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Candace Spigelman, *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.

In *Personally Speaking*, Candace Spigelman introduces the “personal academic argument” to address the dichotomy between personal and professional writing both in the writing classroom and in academic circles. This division is surveyed in the first chapter of *Personally Speaking*. Although recent articles have asked authors to acknowledge their own prejudices in their writing and some established writers have used personal narrative in academic essays, personal writing is generally frowned upon in academic prose. This division leads to contentious composition course syllabi: in an age of expressivist writing, the efficacy of teaching and encouraging personal writing is highly suspect to academicians preparing students for a career in ‘the real world.’

Spigelman unites the personal and the professional with the “personal academic argument,” a new genre that includes personal narrative as part of a serious academic discussion.

After situating her argument in historical and current uses of the personal voice and pointing to several examples of successful use of the personal in academic writing, Spigelman demonstrates that personal writing is as carefully constructed as complicated analytical arguments. She also shows that personal narrative, as any fiction reader knows, can be very compelling and reminds readers that all writing is personal, even the most analytical academic writing. The dichotomy between personal and private is, for Spigelman (and others), largely artificial.

To replace this false dichotomy, Spigelman advocates “personal academic argument,” a hybrid of two writing styles that results in a “surplus” of meaning. The personal voice adds a new dimension to arguments that might otherwise be presented from an artificially limited perspective.

Spigelman does not ignore claims that personal means unreliable; in fact, she illustrates just how unreliable personal narratives can be by comparing two personal essays advocating directly contradictory pedagogical strategies. This difference allows Spigelman to explain the strength of her method: ‘personal academic argument’ requires the rigorous analysis generally reserved for academic writing. A valid personal argument carefully examines its underlying assumptions and reinforces (rather than refutes) research.

As might be expected, Spigelman intersperses *Personally Speaking* with examples from her own experiences with students. This includes tracing the evolution of a student essay through various drafts in which stories from the student’s life play an increasingly crucial role in supporting the essays argument, which likewise grows more complex in each successive draft. She finishes her book with suggestions for how to teach “personal academic argument” in writing classes, thereby bridging the gap between teaching personal writing and teaching academic writing.

What Spigelman fails to address is the difference between personal argument and fictional argument. Many of Spigelman’s arguments emphasize narrative’s emotional impact without distinguishing between personal experience and fictional events. Part of her argument is, in fact, the constructed nature of personal narrative that moves it from the realm of fact and into that of imagined stories. Perhaps there is room for ‘fictional academic

argument' as a corollary to the 'personal academic argument,' but this is not addressed explicitly in *Personally Speaking*.

Another advantage Spiegelman recognizes in Personal Academic Argument is what she terms 'surplus.' The question Spiegelman does not take up directly is what to do with the 'surplus' personal academic argument provides. This issue is hidden behind the ill-defined nature of the surplus itself. Spiegelman's inability to clearly describe the nature of the surplus is perhaps evidence for the need to include personal experience in academic writing: in *Personally Speaking*, surplus is explained by Spiegelman's experience reading an essay using personal academic argument. Spiegelman read the essay three times—once looking at only the academic arguments, once looking at the personal reflections, and once looking at both—and she had a different understanding of the essay after each reading. This multiplicity of readings and meanings is 'surplus,' but Spiegelman seems unable to describe the precise nature and nuance of the multiplication of meaning she found in the essay.

In the "information age," we are not looking for more information; we are looking for ways to extract and utilize meaningful information hidden in a vast amount of data. Surplus information is often more of a curse than a blessing. Many of Spiegelman's arguments demonstrate that the personal is rhetorically useful in gaining the reader's sympathy and understanding, but they do not address the inherent advantage of the "surplus" personal academic argument provides. A more complete picture is not necessarily more useful.

However, for teachers anxious to integrate personal or expressivist writing into academic essays, *Personally Speaking* could be a valuable resource. "Personal academic argument" encourages students to use the stories from their lives to create the compelling, well-substantiated arguments required by academic writing. As mentioned above, Spiegelman's final chapter provides practical suggestions for teaching 'personal academic argument' in the classroom, and the history of her student's essay serves as a model teachers can follow.