets and literary analysis papers instead of the freewriting activities that he enjoyed. Silvio found the worksheets "boring," and all of the "rules on writing" restricting.

> In 7th grade, we would read a book in class, and we would write about what we thought about it. She would give us questions. But it was more—It wasn't based on what we thought where we had the freedom to write whatever. We had to get prepared for standardized testing because it's important. So we're going to have all these worksheets for you. It was kind of boring. I didn't really like English in middle school, because they made us—They had so many rules on writing, and I did not like that.

Silvio continued writing these literary analysis papers in high school, the only difference being that he began drafting on a computer. Silvio, however, preferred to handwrite because he felt he "was going to get distracted by the internet," so he did not use a computer consistently in high school.

> I started out writing and then wanted to try out typing on the computer. I remember I was in ninth grade in my AP Human Geography class. The thing is I typed faster, but I kept feeling like I was going to get distracted by the internet, so I just stopped [writing on the computer].

In addition to limiting his computer use, Silvio also limited his distractions by doing his homework at the dining room table where he could be near his mother who asked him about what he was working on and what kind of progress he was making.

> But if I'm in the kitchen and my Dad is done with his show and I know a project is due tomorrow, I'll work on that dining room table. Because I know my Mom was there doing bills or something. And she'll keep me accountable, "Oh, what are you doing? Okay." If I was in my room, she wouldn't ask me that.

Ironically, writing at the dining room also provided Silvio what he felt were necessary distractions he needed to stay focused.

> Also, there's always someone who comes to the kitchen every so often. Like I had two brothers and a Mom and a Dad. And so my eldest brother would always come out of his room and come to the kitchen. So it was a quick distraction, "Oh, hey. What are you getting? Okay." A minute later, back to work. So I just liked to see somebody every now and then, because if I just locked myself up in my room for five hours with me trying to duke it out, it wouldn't work. I need to have some sort of distraction to at least—I can't look at a computer straight the whole time.

In middle school and high school, Silvio's writing development involved turning toward materials—rooms, technologies, people—that could best help him complete his writing task, tasks that he often felt compelled to turn away from because they were not the open-ended, freewriting assignments that he enjoyed. Specifically, at this moment in his life, Silvio found that the act of turning—both to and from—distraction animated his writing process. By turning toward those distractions he felt he could control and turning against those that he felt he could not, he started to find persistence needed to complete his writing task. Further, it was also important for Silvio to turn toward writing locations where he was watched—at this point, by his mother—who would hold him accountable for finishing his writing tasks.

When Silvio came to college, he was reintroduced to freewriting in journals in his first-year writing course. In addition to giving him the opportunity to do the kind of writing that he enjoyed, these journaling assignments also reminded or reinforced his idea that he wrote best when he wrote quickly.

> When I looked at [the freewrite], it started off with nice, neat, and writing, then "and and and and and" with nice and neat handwriting again. Then, it would get all contorted like you started noticing that I was writing faster, and it wasn't as nice. It was probably because I wanted to get all my thoughts down as quick as I could. So I always look at my writing after that to just see how it started off. And I know when my writing gets interesting. It's when my handwriting gets worse, and I start writing faster. And I look at those parts more, because I think they're more real. Like when I write a story, sometimes if I'm somewhere else, I'll just start writing on a piece of paper before I put it on a computer. And I'll look to see which parts are the best by seeing which ones have the worst handwriting.

His preference for writing quickly began to shape his approach to other writing projects, becoming a reason to wait to begin thinking about his general direction for the project until the week that it was due. This choice often required him to stay up all night to complete the projects.

> I make good progress on being under pressure and time sensitive things. Like I've noticed since I've come up here—Actually, even in high school, if I have a project due, and I've got a month in advance knowledge about it, I probably won't do it the week before. Depending on what project it is. If I have a 5 page project, I'll start it 3 days before and finish it a day before. But I'll start it 3 days before. It's because I feel better under that pressure. I have a problem staying up late. I'm a night person.

In addition to understanding that his writing benefited by feeling hurried and that he was more apt to turn toward his writing task if he felt urgency and pressure, Silvio also continued to feel that he needed to be accountable to someone to stay on track while writing. These two affects—feeling hurried and accountable—began to influence where Silvio chose to write. Specifically, he chose writing locations where he could get distracted momentarily, inevitably get back on track, and feel accountable to someone throughout the writing process: most often choosing his friend's dorm room or the campus library.

Silvio discussed enjoying writing with his friends in one of his friend's, Jacob's, dorm room best. Describing a recent all-nighter, he indicated how important this tension between distraction and accountability was for his writing process, indicating that he would have probably missed the deadline without his friends there to help him lose and regain focus.

> Sometime in this past few weeks, we basically pulled an all-nighter in Jacob's room. We all had a paper we were doing. So I wrote my outline then and there. I felt better because I was with my friends. And there were some points when I had a break, and I got to talk to them. And we all knew that we had a project due the next day, so we got ourselves back on track. If I was by myself, I would have just been like, "Oh, forget this. I'm going to sleep"

When in the campus library, Silvio turned toward a wider range of people, technologies, and texts to feel distracted and accountable. To start, Silvio felt accountable to other students in the library through social pressure: "Because I knew I couldn't sleep there or fool around there and because I knew there were other people there who were serious about their work." In addition to being made to feel accountable for his work through his perceptions of other students working in the library, Silvio's friends also monitored his progress through text messages. Recounting a recent study session, Silvio described being scolded by a friend via text message for participating in a group message thread when he should have been completing his assignment: "She was like, 'No, he's working. You do whatever.' And I was like, 'No, really. I can do this.' And she was like, 'No. Keep working.'" But more often, Silvio turned toward his group text threads and his social networking feeds as helpful distractions that he needed to make his writing task feel less "boring" and "tedious."

> My brain will get tired, and I'll fall asleep. These little things that distract me—that's what keeps me going, "Oh, this is starting to get boring. Oh! I got a text message! I'm not sleepy anymore. Back to work." Twenty minutes later, "Oh, this getting tedious again. Oh! Another text message." Work.

Within a two-hour time frame that Silvio spent at the library, he reported that he "spent probably an hour reading and annotating. Then I wasted 20 minutes texting people. Then, I took twenty-five minutes going to Starbucks and back." Thus, his rituals of distraction had the added benefit of eating his time, contributing to the pressure that made him feel better when writing.

Ultimately, as Silvio indicated when discussing the completion of a recent video project, he was largely agnostic about where he wrote and what he wrote with so long as the materiality of his writing environment affected him in ways that he needed to support his writing process. By having distractions to turn toward and against, feeling accountable to someone, and feeling the urgency of a deadline, Silvio avoided feeling like his writing was tedious and boring. Starting his video project over Spring Break, he began by writing the script for the project in his room at his parent's house where he accidentally fell asleep while writing: "I started it off in my room on my computer. I wound up falling asleep. I made the mistake I knew I shouldn't make. I wrote on my bed" (Fig. 2).

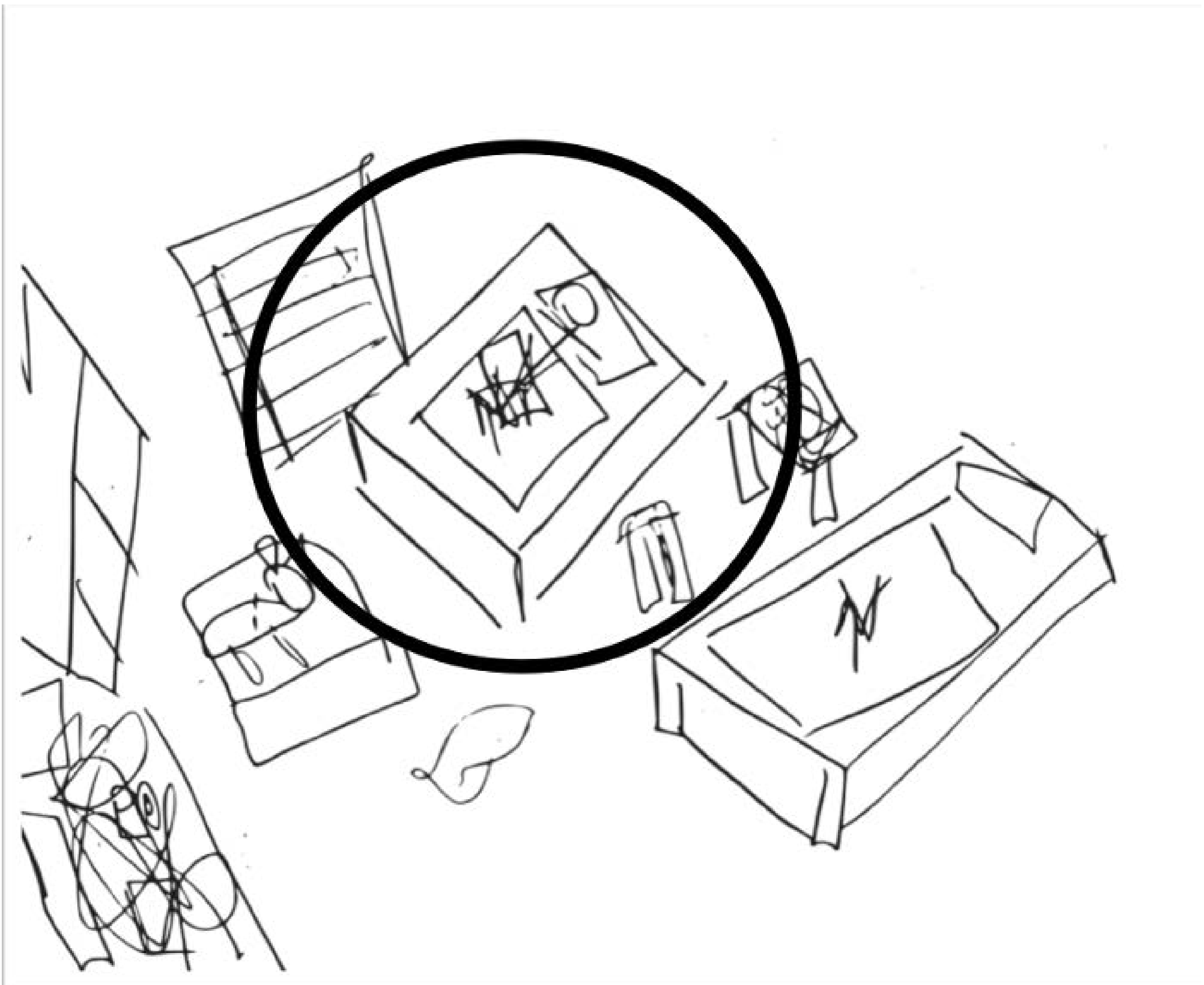

Figure 2. Silvio’s drawing of himself in his bedroom while trying to complete his script over Spring Break. The drawing has been annotated to emphasize Silvo asleep on his bed.

In describing his room, Silvio discussed what caused him to choose his bed as a writing space despite knowing that he would likely fall asleep.

> I have a desk, but it's cluttered. So I didn't write at my desk. That's why I did it on my bed. My dog is sometimes there in her bed. Sometimes she went out of the room. Some clothes on the ground. The desk next to my bed is full of stuff. So I guess the reason why I chose my bed was because there was nowhere else in the bed. So you ask why you didn’t go to the kitchen. And it was because the kitchen was cluttered with things. When I come home from college, I expect—Okay, I kind of do. It would be nice to see the house clean and the table cleared, because it gives me piece of mind. But it's not. So when I did do this and wrote the script, things were everywhere.

In addition to his indicating why he chose not to write at the kitchen table, a space that allowed him to turn toward and against distractions to animate his writing process in high school, what is also noteworthy is how vacant this writing scene is compared to those he described as being more successful in. Rather than being affected by people, turning toward and against distraction, and feeling the urgency of his deadline, this attempt to write in his bedroom was stagnated and frustrated—weighted by his environment and the writing task. In contrast, Silvio described trying again at work (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Silvio's drawing of himself working on his script in the office space. The drawing has been annotated to emphasize the office space. Although Silvio represented five different people in the office space working at cubicle desks, it is unclear which figure he drew to represent himself.

> One day, I was supposed to work, and I told the boss, "Hey, Spring Break is almost over. I've got this project. Can I spend the first half of the day writing my script?" He said, "Sure." So I went in one of the desks. The guy who is here is going to retire and doesn't work on Fridays. So I commandeered his desk, had my computer, and then just typed and typed. You know? So I was in a little cubical in my area, so nobody could really talk to me or see me, because I'm in this corner. Sometimes I would turn around, because this guy in this office is talking. So sometimes I would actually go and talk to him. I went back down and wrote the script.

Describing how he felt in this space, Silvio said, "I was concentrated. I was focused. I was comfortable. The chair was great. It was the best place for me to work." Although this environment was not a regular location for his writing, and did not indicate that he had written there before or would again, he was positively affected by its materiality. Bringing with him the urgency of having wasted a day sleeping and an impending after-Spring Break deadline, Silvio had an environment where he could turn toward and away from distraction—in this case, someone else in the office. Likewise, given its status as an office, a space where people are productive, Silvio likely also felt the same kind of social pressure to work as he had in the library where he knew he couldn't "fool around" or "sleep" because he was surrounded by "other people there who were serious about their work." Although the office cubicle was not a regular writing location for Silvio, the scene affected his writing in familiar ways and more importantly, in ways that he knew to be conducive to his writing process. Bringing with him the urgency to write his script, Silvio was met with distraction that he could placate and ignore in a space that he could associate with.

Accounting for Affect and History in Accounts of Material Practices

In general, research examining material processes has too often focused on particular moments in a writer's life by focusing on the material practices employed by writers to complete a particular writing task. In doing so, such research has documented the range of materials, strategies, and practices that writers employ to support their writing processes but has obscured how those scenes of process form over time as writers address situations across contexts. Elsewhere, when research like Alexis' does account for the history and evolution of a writer's process, that research has largely focused on writers who develop a writerly identity through a consistent set of materials, leaving out those writers—like Silvio—who do not identify as writers as well as writers like Maggie who turn toward a different set of materials as part of their writing development. By providing a more complete range of writers' evolving material processes, accounting for their histories of adopting and disregarding materials in an evolving writing process, Maggie's and Silvio's cases provide further evidence that writers rely on material practices to aid their writing processes (for instance, to cultivate focus, relieve stress, increase or decrease pressure) while showing that their practices are informed by a complex affective history that shapes who they are and what they do as writers. While the past does not determine what writers do years later in college, Maggie's and Silvio's cases show that the writing process recurs over the course of a writer's life if only, perhaps, in echoes. In other words, these two cases indicate that in addition to being, as Hannah Rule has shown, "textually" and "environmentally" recursive, process also recurs temporally (429). As writers are affected by texts, environments, situations, and tasks, the practices they employ echo—or even resemble—past scenes of process: in Maggie's case, through an arrangement of materials and in Silvio's, by way of affects that Silvio pursues through a range of materials and practices.

When examining the material processes of writers, often what is most resonant about such accounts of writing *in situ* are the idiosyncrasies of writers' processes: the variety of materials and effects that comprise the scenes where writers work. Examining how writers' processes evolve through a focus on affect provides insight into how these scenes take shape as writers turn toward and against materials, some *sticking* to writers and leaving them "sticky" and other materials disregarded in pursuit of new affects (Ahmed *Cultural* 91). While such a focus on affect ultimately leaves issues of preference more idiosyncratic, it does highlight how meaningful writers' choices are in their lives, tapping both a history and an affective reality that writers engage with each time they begin a writing task.

While neither Maggie's or Silvio's cases indicate that adapting or recreating past scenes of process is a conscious part of their writing process, their descriptions of how they felt when writing in their particular scenes of process indicate that in addition to what writers have done, their material memories also include the affectivity of their writing process—how writing has felt. While it is unclear whether practice or affect take priority in the lives of writers as they turn toward particular materials and practices, this research suggests that even as materials, scenes, contexts, and situations change over the course of a writer's life, there is consistency in the affects writers seek out in support of their processes. Given this consistency in desired affects, Maggie's and Silvio's accounts of process indicate that identifying the affects that writers seek out *in situ* provides a useful frame for studying the nature of writers' processes as they evolve over time and across contexts.

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Notes

1. The names of informants in this IRB approved (IRB00000446) study are assigned pseudonyms used to protect their confidentiality. (Return to text.)
2. All but one of the eight participants moved to attend college where this study was conducted. (Return to text.)

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