Before you are "called" to write as a reaction or act of participation, you are "culled" by writing into the (bodily) sensation of involvement. You are first involved in the writing, which allows for the "call" to get heard in the first place.

—Jenny Edbauer

How did Jenny Edbauer’s recent essay in JAC “involve” me? What was its “call” for me to write this response? To ask these two questions gets at the heart of Edbauer’s concern: she addresses the theories of affect and the call for practicality.
the bodily dimension of writing, suggesting that writing involves both signification (how we are positioned in terms of identity formations in a culture) and affectivity (how we react and interact with those formations at a level of sensations). Edbauer's test case in her essay is graffiti, a form of public writing that informs her argument about the importance of considering "the experience of rhetorical context" (139). So far, she notes, we have not yet fully accounted for the experience, or affect, of graffiti and of writing in general.

Edbauer's essay most strikingly hit me when, early on, she writes that recently in composition studies we have had a number of publications that engage the question of affect and writing. She cites work by Lynn Worsham, T.R. Johnson, Marshall Alcorn, Dale Jacobs and Laura Miccicche, Daniel Smith, and myself. The real "hit," however, came for me when Edbauer explains that part of her goal in her essay is to be engaged with a persistent critique of affect-centered scholarship; Edbauer quotes a passage from a WPA-L-exchange, written by Fred Kemp, in which Kemp writes that much of the theoretically sophisticated work on affect seems to have remained useless for "places where teachers actually encounter students" (135). In particular, Kemp decries that this scholarship has not made its "way into the actual lesson plans in the tens of thousands of classrooms that teach writing in America" (135). In effect, Kemp points to the sometimes obtuse and sometimes highly theoretical language used in much composition scholarship that focuses on affectivity. I think he's right. And, I feel involved, at this specific point of dissonance.

I am listening; I am struck. Kemp's point, and Edbauer's pause in her own essay to consider Kemp's point, arrest a clear meaning. I have heard the argument before, insistently, from colleagues and dissertation advisers (memories of intense discussions get triggered for me at this point); so, when I read in Edbauer's essay that this arresting argument comes up again, I am struck. This time, since she brings it up as a stopping point in her essay, it hits me harder. After all, as Edbauer writes, we have had a growing number of articles and books that address what seems to these scholars to
be an inescapable and significant dimension of writing. And yet, some of our colleagues do not see the significance because the language of these newly emerging theories of affect seem obtuse, unnecessarily complicated, and filled with jargon. Some of our colleagues ask questions about how the theory "applies" to the classroom. Right away, I react with my own questions: as teachers, do we not always write about the classroom, even when we seem to address only theoretical points? Why can they not see that? And, can theory ever be separated from "practice"? As I am becoming involved with Kemp and Edbauer's questions, I notice that I perceive an attack; I feel slighted, snubbed, and incredulous—why can't others see affect at work at the very center of all our classrooms—and I feel afraid: what if this scholarship, my scholarship, misses the point? What if people really don't get the point because there is no point? Have I been wrong all this time? Have I made a fool of myself?

Clearly, in reading Edbauer's essay and following her argument I become "engaged" and I react as I notice how her points affect me. And by affecting me in these bodily ways, her points resonate, and demand a response. So, in sitting down to write my response, I begin with this disconcerting feeling that has brought up these questions for me about the goals and effects of scholarship that deals with the issue of affect. I first read Edbauer's essay about four weeks preceding the drafting of this response. In those four weeks I let the ideas float and drift; I went about teaching my three courses and kept wondering, does affect matter in the classroom? How does it matter in the sense Kemp wants to see it—in terms of interacting with students, in terms of lesson plans, in terms of writing? And I ask myself how to get at the most vexing (perplexing, maddening, frustrating) question for me: how to make my way through this issue without polarizing what I want to say as theory versus practice, students versus teachers, affect versus signification in order to reach a space where theory and practice and students and teachers and affect and signification... happen.

In this brief response, guided by Edbauer's excellent work, I take up one practical and central teacherly activity: reading and
responding to student essays. I realize acutely how much affect comes into play as I read student work and as I consider students' motivations for writing. One assignment I am reading at this point comes from the undergraduate critical theory class I am teaching this semester; it's mostly focused on poststructuralism, issues of language and representation, and the role of art in culture. I enjoy the papers, which are short responses to the last two weeks of readings. I wish to discuss in detail a paper by one particular student, Jessica Lindsey. In order for me to discuss the impact of Jessica's writing—to account for how it engages not just signification but also affect—I break here with convention and cite the student's work by her full, and real, name. I have asked Jessica's permission to quote from her paper, and I have shared my drafts of this response with her.1

One of the first things I noticed in her essay is its movement between subject positions. That movement affects me as a reader to the degree that it makes me lose "my self," because it is itself lost in a way, addressing how the writer drifts between positions, and has a lot to say about that. When she was reading my first draft of this response, Jessica wrote a comment at this point in my draft. Where I wrote, "because it is itself lost in a way," Jessica noted in the margins: "key . . . how so? (meaning, how does affect heighten when reason falters? Why? Or, confusion/contradiction supersedes intellectual resolution. And how does affect then promote a desperate call for sense or mental response to a bodily sensation?)" In other words, in her marginal comments, Jessica points out the dual nature of writing's predicament: it is both part of a fold of bodily sensations (felt as desperation, confusion, contradiction—all sensations that impact the body) and, at the same time, there is a need, or a structure, that demands that we make sense and create meaning for those bodily sensations. In fact, Jessica here articulates what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari wrote in their first collaborative book, Anti-Oedipus: "There is only desire and the social, and nothing else" (29). "Desire" can be understood as wants, drives, motivations, yearnings: precisely what Jessica expresses as the "desperate call," and "confusion/contradiction."
And, "the social" addresses the need for sense-making, for an explanation, that will follow along a social/cultural path that creates means of interpretation and organization. Thus we can understand Edbauer's explanation that "writing is nothing but the proximate operation of affect and signification" (136). Bodily investment and ideology; desire and the social.

Writing this response, then, arises out of multiple socio-affective encounters—mine with Edbauer's essay and Jessica's paper, Jessica's with my response, and mine with her comments. But what are the specifics of these encounters? Edbauer notes in her essay that a text's style, its particular articulation of sense experience, functions as a tag that attracts readers' or listeners' affective response. In graffiti, for instance, as Edbauer explains, tagging on trains becomes a stylistic device that appeals to passersby in part because trains denote a sensation of fleeting-ness, of journeying, of happenstance. A tag on the train, then, becomes a style, "a qualitative measure," according to Edbauer, that "opens us sites for making something matter to people—giving a hook, a feel, a space to invest certain kinds of interest" (146). A similar encounter happens when I read Jessica's paper. The tag for me as her reader arises out of her social position as a young woman and the attendant affective tensions and experiences. Just like graffiti on a train might affect me by suggesting the message's feel of adventure and traveling, so does Jessica's writing affect me by suggesting the feel of being a woman in contemporary culture. Specifically, the energy, the sensation of the social positions-as-frustrating that has called on Jessica to write her paper, also calls to me to respond to it. Jessica begins her essay like this:

Lately, I've been having a lot of heated poststructuralist discussions. I use heated in the "best" sense of the term, meaning passionate and thought-provoking, rather than caustic. They have taken place for the most part within the realm of family (in-laws to be precise, another breed of family unit), which makes for an interesting dynamic in itself with all the conventions and structural systems that make up the family
entity: hierarchies, self-indulgences (more blatantly than in non-familial social settings), expectations of loyalty, the fine line of respect and opinion and judgment.

From the very beginning, as I read this essay, I see that affect becomes a pivotal axis that makes Jessica's writing possible and that also works to involve me as her reader; her sense of turmoil and tension (articulated in phrases like "heated ... discussions," "passionate and thought-provoking," "and interesting dynamic") mark the intensity of her particular experience with gender identity, family, and culture. That affective experience takes place in a social, representational space that is marked by various lines of signification and cultural ordering—evident in Jessica's description of the family as a site of hierarchies and social conventions. That is to say, her relation with family involves sensations of tension. Edbauer helps out here: she notes, "The sensation of such a relation, moreover, is what we might call the encounter of affect. It is the experience generated by relations—by your body-in-relation" (142). So, I understand this rather theoretical concept to mean that Jessica, the writer of this paper, feels the call to write because she articulates that feeling that happens at the intersection between familial structure and her affective experience of it. This mutual presupposition of both the family-as-structure and the body-in-relation creates the call to write for Jessica—expressed stylistically by way of "affective" descriptors ("heated ... discussions," "passionate and thought-provoking," "and interesting dynamic").

Jessica's paper continues as she notes that she's been aware of her society's emphasis on a feminine beauty ideal that values thinness and physical features obtained from diets, cosmetics, and plastic surgery. After laying out this analysis, Jessica suggests,

I find myself, however, being concurrently repulsed and driven by these trends. I personally struggle with the way I feel when I look in the mirror. . . . I fight with myself, knowing on the one hand that I am worth more than my body (and concurrently that nothing is wrong with my body to begin
This section clarifies Edbauer's explanation that "writing . . . involves a mutuality between sensual and signifying effects. The two dimensions exist in proximity to one another: meaning and feeling always shadow the other in rhetoric without reducing to the other" (151). The writing moves between signification and affective experience. In the section above, Jessica focuses on the dynamic encounter between sensual and signifying effects as she gives voice to how the ideological constructs of women's identity play out on and in her body. That experience is full of resonances and movement; here, it is a tension and frustration on the writer's part and that sensation becomes the very expression of the paper.

To further develop this point, the writing that takes shape in this example forms an affective drive not only for the writer but also for the reader. The practical connection to the classroom situation becomes even more acute when one considers how reading my student papers engages an affective experience. Edbauer explains, "When we encounter writing, it not only signifies something to us, but it also combines with us in a degree of affectivity" (151). In other words, when I read Jessica's paper, I understand her explorations of our culture's signifying codes (dominant notions of femininity) and I also feel with the paper. I hear the struggle she's getting at; I hear Jessica's frustration when she notes that she's both "repulsed and driven by these trends." The terms she chooses—"repulsed" and "driven"—denote an affective interaction that translates to me as her reader. I can sense the urgency of Jessica's point and the level of involvement she articulates. The writing moves in a way that demands a response from me that also implicates signification and affect. At the end of her paper I write, "This is an amazing paper, Jessica! I see much of myself in these pages—I had huge bodily and confidence issues when I was younger. . . . I didn't want to write too much in the margins because this was a space for you to explore your feelings and your points." So, I
interact with the affect in these encounters: affect is there when Jessica takes up her call to write, it's there when I read the paper, and it definitely manifests itself in my reaction to the writing.

Whether one makes marginal comments or not, whether a student takes up this point rather than another point, affect plays a huge role in how the rhetorical moment plays out. It invests spaces of signification with the attendant intensification that affect brings with it. No marginal comment we make as teachers (or, not even the absence of comments) is ever devoid of an affective component that involves students; and no paper or student writing ever functions without an affective element.

In that sense, I now understand that Edbauer advocates “a literacy of affect” in the latter part of her essay. She argues, “The concept of affect meets the street in a radical way for writing studies” (151). The radical edge she addresses comes about when we consider that we always also experience writing, not just understand it. We experience it on the body. Edbauer admonishes, “Our literacies can stretch further to the rhythm, texture, accent, and intensities that cause culture to go live” (153). We might ask how our students are involved in our classrooms, and how we encounter them via the lesson plans we so carefully devise in our offices. Likewise, do our students call us to be invested in a particular classroom? As Edbauer argues at the end of her essay, “The ‘practical’ aspect of writing and rhetoric (for better or for worse) is therefore nothing other than affect at work” (155).

As my first full draft of the response was winding down at about this point, Jessica, my reader, made the following comments:

My main comment is something that struck me in Edbauer’s essay that you did not address directly. Edbauer says, “writing reacts to a call; it is an act of participation within a discourse community” (137). So, I want to know what your take is on the student-teacher relationship as a (fluid and volatile?) dynamic within a (“the”) discourse community? How is reaction a movement within dialogue? Is affect purely responsive? If so, how does the ongoing “discourse” (including nonverbal, of course; i.e. societal constructs and social movement in general) breed response/affect (are these
interchangeable?) and how, in turn, does affect breed discourse? You imply some of your answers, but I want a more explicit, developed response to this.

Jessica is probing to highlight an important part of Edbauer's argument: that writing acts on the one hand within an ongoing cultural/historical conversation, and that writers experience this conversation affectively on the other hand. Jessica asks valuable questions about the intersection of these two dimensions of writing by bringing in the notion of the discourse community of teachers, students, and the larger academic institution. How, then, does affect interface with community and institutions? Here, again, I bring up Deleuze and Guattari's point about desire and the social. The social hails individuals in the classroom as student or teacher, as an authority or as an apprentice; it allows both teachers and students to speak from an established position within the specific social/political economy. On these terms, individuals become subjects: teachers assign papers, students write them, teachers assess papers and give grades, students listen and learn. In this formation, a paper is read by way of grammatical rules and rhetorical goals; the teacher marks mistakes, suggests improvements of style and syntax, and corrects faulty logic according to the discourse community's standards. In other words, this dimension is a highly constructed, but necessary axis of social functioning and regulation. Even at the moments when, for instance, I engaged with the affective dimension of Jessica's paper, I also read it through the lens of academic order and structuration. Now, both Edbauer and Jessica (in her end comments) ask about the experience of that structuration, too. That's where affect comes into play with discourse community. Grading and assessment are never as clean and straightforward as we might sometimes imagine.

To help make this final point, I look to D. Diane Davis' essay "Finitude's Clamor: Or, Notes towards a Communitarian Literacy." Davis writes, "Sharing (that is: community) takes place not among similarly positioned subjecthoods—subjects share no/thing as
subjects—but (only) at the extreme and exposed limit of subjectivity, where a (finite) being irrepressibly exceeds itSelf” (124). In other words, beside or in excess of structuration—beside good grammar, good logic, appropriate teacher/student behavior—lies something else that also is part of reading and writing, of being students and teachers. This something else is where real community building takes place: where subjects slip up, where they stumble, where they encounter the limits of subjectivity. That’s the movement that Jessica addresses in her paper as the frustrations and disruptions with gender identity; that’s where she writes about how her experience with family structure drives her beside herSelf: precisely that stumbling, that stammering, that interruption creates the affective component that connects a writer to a reader and to a discourse community. In “discourse,” then, one finds a conjuncture consisting of both the line of structuration, and the line of affective disruption. As a teacher, I grade students and assess their compliance with the rules of my discourse community, and I also engage affectively with a multitude of events and encounters that exceed disciplinary regulations; as Edbauer, Davis, and Jessica suggest, that part forms our experience with discourse. That is to say, as Jessica notes in her comments above, the student/teacher relationship is indeed “fluid and volatile.”

So, of course, at the end of my response I come back to Fred Kemp’s call for clarity and applicability of theories of affect in writing studies. It seems to me that the practical aspect of this work plays out, if we want to or not, in our everyday experiences of our pedagogies and lesson plans. At the very least, theories of affect help address the “feel” of the classroom in moments of excitement, fear, joy, frustration, hope, and apathy that we all encounter, in complex ways, from the macro-level of “what are course goals?” to the micro-level of “what did the student mean to imply with that comment? or “why are they not more excited about this assignment?” to “how can I make my students participate more in class discussion?” These are questions worth asking because they involve how affect operates in pedagogy, and Edbauer’s excellent
essay (as well as Kemp's questioning) have helped me put issues of affect into sharper view. My hope remains that I may have succeeded, even in a small measure, to get that across to my readers.

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Notes

1. As Amy Robillard notes, "the decisions we make about whose work to cite are affective decisions" (260). That is to say, to cite students the way we usually do, anonymously or by first name only, is an affective decision that stems from the discipline's view of students as being mainly research subjects. Student texts usually appear in composition scholarship as examples of pedagogical approaches, and pedagogy is largely seen as being implemented by the author of a piece of scholarship. In order to protect students in our scholarship, we guard their identities. Robillard also argues, "citations reveal a great deal about personal allegiances. We cite the people we cite because we feel certain things toward them" (261). "Allegiances," and "feeling certain things towards other scholars," are affective responses. Thus, when we cite other scholars' work by full name, we may express feelings of indebtedness, respect, and gratitude. In drafting this response to Edbauer's essay, I could not regard Jessica Lindsey's work as the subject of my writing. After all, I am not writing about Jessica's paper; rather, prompted by Edbauer and Kemp's questions about the practicality of theories of affect, I am concerned with what writing does, why people want to write, and how readers respond to texts. In other words, Jessica's paper becomes the "real" text with which I engage, and Jessica as the writer becomes an interlocutor and collaborator.

2. I do not mean to suggest that solely my identity as a woman enables me to read Jessica's paper in an affective way. For example, a male reader would surely experience an equally affective reading experience of a different kind; it could be moving along different lines of gender and implicate his affective experience of "maleness" in our culture; or, it could involve him more along the lines of what Jessica writes regarding her family experience. In any case, rather than making a reductive argument about certain identity categories, I want to highlight how identity and subjectivity as such pass through affective resonances in complex ways.
The Trouble With Affect

Laura R. Micciche

What does writing do? Jennifer Edbauer circles around this question throughout her essay on affect and writing. Her answer, and the case she builds in service of it, is that writing signifies and embodies affect. The connective tissue of the "and" functions as the problem she addresses: that is, compositionists tend to over-invest in signifying practices while largely neglecting the affective dimensions of writing. Whereas she acknowledges the promising work being done on emotion and affect in composition studies, she finds that it is undermined by scholars who create a "false binary between signification and affect" and who gauge the value of research in this area solely by its classroom applicability (135). For example, she cites a conversation on WPA-L in which Fred Kemp aligns studies of affect with the "literaturists' job of one-upmanship the best current ideas of the guy next to you," when