In the 1996 issue of *PMLA* considering “the personal” in scholarship, Michael Bérubé suggests that scholarly use of personal narrative represents “some kind of generic violation of scholarship in the human sciences.” But he concludes that “as long as the scholarship in question concerns humans and is written by humans, readers should at least entertain the possibility that nothing human should be alien to it.” This conclusion, so self-evident, is only now becoming acceptable in the humanities—that is, to admit the full range of human experience into formal scholarly writing.

The study of language and literature without reference to its roles in scholars’ lives and communities has been the most common academic practice; such study is also academic in the pejorative sense of its being “not practical” or moot or removed from real life. The adjective “academic” has meant, among other things, that scholarly writing about language and literature assumes that the subjectivity and social memberships of scholars are *not* factors in their humanistic knowledge in the same sense as physical scientists assume that their subjectivities are not factors in their knowledge of science. Because humanists have used the scientific sense of objectivity to conceptualize their own work, and because humanistic scholarship does not have as great an economic and physical consequence as science, humanities have come to seem less important as subject matters than science, law, or business.

This volume collects essays that, taken together, try to show how fundamental it is in humanistic scholarship to take account, in a variety of ways and as part of the subject matter, of the personal and collective experiences of scholars, researchers, critics, and teachers. The volume advances the view that humanistic inquiry can not develop successfully at this time without reference to the varieties of subjective, intersubjective, and collective experience of teachers and researchers. We of course do not think that such reference is a requirement or that it should appear in every study; rather, that regardless of the announced level of subjective involvement of the scholarly author, both authors and readers need to have on their hermeneutic agenda, as readers and as writers, the task of locating scholarly authors through personal and social
criteria. This presupposition may then apply to different authors in different degrees, as it does in this volume: authors choose how to identify themselves. But in each case, we readers and interpreters have at least before us the issue of the subjective and intersubjective situation of the author(s) as part of the subject matter.¹

To one degree or another, scholarly authors’ lived experiences are already part of the different subject matters in the humanities. However, the conventions of writing urge writers away from the citation or use of these experiences. In secondary and postsecondary writing pedagogy, authorial detachment is part of the curriculum; self-inclusion, particularly the use of the “I,” is strongly discouraged. Students are not taught that sometimes the first person is effective, or that one’s own experience may well matter in one’s way of announcing knowledge, but that it is actually not acceptable to use the I or to fold in personal experience in substantive ways in academic writing. In this way, matters of writing pedagogy are closely related to matters of writing conventions in the humanities. Humanists are often unconscious to a great extent of just how coercive these conventions are. While many may wish to use self-reference and self-reflection, combining the genres of scholarship with the genres of personal experience and observation is confined to texts that are prominently marked “memoir,” “autobiography,” or other life-writing genres. One may include reference to scholarly work in life-writing, but one cannot include life-writing in scholarly work. This is the conventional means of minimizing the human presence in the humanities.

The foregoing description represents what motivates our effort to bring out this volume. But we did not anticipate how, exactly, it would materialize. We had a call for papers, and we had a zone of interest which we know has been growing in the past two decades. We waited for the essays to arrive and to see what they said. We sorted the proposals and the essays until we thought that each essay contributed something distinctive. Our last step was to face the issue of how the essays added up to a comprehensive perspective, to a vision that could provide guidance to other teachers and scholars. We thought that unless contributors wrote about what they themselves thought were the important issues, we would not be able to “add up” anything that truly reflected our constituency, or that would speak to the many colleagues and disciplines beyond our own. We tried to withhold judgment about what we wanted to accomplish in collecting these essays, rather than decide beforehand and instruct potential contributors on what we envision. We understood the risks of this procedure, but we thought it was more in keeping with our sense of ourselves as students: learning from our contributors. After collecting the essays we were able to sample what our colleagues were thinking, and then to
decide, on the basis of their work, how the issues that they raised connected to the ones with which we started.

These issues are reflected in the five divisions of the volume following the introduction. Each division characterizes what we think is the principal choice by the authors on how they could best contribute to our topic. By juxtaposing each individual essay with others, we give each an accent beyond what the authors may have foreseen or intended. The volume’s title reflects our sense of how the essays, taken together, add up to a picture of part of our profession, to a view of how we are changing, and to a set of advocacies of how we might change further. In addition to what our title actually says, here are a few other general issues, touched on to one degree or another by all the essays, which have emerged in our reading and interpreting these essays and that we think are also marked by the title.

*The inseparability of teaching and scholarship.* Readers may notice how many contributors treat teaching and scholarship as aspects of a single process. Including personal experiences and narratives in the presentation of scholarship lends scholarship its pedagogical authority: it is not just plain “knowledge.” It is knowledge derived by someone and told to someone. It is knowledge that *this* person found in *this* community or society and is sharing with *this* other group of people. Contributors to this volume take pains to account for how they are situated, and, therefore, how their claims may then be taken up and evaluated by us readers. Scholarship that is “from” and “to” someone is, yes, “personal,” but its personal location is only a feature of something that can be taken up in collective contexts and in non-personalized senses. Teaching that takes place in particular locations is “local” teaching, but it is also teaching that tells us the character of knowing, especially the knowing of language and literature. If the scholarship is about Joyce Carol Oates or Anne Sexton because Brenda Daly and Paula Salvio chose these authors, it is also about other authors who are read by other students and researched by other scholars. The persons, the scholarship, and the teaching are combined.

*The connections of personal experiences with the subject of language and literature.* Peter Elbow has asked, “What is English?” Our answer has been that “English” is both “our” language and the subject of language and literature. These essays say, in part, that we must be aware that we are studying our language—the language of a specific society that is host to many cultures and many values, but that we are also studying something that all people have, language and literature. Contributors to this volume come from many (though not all) zones of American society represented in the academy. Yet each is committed to “English” the subject, each speaks “English” the language, and many speak other languages, know other subjects and cultures, and bring their special
knowledge to bear on the study of language and literature, as do Susan Handelman, Katya Azoulay, Victor Villanueva, Morris Young, and Chris Castiglia. Yet many other contributors also bring special perspectives on English the language and English the subject—those of profession, gender, history, pedagogy, to name a few. Almost every essay raises this issue: how English is both our language and a subject matter that extends to all language and literature.

The connections of literature and composition studies. This has been a continuing problem in “English” for perhaps a century and a half in modern times. Yet most contributors to this volume have not subscribed to this division of subject matter and academic interest. To them, writing, language, language use, and literature have been part of one picture that has made a point of recognizing the human in the use and study of language and literature. Richard Ohmann’s several works, for example, have presupposed a unified subject. In his contribution, he adds his own responses to teaching and to university administration, and suggests thereby what may be new relations of language and society, of English and America. Victor Villanueva, a teacher and administrator of English and Spanglish, is someone whose story and whose memory may itself fall among literary genres. Essays like Rachel Brownstein’s take over the “student” genre, while her students take over oral genres, and the classroom account she gives can count as an ethnographic genre. Most of the contributions to this volume are not easily identified generically because they cross genre boundaries and show by repeated example how the many genres of “writing” speak against a propadeutic subject of “composition” as being distinct from a scholarly and culturally privileged subject of “literature.”

Taken together, the essays in this volume fall into the category of “scholarly writing.” Yet, they also create new subcategories of scholarly writing as they change the received genres. The essays have a social character, yet they are all still personal, even those, such as Willard-Traub’s and Gray’s, which seem to use more traditional scholarly conventions of writing. Their subject matters as well as their styles change their genres and form the basis for new pedagogical initiatives—ones that permit the risks, the personal reflections, the experiments, the errors, the awkward moments characteristic of real teaching and real research. Narratives such as Joycelyn Moody’s challenge the customary conventions of teacher-student interaction in her “diary,” yet the total effect of such an essay is to invite other such diaries that tell of the real levels of relatedness between students and teachers. This is a “scholarly” diary that speaks with a personal, individual, human, voice to those of us who are listening.

This volume continues and extends the efforts of a group of scholars who have begun to introduce their own lives and experiences as social factors in the scholarship of language and literature. In particular, these authors view their
personal and social circumstances as part of their subject matter—whether implicitly or explicitly. Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Women’s Place* (1975) includes a discussion about the “place” from which she begins her thinking about language use. Lakoff ultimately expands this sense of place to include psychotherapy, the law, the culture of beauty, and the academy. In each instance, however, Lakoff explicitly describes her vantage point in terms more personal than those of a great majority of other scholars. Similarly, Adrienne Rich’s collection, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979), and Diane Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Zauhar’s volume, *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism* (Duke UP, 1993), examine even more closely the embedded self within scholarly work. Patricia Williams’ *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1990) is an especially persuasive instance of how important it is to refer to one’s own experience in discussing something as broadly applicable as the law. Scholarly uses and examinations of personal experiences help to articulate relationships among a variety of disciplines, as well as interestingly unarticulated links between composition studies and literary studies.

We see this in the work of one particular scholar: Jane Tompkins’s “Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History” (1981) examines how her own otherness led to her critical assessment of the same in the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Tompkins’s rhetorical strategy features aspects of her own life as the introductory portion to more traditional forms of academic argument. Most recently, in *A Life in School* (1996), Tompkins examines her own life as the context for her scholarly work. Nancy K. Miller’s work is also noteworthy, particularly *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*; Janet Varner Gunn in *Autobiography* suggests a perspective having to do with “taking oneself up and bringing oneself to language”; Shari Benstock asks, in “Authorizing the Autobiographical,” how writing mediates “...the space between ‘self’ and ‘life’ that the autobiography would traverse and transgress.” Benstock suggests that “...the place to begin our investigation of autobiography might be at the crossroads of writing and selfhood.”

Composition studies has continued to delineate these personal-scholarly contexts since its emergence as a formal discipline in the late 1960s and early 1970s, examining both writer and students of writing. Deborah Brandt details, for instance, the acquisition of literacy among workers and the social forces that contextualize multiple literacies. Victor Villanueva, Jr., in *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* (NCTE, 1990), examines how his “position” in the world provided the pedagogical and philosophical contexts for his work in composition. NCTE has also published *Teaching in College English and English Education* (1998) a volume in which editors Richard Larson, Thomas McCracken, and Judith Entes feature work by scholars writing about how they
came to be postsecondary teachers of literature and composition. These very few examples from literary and composition studies suggest that such substantive accounts of the “inner” academic life provide appropriate and rich contexts for further study and analysis—and for interaction between these two areas of inquiry.

Personal writing has become a collective interest as a necessary context for scholarship and pedagogy. The 1996 issue of *PMLA*, cited above, provides potentially productive links between the literary scholars featured in *PMLA* and the work of composition scholars. For instance, Donald Palumbo-Li notes that the “racialized personal in scholarship” inevitably contributes to the creation of the personal, along with the “consequences of institutional change.” He notes, “If we value the humanistic enterprise precisely because it allows us to explore our humanity, the link our particular lives have with others, then the minority scholar has a particular set of negotiations foisted on him or her, for the appearance of race in the university is an unstable one.”

Cathy Davidson furthers the debate to embrace issues of genre (not unlike the work of Diane Freedman in *An Alchemy of Genres: Cross-Genre Writing by American Feminist Poet-Critics* (1992). She points out that “the conventions of genre for personal writing are every bit as scripted as the conventions of scholarship . . .” She notes that she makes the same kinds of aesthetic judgments about personal writing “. . . as I do about novels, plays, short stories, essays, or articles in *PMLA*.” Concludes Davidson, “Whether we put ourselves in or think we are leaving ourselves out, we are always in what we write.” Davidson here teases out multiple layers of the personal—the actual use of the personal in literary criticism as well as the inescapable “I” that must be part of even the most allegedly “impersonal” scholarship. If, indeed, “The politics of multiculturalization involve a rethinking of every participant’s personal place,” as Palumbo-Li attests, then Sylvia Molloy’s view, “that the use of the personal is a decidedly political act,” seems a logical, concurrent step. Molloy believes that a use of the personal is “. . . the only way at times to draw attention to the necessary duplicity of all texts and discourses.” While Molloy realizes “the enormous responsibility of the personal,” she acknowledges that it can become “too easy, too close to commodification in a safe academic setting.” As such, it needs “rethinking.” Molloy acknowledges that personal “intrusions” can be “jarring or at least cause discomfort and because they effectively call attention to seams, gaps, differences that a general, impersonal discourse would ignore.” In view of both the problems and new opportunities it offers, personal-scholarly writing represents a new direction for academic work. It is clear that “old” directions remain, with only new moves, new gestures, when added to what has been done, suggesting new directions.
Perhaps an appropriate place to start understanding these new directions, new gestures, in a detailed way is to pay attention to our own stories as editors. We are not confiding or confessing anything to you, our colleagues, but we provide a different level of justification for opening this path more energetically. We consider it essential to show that our own lives have led us to this point of commitment and self-inclusion, yet still with circumspection at each point in the process. We have lived as if included in all other areas, but as scholars and teachers, we have written (before now, and very often) as if we were not a part of the groups to which our thoughts are directed and about whom we want to know. We had attempted to remove ourselves from our scholarly writing as if to suggest, by the absence of the personal “I-voice,” that we were members of that rhetorically conventional and established group. We aim now to participate in the work of those whose thoughts collected in this volume by assuming the first person and observing what emerges. We want to test what some of the writers in this volume suggest, either through demonstration or declaration, that including reference to personal experience or even acknowledging it causes discomfort for them and for others. But we also want to feel the authority that may come from an elaborated and developed style of personal candor, and we want to propose understanding that is more helpful because more clearly anchored in human experience.

DEBORAH H. HOLDSTEIN

For some of us, I think, using the personal in academic scholarship provokes a profound sense of unease. As I reread this first sentence, I am struck by my need to make a personal statement by saying “for some of us” instead of “for me.” I suppose I could be personal—sort of, by not focusing entirely on myself but meaning myself. Perhaps I am all too in touch with my inner adolescent, the one who is told by adults, “It’s not about you; it’s not you who’s important. It’s the community.”

I believe completely Cathy Davidson’s assertion, noted above, that “Whether we put ourselves in or think we are leaving ourselves out, we are always in what we write.” Perhaps, then, for me, it’s a matter of degree. While we might very well “be” in what we write, the varieties of academic rhetoric, however only allegedly objective, still, to me stand apart from the truly personal, in which narratives involving one’s life are revealed within or instead of more conventional academic forms. I cannot legitimately rail against androcentric, academic argument; I am not entitled to do so, as I have not yet dominated it. The conventions of academic argument, I fear, might exceed my grasp. David Bleich, like Richard Ohmann in this volume, has thoroughly mastered (deliberate word choice) the various rhetorics of academe; indeed, he has
improved them, shaped them, reshaped them. He has earned the right to be personal and given his authority within the profession, he is undiminished by its use. His credibility as a scholar remains.

Perhaps, too, I’m convinced that if something comes readily to me—as it has often seemed when I’ve written about family stories—that it cannot demonstrate the same degree of discipline, of accomplishment, as that which comes at greater effort. If that is the case, then, I am obligated to attempt those things that come less easily. Don’t we, shouldn’t we, exhort our students to strive for that which seems difficult, challenging? The so-called conventional, scholarly essay represents a form of that personal exhortation for me. Aren’t the scholarly excavations required towards acceptable scholarship, paradoxically, among the most personal of ventures towards collective acceptance?

As Susan Handelman asserts, “knowledge has a face,” but “the individual, ‘confessional voice’ is not such a major component of classical Jewish discourse, in part because Judaism is not a ‘confessional’ faith. . . . but instead a covenantal membership in a People with a collective history, fate, and destiny.” While several of our contributors point out that the “community” or collective nature of academe doesn’t really exist—that we prize the individual, privatized work of the “solitary scholar”—there are nonetheless sets of scholarly conventions within each discipline that suggest membership. Perhaps I find my voice as an academician tempered by what I perceive to be the various histories and expanded canons of my ongoing academic experience, a voice that finds comfort only if the confessional is balanced by near-universally agreed upon conventions of scholarly work. I think of a personal favorite, the Jane Tompkins essay on Uncle Tom’s Cabin cited above, which, at the time of its publication in 1981 dared to break the rhetorical conventions of academic prose by beginning as follows:

Once during a difficult period in my life, I lived in the basement of a house on Forest Street in Hartford, Connecticut, which belonged to Isabella Beecher Hooker—Harriet Beecher Stowe’s half-sister. This woman at one time of her life had believed that the millennium was at hand and that she was destined to be the leader of a new matriarchy. When I lived in that basement, however, I knew nothing of Stowe, or of the Beechers, or of the utopian visions of nineteenth-century American women. I made a reverential visit to the Mark Twain house a few blocks away. (20)

Tompkins’s essay uses the personal as a touchstone for what is ultimately a strongly argued, scrupulously researched, scholarly work about the value of “sentimental fiction” by women bringing note to an era more readily associated with Whitman and Twain. I often use the Tompkins essay as a model with students to discuss the rhetorical conventions of academic writing, praising
her impeccable, useful contrast between personal narrative and intellectually strenuous argument. [I contrast her essay with an equally useful piece of conventional academic argument: Edward Hirsch’s award-winning essay in PMLA, “The Imaginary Irish Peasant,” notable as an example of excellent, traditional academic scholarship as well as for its clarity. (And the latter leads to an entirely different discussion which I will not take up here.)]

In each of these essays, I admire the hard work, the discipline, the reconfiguring of the self into an academic self that must take place for such difficult work to occur. As the daughter of immigrants, I was encouraged to listen to popular music and to watch television as ways to make certain, my parents believed, that I would be completely, fully “American.” While there are limits to the possibilities for any objectivity in language, I still believe, more often than not, that being “too” personal is a luxury, the privilege of those who have somehow arrived. (Conversely, and in other hands, when the confessional appears in the guise of the academic, it might be seen as the mark of the naïve.)

A number of our contributors discuss the various “selves” of scholarship and teaching; certainly there are ways to be multiple selves that are true to who we are: for instance, the George Will I would rather not read as a political columnist, is, alas, the same, wonderful George Will who writes about baseball. Similarly, I do not become any less the working-class, Jewish girl from New York if I successfully achieve the conventions of academic prose. I do not assimilate away (even if I want to) by achieving the difficult.

As context for what to me is a hard-won place in the community (or, as you wish, non-community) of academe, I often tell the story of one of my high school English teachers, Mrs. Ludwick. On the first day of honors English class during my Junior year in high school, she held up a cartoon from The New Yorker—a magazine that other people’s parents read instead of Life and Reader’s Digest—that featured three witches around a cauldron. The actual caption escapes me now, but I recall her saying, “If you have not read Shakespeare’s Macbeth, you would not understand to what this cartoonist was alluding. You would not be a cultured person.” (That she said “Shakespeah,” cahttooonist,” and “allooding,” did not escape my adolescent notice, providing an interesting contrast to her well-meaning notions of “cultcha.”) She concluded, as if to set the major goal of the rest of the year, “It is my job to give your culture.” (“Cultcha”) And in her way, Mrs. Ludwick was right: the culture with which she hoped to inoculate us was the culture of T. S. Eliot, to me and to my other white ethnic and African-American counterparts, “the other”—to us, the unattainable, something to which we could aspire. In a curriculum that had also featured The Autobiography of Malcolm X, a book I might add, to which we could “relate,” it was Eliot and company—and we thought of
Richard Wright as part of the same company—whose oeuvre we had to work to attain, to dominate, to prove ourselves additionally capable of interpreting simply because these writers were in every way, shape, and form, the “not us.”

That I work mostly in composition and rhetoric—and often in technology—enhances my desire to dominate conventional academic prose. Many of us remember the typical essay in *College English* during the 1960s that always seemed to begin like this: “I walked into my Dean’s office, put my feet up on his desk, and told him ‘We need to do something about the ways our freshmen write.’” To this day our colleagues with credible scholarship in conventional terms struggle to achieve tenure in a profession that views with skepticism some research in composition studies, judging the work undisciplined and self-indulgent (despite a growing body of work to the contrary). Too often, despite the increasing prominence of composition and rhetoric, there are those who wait for the moments at which compositionists might recede into what is in the view of some the uncritical, unexamined storytelling—the (gasp) “personal”—that makes the field suspect to begin with.

But just as we tell our students that there are different occasions for writing, so too are there different occasions for us: the conventions of the scholarly review in *Genre*, say, are different from the scholarly review in *The New York Review of Books*. These, in turn, differ from scholarly essays in *College English*, *PMLA*, and *American Literature*, which, in turn, differ among themselves within certain unarticulated but defined parameters. Perhaps, then, that which we already know is a compromise mediating my discomfort: that like anything else, the place for the transparent personal within scholarship is a matter of degree, its prominence varying among and within academic genres. In all, however, I remain wary of those colleagues who encourage the wholly, transparently personal from their students to the neglect of conventional rhetorics—of the sort these colleagues themselves have mastered. In doing so, and in the guise of “empowering personal voices,” they hypocritically deny students access to the same privilege, deny them the potential to change academic conventions from within.

**DAVID BLEICH**

I remember learning academic writing. It was in college, and I had to write my bachelor’s thesis. I read all the criticism on T. S. Eliot’s plays. I had read so much that, unconsciously, I had assimilated the cadences and styles of the commentators on Eliot and his work. I did not know this had happened, but when I sat down to write the last draft, the language came out in the form of “Eliot criticism.” For me, this was a genre in itself. A year later, I had the chance to get a job at McGraw-Hill as an entry level editor. The test for this job was to
write as if I were a reporter and “report” on the advance presentation of a new kind of railroad system. After studying the imaginary “announcement” by the company, I wrote a newspaper story about this new system. I had assimilated the language of the promotion and converted it into journalese: my story sounded exactly like a newspaper story, and I was offered the job.

It was not until having to write my dissertation and announce a professional identity—how I would say who I am to people who would hire me on a career basis—that I observed my own absence from the scene of writing. It was during this time that I had become interested in the subjectivity of reading. Yet, the subjectivity of writing seemed still to be a forbidden topic. Then, and now, many consider subjectivity a zone of insubstantiality. Although readers’ responses are treated somewhat more respectfully, there are still few, if any, accepted languages for announcing the subjectivities that emerge in reading and for translating them into other genres and styles of language. But in writing, the problem is more acute, as, despite the increasing numbers of people wanting to write as if they were part of the field of observation, it is still a choice that rarely leads to the same respectful response as does the voice of the detached scholar.

In college, when I learned the voices of the critics by reading studies of Eliot, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and others, the professional status of my choice of dissertation led me to utopian literature, a field whose idealism I could at once criticize and admire. However: I felt and knew that my deeper relation to this subject matter was out of bounds for a scholarly project. This meant: the subject that I chose to launch my professional identity had to be presented without reference to my privately acknowledged sense of its importance to me. At that moment, in the mid-sixties, I suppressed my wish to face this problem of formal academic writing until perhaps fifteen years later, when I turned actively toward the profession of writing pedagogy and tried to work within its space to face the more general issues of how the use of language can help to bring us more together with each other in academic life.

In case any readers of this volume want to know, my dissertation is available in the libraries as *Utopia: The Psychology of a Cultural Fantasy*, published by the UMI Research Press sixteen years after it was written, thanks to the generosity of Professor Robert Scholes, who picked it out of oblivion and recommended its publication. Its idea is that utopian authors have not advanced past adolescence, and the lack of literary quality or power found in most utopian novels derives from the adolescent fantasy of dominion over society being given to them by benevolent parents, fathers, circumstances. I used this idea to relate Thomas More to Edward Bellamy and H. G. Wells; I claimed that their lives were incomplete and in major ways, juvenile. They were boys, good rather
than evil, whose gang psychology was translated, if fatuously, into being the
gang-leaders of a peaceful and benevolent society.

Perhaps I could not say then about this piece of scholarship and criticism
what I can say now: it was my moment of trying to grow beyond adolescence by
criticizing the adolescence of others. However, during the writing of this disser-
tation, I was enjoying an adolescence I had previously missed having gone to all-
male schools—high school and college. Was it hypocritical to have experienced
this counterpoint: above adolescence in my dissertation, adolescent in real life?
Perhaps it was; perhaps many academic statements, claims, advocacies are sub-
ject to the same intrapsychic trope. Yet it is also true that each zone of my mind
had an appropriate public context. The question is: how full a picture of adoles-
cence (for example) is available to the scholar not aware of his or her own implica-
tion in the issue? Had I been examining the psychology of these authors with my
own situation more clearly in view, might I not have written about them with
more sympathy, perhaps even with more alertness to the gender issues they raise,
and which I had to raise when preparing the piece for publication? Doesn’t the
author’s awareness of self play a role in how the writing is done, what stances to
take as a public figure, and particularly, what tone and attitude as a person
among others to take? Might I not have noticed earlier in life the endemic arro-
gance of the academic posture, an arrogance that is generated by the convention
of detachment, learned in postsecondary writing courses? Might I, like many in
my position, also have learned to notice my male adolescence with more perspi-
cacity and to understand its socially given expectations? Might I have related
these expectations to the postures I felt myself taking as an academic writer?
Might I have become aware sooner of how fully expectations of masculinity have
guided many academics, including many women, to write dishonestly—that
is—without regard to who they believe they are in society?

So for me it is no longer personal to be personal—it is fundamental. Once I
include myself in the “audience” my contribution changes: my words lose their
hortatory status, and take on instead the role of invitation, contribution, mem-
bership, and studenthood. I am no longer bound to argue, to make points and
cases, or to think that whoever reads my work must be persuaded. I am, rather,
more conscious of being among others with comparable, though not identical,
interests. Writing and speaking among others is different from doing the same
things as performances. It is not just personal or just performing; it is a wide
variety of stances that become available, once at least some terms of personal
commitment are included, some aspect of one individual history as a living
being and a social constituent, is invited into scholarly discussion.

This is how I feel in the presence of the other contributors to this volume. I
feel ready to take up their formulations seriously and perhaps to overtake them,
to “steal” them and place them into my own vocabularies. I feel authorized to traverse the differences that there obviously are between me and them. My individual voice provides a basis for hearing other individual voices as having struggled with similar counterpoints, similar previously private misgivings. Each of our formulations justifies all the others, and, gradually, the collection of individuals in this book come somewhat closer to one another and seem, when viewed from a greater distance, to be the beginning of a new community.

Certainly, in my responding to Deborah’s invitation to collaborate with her on this volume, a fledgling new community was formed. Our relation to one another began to change from what it was in the past. We worked in this “project” but the interaction brought other issues before us, issues of interpersonal style as we tried to guide our differences toward complementarity that will help us and other contributors. We have not worked through or defined in any formal way what our differences are, and we have not formulated how our strong common cultural ties as Jews with immigrant parents growing up in Queens played a role in putting together this volume. At this time, I can’t say at length how these common values work, but one thing is clear, I think: we have recognized the inseparability of individual from collective experience as a value taken from our parents and our culture. We have recognized how our talk shifts peremptorily from the private and hidden to the personal and shared, to the individual and the published. We take these common moves routinely in our discussions of essays and values, and we communicate with one another because we have noted this sense of common style, attitude, and public purpose. We engage in this volume because, perhaps, we want to eradicate people’s feeling of exclusion, especially on the basis that their personal history departs from what was previously understood as “normal.” We re-direct our historic opposition to exclusion in this local context, and we are grateful for the chance to pursue this purpose in the form of a scholarly enterprise.

IDEALS AND CAUTIONS

Our individual reflections, above, have already presented both our ideals and our cautions. From Deborah we heard how if this new direction in language and literary studies proceeds, little is accomplished if it is merely a new venue for the already confident. From David we heard how if the ideals of scholarship as now received are presented to the next generation, little is accomplished. In the first section, there are two wide-ranging reviews of this balance of values.

Margaret Willard-Traub’s essay is part of the theoretical consideration of new approaches to self that don’t censor it as a living idea. She focuses specifically on how feminist theory in literature and writing has begun to affect the
“scholarly self,” the voices we hear in reading our colleagues work, in rethinking how we are going to interact, in classrooms and in conferences, without the traditional tropes of academic egolalia. This essay, both critical and reflective, engages the provocative work of such figures as Ruth Behar, Nancy Miller, and Jane Gallop, and she provides guidance about how personal accounts do, could, and should lead us to issues of collective concern, without, however, letting the special identities of the personal narratives disappear. In particular, her discussion of loss, like Salvio’s, leads toward the view of how academic genres are changing toward more active self-inclusion, and that these new genres are the signs of new social relations less prone to posturing, to idle abstraction, and more oriented around the unity of teaching and scholarship. In this process, she and Salvio are trying to teach how not to avoid pain and frustration in our attempts to tell, teach, study, and share the truth.

Jeffrey Gray, in reviewing a range of work in postmodern and postcolonial literary theory, considers an issue posed and implied by many contributors and those doing related work: how is it that personal styles, tropes, awarenesses and identities continue in our discussions in spite of the critique of the unitary self in postmodern thought? In spite of the proliferation of anti-essentialism, anti-foundationalism, fragmentations-of-self ideas that people entertain, postmodern theory seems still to retain a dimension of liberal humanism. The language of self and individual consciousness, he suggests, is not going out of style. Rather, in its place in language retains, with other ideas, a pragmatic reality in our lives. Other essays in this volume have shown the dimensions of this reality.

Juxtaposed to one another, these essays portray the issue of scholarly self-inclusion in its resistance to being dogmatized. As humanistic scholars gradually acquire the courage to disclose their stakes in their new understandings of the subject matter, they also recognize how much more latitude the subject gives to write from a variety of sites in the profession and in society. In the next section two unusual sites are considered.

SELF-INCLUSION IN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP

Brenda Daly’s essay is, in part, an answer to the cautions of Deborah Holdstein and Jeffrey Gray. Daly’s site is definitely one of the more dangerous ones in the academy and in society. We are first beginning to face the common occurrence of the incestuous derogation of women’s and children’s lives. Brenda Daly’s lifetime scholarly achievement has helped to open this path for this part of social experience and she has showed how it may enter the curriculum while we stay alert to its risks. While “radical introspection” may have been a part of classical Greek society, it has, today, a new meaning, one that could be taken up by all people, not only the privileged.
Before feminism became a factor in academic life, the genre of autobiography existed and was treated with respect—provided it knew its place. As Deborah Holdstein has observed, only some have been permitted the luxury of “writing my autobiography”: these were the writers, critics, and travelers who already reached a relatively advanced age, had many public accomplishments, and now in a leisurely sense, they could “look back,” make assessments, tell their stories. Brenda Daly’s essay tells us how this can no longer be the case. Daly’s writing says that a person’s life can never again be a mere curiosity—the things that happen to us, our struggles, our accession to the privileges of academic life, our pre-academic family life, these too are fundamental. She suggests how these events teach us how to read, how to choose what we read and what we announce in our curricula. Daly’s story is one of family concealment that leads to personal concealment. The processes of suppression and repression of the dangerous truths about some families’ lives have been especially damaging to the ability of women to have lives of candor in public and in private. It is as if, in childhood, and unbeknownst to many women, the gift of self-esteem has been taken away, and as they grow into adulthood, are left to comprehend how this happened. Daly’s story is, luckily, one of recovery from this near-permanent removal of self-esteem. She suggests how scholarly reading and criticism meant recovery for her and a path toward contact with student who may also have had to conceal the fundamental experiences of their lives. Daly shows that the one window of hope for her and others like her was the chance to publish in self-disclosing genres, to bring to light, to announce to others that, yes, “It really did happen,” much as Patricia Williams’s sister urges her (in The Alchemy of Race and Rights) to say “it happened” just because there will be a mendacious chorus saying “it didn’t happen.”

Paula Salvio achieves a similarly compelling synthesis of perspectives and genres. Dealing with a situation of the loss of a beloved parent whose loss is also resented because it was unnecessary and paradoxical, Salvio folds her story into that of Anne Sexton. Salvio’s story follows her sense of loss and resentment into her scholarship and her teaching, and in the process, urges us to anticipate our unconscious responses to the literature we teach. Many of us literature teachers teach what we love. But the terms of our love of particular works are usually seen as not requiring any formal examination or social reference. Salvio, however, shows that whatever our attachments to literature and to writers, the fact that there are such attachments means that their roots in our life histories are significant, and that looking for them, finding them, and disclosing them as part of both the pedagogical and scholarly processes enriches these efforts for students and teachers. Sure, there is pain and discomfort for both Daly and Salvio. Yet one “fundamental” feature of our professional commitment is examining
the unexamined for what it will teach us and future generations. Daly’s and Salvio’s essays show emphatically the seriousness and necessity of personal courage to disclose issues that younger, less able, less experienced, less comprehending people don’t yet know to pursue. Their work shows teaching and scholarship at its deepest and how personal inquiry is a necessary part of them both.

TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP FACE TO FACE

Daly and Salvio show that including themselves in literary teaching and scholarship involves “facing” the forgotten, repressed, and suppressed in their individual histories of experience: they look memories and moods in the face by recording, narrating the movement between self and text, self and author, self and co-reader. Susan Handelman shows how, through Jewish history, the relation of teacher to student has always had a similar “face-to-face” status, that student and teacher face each other in the same sense that each of us “face” experience and history. This is not the case for the history of our own society, but, most of us would agree, that, as Richard Ohmann and most other contributors acknowledge, the individual facing oneself cannot be taken out of any teaching. In fact, we might as well admit, we have given the one-to-one tutorial the status as an ideal teaching unit, and this ideal materializes in the dissertation phase of doctoral study. Handelman shows how serious an ideal this is: it is not just a tutorial—it is “eye contact,” the necessary face-to-face that must be part of the process of teaching and learning. Handelman documents this necessity in the long tradition of Jewish scholarly commentary. At the base of historic Jewish inquiries into what laws shall hold society together is the experience of face-to-face learning.

One cannot help but notice the connection between Handelman’s ideal and the very differently put discussion of Madeleine Grumet, who, earlier in her career, stressed the connection between the bonds of parent and child and the bonds of teacher and student. In both Handelman’s and Grumet’s ideals, personal experience is already collective, already made up of two people facing each other, learning from that juxtaposition. Some language philosophers such as Lev Vygotsky and George Herbert Mead have described how language begins through one’s experience with two or more people; social processes then create individual language capability as a phase of the socialization process. This is the similar weight of Handelman’s contribution: there is a certain primordiality of the face-to-face, the foundation of the wider collective, the source of our sense of the individual.

A great deal of academic editing in the humanities renders this face-to-face category a problem. In the rapidly growing practice of anonymous review, the editor “faces” the author and the reviewer, but the latter two don’t face each
other. Louise Z. Smith considers how these editing practices affect the process of moving the individual voice to face the public. Different relationships between author and reader are implied by the different modes of personal address—the personal and impersonal “you” that may be discerned in many essays written in personal modes. Smith is particularly concerned that when the more familiar “du” mode is used criticism crosses over into exposé—a sudden devaluation of the very act meant to make abstractions feel more consistent with experience. While agreeing that personal address is inescapable, and that there are instances of personal criticism that are not self-indulgent, for an editor to face authors as persons is a challenge. Smith relates the needs of the editor of a large, high-circulation journal (College English) to the needs of the profession to begin to include reference to personal experience. In the context of editing, she observes, practices like double-blind review, while helpful to those getting started, still do not remove the editor from interacting with contributors in the traditional person-to-person mode. Her experience could be an instance of Jeffrey Gray’s—and Cathy Davidson’s (cited by Holdstein, above)—similar observation that the person—the single face, the single voice, the active subject—is going to be there in some form, regardless of political change or intellectual fashion. Smith’s account alerts us to how, if we take into account the continuity of day-to-day experiences, we necessarily write our scholarship through the combination of personal and collective values, modes of interaction, ways of speaking, styles of writing.

TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

The scholarly tutorial (such as obtained in dissertations and “independent study” arrangements for students) and the double-blind review are extremes of pedagogical and scholarly interpersonal relations which occur in lesser degrees and in mixed forms in other social relations in the academy. These relations include the identified ones of journal reviews, academic conferences, department meetings that review curricula.

Madeleine Grumet’s commentary on how the interest in autobiography has evolved and on how the genre has varied suggests its broad range of application in the teaching and scholarship. Coming from a basic sympathy with the practices of family, children, and rational subjectivity, Grumet reflects on her own growth, especially on her responses to postmodern critiques of individual life that challenge these sympathies. Remembering herself as “Miss Subjectivity of 1978,” she now asks that autobiography not stop with the personal narrative but guide us also to generalizations about selves in society. She reminds us that if we think of ourselves as teachers, the process of sharing the private in public is never purely either public or private. It is only that our ways of thinking about
one another change as we change our genres of writing, as we include reference
to our own growth, our “aging,” our consciousness of the passing of loved ones.
She urges that we remember that our self-awareness, as teachers and as citizens,
is finally oriented around contributions to society, to collective life.

Karen Paley follows this line of thought in her discussion of the need to
remember the collective value of “expressive” writing. She notes how we have
come into a mood in which “expressive” is equated with self-indulgence and
narcissistic “emoting.” In fact, she, like Grumet, has viewed expressive and per-
sonal writing as an element in a social project that aimed for full equality in
society for all groups, all memberships. As individualism has become redirected
into narrow, power-oriented values through the influence of corporate culture,
those writing teachers who have insisted that people continue to tell their sto-
ries have felt the pressure of condescension. Writing teachers, always the lowest
on the academic totem, are now feeling the effects of this new pretext for dimin-
ishing their work. Paley takes up the task of revoking this new criticism with
evidence from classrooms and counter-arguments to critics. She shows what
many have assumed: the announcement of experience has both a social and a
personal weight, and their combination, not their separation, is the responsibil-
ity of those of us teaching writing and other subjects presented in writing.

Diane Freedman’s essay, also answering Grumet’s challenge to use all the
forms of autobiography, surveys the pedagogical contexts in which writing
“that matters” can be taught, where the writing refers equally to the literature
and to the comments and analyses given by students. She shows how accounts
of teaching experiences are becoming more self-consciously integrated with
scholarly genres. Freedman has a broad range of reference to scholarly work
that has increasingly used self-inclusion—anthropology, sociology, education,
as well as literary criticism—but then returns to show and document the salu-
tary effects on students’ motivation when they are able to read, write, and dis-
cuss with full reference to experiences, including painful ones, of their lives.
Like Brenda Daly, Freedman is interested in the transition of writers’ senses of
audience from individual to class to public. Freedman’s essay shows genres in
the process of change and her citations of students’ work also help to show
why they change. Today, she observes, that on the part of writers, teachers, and
students, there is a willingness to loosen received generic boundaries, because
people in all parts of society, many from communities entering postsecondary
education for the first time, have narratives that help to end the rule of “mas-
ter” narratives. She shows how school work is life work—a calling for some,
work about people’s lives for others, the movement through stages for still oth-
ers. Each of these works entails a new view of language and literature, a new
sense of how to overtake it and fold it into our minds.
Rarely in the professional literature do we find accounts of pedagogical experiences in graduate school. Rachel Brownstein overtakes the students’ voices in her title, “Personal Experience Paper” and then considers the fact that pedagogical experiences are necessarily personal, another version, perhaps, of Handelman’s subject. Writing in an informal and decidedly non-ethnographic style, Brownstein implies a degree of her discomfort, but also dramatizes her kinship with the students. She is responding to the traditional academic hesitations about taking personal responses to literature seriously by asking if she is wasting students’ time seeking, listening to, and then integrating their responses and other allusions to their personal lives into her more traditional judgments of literature’s meaning and value. She cites undergraduate as well as graduate responses. Yet the different kinds of students entering her classes are non-traditional, so that her account of their experiences of one another brings a fresh accent to the genre of classroom accounts. Her discussion puts the question of personal response to literature in a somewhat different light: if we are aiming to encourage a wide reading latitude by postsecondary and graduate students, how do we use the experience and expertise of the scholar who has devoted decades to the study of the same works? When listening to this account with the “third ear,” one hears perhaps the thought of how protective traditional scholarship had been of the subjective and the private.

A decisive shift from Brownstein’s voice is that of Joycelyn K. Moody, who moves forcefully into risky territories about which many teachers have expressed hesitations. In recounting a teaching situation in which she lived in close proximity to her students, she observes in revealing detail the feelings, moods, interpersonal psychology of trying to challenge students while relating to them in fully personal ways, including dancing with them. This engrossing account raises an issue that has been sensitive for centuries—from Abelard and Heloise through Jane Gallop (whose experience is mentioned by Ohmann and Holdstein)—the temptation toward erotic feelings between teachers and students. Moody’s essay does not, of course, provide answers and solutions in the usual sense. Rather, she provides a personal narrative that permits us to conceptualize, and in part to judge for ourselves, the effects of what we usually think of as dangers. We may feel the teaching situation in which she worked, and perhaps because it takes place abroad, we may perceive a distance that encourages us to compare it to our own teaching.

THE SOCIAL CHARACTER OF PERSONAL NARRATIVE

One of the reasons for the exclusion of the first person in scholarly writing is the ideal that because scholarship is for everyone, narcissism is unwelcome. Yet, in scholarly writing, narcissism has taken indirect forms (such as the
excessive citation of one’s own work), and in professional life it is already rampant among academics. For too many, the measure of success is the length of one’s vita; for many graduate students and not-yet-tenured scholars, there are many efforts undertaken “because it will look good on my vita.” The process by which faculty members are judged and evaluated already says that you either succeed as an individual, or you risk failure. The censorship of the first person in scholarly writing is accompanied by a standard that discourages the identification of second and third persons as scholarly collaborators, thus encouraging narcissism indirectly.

In “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship” Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, two scholars who have collaborated with one another for a long time, observe that in spite of attempts to find alternatives to the “adversarial academy” in recent decades, “the deep structure of the academy remains relatively untouched.” (358) This statement refers, in part, to how the primacy of individual authorship as an ideal has continued to discourage the recognition of the value of collaborative work as a practice deserving of professional credit at least as much as individual authorship. The axiom of individual authorship, as backed by centuries of copyright law, is justified by the presumed “objectivity” of the individual author. The inclusion of subjective stances in the work of individual authors would, under this axiom, discredit the authority of the author. However, as Ede and Lunsford (as well as many other scholars collaborating with one another on an equitable basis) have repeatedly demonstrated, collaborative efforts provide more space for personal writing to enter the text: the two voices’ subjectivities, as well as their intersubjectivities, help to remove the sense of narcissism that could accrue to the self-references and self-disclosures of single authors.

At the same time many styles of offering personal narratives about scholarly lives perform the same scholarly function of enhancing public understanding that other, less personally articulated writings have performed in the past. As Virginia Woolf writes in *A Room of One’s Own*, the turn to biography and autobiography as a source of new information provided her the means to overcome ideological biases found in traditional (male oriented) scholarship.

The account of collaboration given by Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly points us in the directions outlined by Ede and Lunsford. Their account suggests how individuals’ sense of membership in the academy and in society is cultivated through collaboration. In our (Holdstein’s and Bleich’s) collaboration, we chat a great deal about everything but our work. Sometimes, our concern for one another as total figures upstaged our responsibility to proceed with this volume in a timely manner. Nevertheless, here it is, done perhaps not as soon as we would have liked, but with the sense that it is our common project,
with our extra attachment to it. This last observation is one of our gestures of connection with Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly, who have collaborated with each other as friends and colleagues for two decades. They met in graduate school, found a common language, obviously both personal and professional mixed in with one another, and then found that this language led to projects that need their collaborative attentions. Just how personal a story is this? Well, of course it is personal, but it is like the relations of many faculty members who, unlike Ronald and Roskelly or Ede and Lunsford, have not recognized the value and advantage of discussing their collaborations as part of their scholarly practice. Hundreds of us faculty members collaborate with one another in different ways. Sometimes it is just a matter of “many hands making light work.” Other times it is common for a project to demand the perspective of two or more people. We may not be used to hearing the story, account, or explanation of the collaboration attached to the given work, but those genres insert our human experiences into our writings. Such genres seem to emerge only on dramatic occasions, such as the account of how the double helix may have been discovered. Ronald and Roskelly’s essay shows how that acknowledging our dependency on our friends and colleagues emphasizes the social basis of personhood, while helping to move us away from the adversarial academy.

Victor Villanueva’s essay, a combination of genres reminiscent of his own, Diane Freedman’s, and Patricia Williams’s books teaches us how mixed and multiple genres urge us to notice the mixed and multiple constituencies in our society. He reminds us of the contemporary meaning of “pathos.” Our culture, he notes, is very familiar with logos and ethos, but as most contributors to this volume acknowledge, pathos is a problem for academic writers. Pathos, like the first person, has been relegated to autobiography. When it appears in scholarly writing, it is perceived as sentiment. With a dramatic combination of genres, including so-called “fictional” ones, Villanueva, like Freedman and Williams, is teaching how to create genres that include, but do not focus exclusively on, our emotional stakes in our histories and in our language uses. His purposeful inclusion of colloquialisms, poetry, partial memory narratives make his own present tense live in new ways. How many of us professors are willing to describe our own habits of mind in this way that demonstrates how fully a part of others we already are, even as individual authors?

Katya Gibel Azoulay, an anthropologist who has already written self and society into the academic record, tells another personal story that documents the Western refusal to acknowledge in public the ubiquity of ancestral mixtures. Of the many issues treated in her essay, perhaps the matter of scientific racism is the obstacle most decisively opposed by her forceful account of “what actually happened.” She observes that racism backed by science—“is stronger
than the disclaimers that race is a social construction.” Science and local mythologies have combined to perpetuate false habits of perception; her experience, recorded in her recent book, counters the centuries-old axiom of assuming the primordiality of “the self in isolation.” Her voice and her story revokes the ideal of the primacy of the isolated individual by telling her own experience as a family history. Because of this emphasis, “I accentuate the complicated histories of people, the emergence of diasporic communities, and the significance of interrogating political signifiers.” This in turn leads to the effort to create “courses, syllabi selections, and research projects . . . shaped and crafted from the advantage of multiple perspectives.”

Like Azoulay’s accent on family, the essays by Morris Young and by Chris Castiglia take us back to the childhood experiences that contributed to their scholarly identities. Young’s re-creation of the experiences in the office of the “speech therapist” dramatizes how collectively held attitudes and practices tried to guide the individual child into inappropriate categories. He goes through a series of incidents, showing how the uncertain responses of strangers gradually foster in him the sense of uncertainty: his appearance always gave a first impression of being “foreign,” even though he was born in the United States—Hawaii.

Those of us who have not experienced this unsettling but conventional response may not understand its effects. One presents as native-born in every way. But appearance is used to turn the otherwise certain identity into an anomaly. Young demonstrates the cumulative effect of experiencing these responses over childhood and youth. By the time he arrives at the front of the room as a university faculty member, he anticipates them. He realizes the inertia of his position, how slowly it would change. Yet he also realizes that the moment of this writing is also a moment of change. “The use of story (and not simply to resist or invert dominant culture) creates the possibility of expressing a fuller experience.” In this way, Young gives us the sense that “assimilation” is for everyone. The narratives of childhood recovery help us readers to create a more inclusive society, rather than just to resist a hegemony or to enhance an individual. Young’s pedagogy and scholarship grow from this narrative.

Christopher Castiglia’s is the story of an individual deriving collective values from home to overcome the isolation in academic life. Like Young, he is on a borderline: his appearance, however, works to conceal salient features of individuality rather than revoke salient features of membership. Again, a productive response to having been placed in this situation is to tell the story. Castiglia is the suburban youth who is really gay. His essay counteracts “the academic desire to segregate the personal.” Placing this issue in the arena of sexual identity emphasizes its national, even global, dimensions. Segregating
the personal in our own society quietly performs the collective bigotry of keeping people “in the closet.” When Castiglia tells the story, his participation in national culture emerges, his kinship with familiar symbols and practices are rendered as lived experiences. The examination of his own life suggests that the success of his citizenship in family and society “has in many ways made me a poor academic—too hungry for community, too quick with tactless speech.” But by telling the story, Castiglia moves the academy closer to society. The reader immersed in his appealing, articulate renditions of youth in Northern New Jersey, feels the connections Castiglia has had to feel only through pain. Yet he too is teaching us through the voice heard in this volume.

Richard Ohmann’s narrative takes us to a time when “student centered” teaching was not widely known and argued about. His trepidations as a young teacher, while common enough among today’s young teachers, make us smile as we know him as one of the leaders of our profession, one of those whose lifetime achievement has helped render the academy a place where more and more of us can find fulfillment. Ohmann’s descriptions of his youthful experience makes us conscious of our own historicity as well as our social privileges.

Interestingly enough, the personal voice we find in this essay has been there, it now seems, all along! How similar it is to the voice of English in America, as well as to those of Ohmann’s many other contributions. Yet his essay also shows that although we may admire a personal voice, it is not the same as to use that voice, or any other, to write oneself into the subject matter, and this is what his essay achieves on this occasion. His experiences at Harvard, at Wesleyan as Vice Provost, as editor of College English: these now are part of “English in America” the subject matter, the profession, the pedagogy, the academic community.

As a citizen of his university community, indeed, as one of its pedagogical, intellectual, professional, and administrative leaders, he may have to take positions that do not represent his political convictions. What is he to do? He places this issue in the context of his story, his long search for what is right for both himself and society. Is this a “personal” story. Some will say, “easily,” but it is not so clear, unless we have already cordoned off the “personal” into some narrative form that has many “I’s” in it. Here the writer’s question remains unanswered; his memberships, while clear, dictate no clear rules for how to meet the contingencies of social circumstances. Yet, including the individual perspective dramatizes just how incomplete this perspective is if taken alone to be fundamental.

It is interesting to us as editors how stubborn this combination of personal, impersonal, and collective uses of language is. We believe that these essays show conclusively that one cannot separate “the personal” anything (well,
maybe the toothbrush), from what belongs to or is associated with the “our,” the some of us, and the all of us. In a sense this collection is a voice opposing strong boundaries while recognizing a wide variety of limited uses of boundaries. This collection has found and also advocates for the reduction of censorship, for the construction of different ways of communication, and for the informed interest in what others feel it essential to report.

We are aiming for new values for ourselves and our profession. We want to remove the implied coerciveness of the term “profession,” a word that says in one way or another, “you can’t say this, you can’t say that.” At the same time we seek in the combination of the personal and the professional ways to reduce idle combativeness that dates back to the age of classical Greek rhetoric and to 12th century university pedagogy through which students’ Latin debates were tests of their readiness to become licensed teachers. Of course we hear voices preparing to say that opposing adversariality is adversarial. But we have an answer, which, we claim, is forceful but not adversarial: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” We ourselves think that this is neither inconsistency, nor paradox, nor hypocrisy. We can dispute and oppose; we can combine, create, and transcend mistaken views; we can include ourselves among as many others as appropriate. And we can honor revisions of our selves, our memberships, and our societies, without declaring their demise.

NOTES

1. This same issue, as it applies in physical and social sciences as well as in the humanities, is taken up in the volume forthcoming from Duke University Press edited by Olivia Frey and Diane Freedman, Personal Thoughts. A still compelling volume making a similar point about science is Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, eds. Sandra Harding and Merill B. Hintikka. Boston: Reidel, 1983.

2. Its problematic status can be traced back much further to the separation of the written from the oral uses of language that is, actually, thousands of years old, though not altogether universal in Western culture.