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Pieces of a frame: A student's writing of an academic essay

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This study attempts to uncover interactive processes of reading and writing about a text by studying how one student writer writes about reading. It describes how this interactive process helps in the creation of a product, an academic essay about a work of literature.

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Gergen, in making a case for the communal basis of knowledge transmission states that "knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together" (1985: 270). The academic institutions that students join use language as a process of interchange and the "primary material resource" (Brodkey 1987). In *Academic Writing as Social Practice*, Brodkey explains "that much of the talk academics engage in with their students as well as their colleagues, depends on shared information obtained through reading" (17).

Frequently, in the writing classroom, one process of interchange is the reading of published texts. These texts can be used in a number of ways. They stimulate class discussion, act as a basis of knowledge and often provide the basis for students' written assignments. Students read these texts and provide coherent arguments about them. Hence, both writing about texts and the act of reading texts becomes a communal activity. When students read and write about texts, how do they interact with them? Fish argues that readers are members of a community, "made up of those who share interpretive strategies" and that these strategies are acquired (182). He insists that writers of a community write texts, so that "its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them" (182). In fact, "these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" (182).

To uncover interactive processes of reading and writing about a text, theory and research show reading as a constructive, making-meaning process, much like writing. Salvatori (1983) researches how an awareness of reading as constructive can show the composing of oneself and text through interaction (like writing). Primarily, writing becomes an integral part of a reader's response, because 'composing' is a way to understand text and self. In this sense, writing is seen as discovery; one uses writing in conjunction with reading by recording one's own evolving thought. In fact, reading and writing are posited as a continuous process of formulating one's own thoughts and feelings.

To see what this 'continuous process' might look like I studied how one (student) writer writes about reading. I wanted to uncover how that process helps in the creation of a product, an academic essay about a work of literature. Specifically, I set out to capture a 'communal process' in the making of a written product. Also, I was equally interested in how this process was affected by other factors as well, factors that include a student's past experiences with texts and my presence as the teacher in the process of this interaction, which may or may not influence a student's written product.

The knowledge that an author of a published text and I transmit in the process of interchange could help me better understand students' relationships with me, published texts, and their own texts, and my relationship with students and their texts. In this exploratory study I look at one student's engagement with reading and writing about a literary text. I do this because I am interested in how students interact with texts, the strategies they employ, and what my own 'text' does to effect them in their creation of an academic essay on a work of literature.

The data analyzed involved his journal entries, his written comments in the Zen text, the response paper, classroom discourse, my comments on both the response and his first draft, the conference, and his final draft. I categorized each of the various parts of the reading and writing task to find parallels among the 'pieces' of the frame that shaped his academic essay about a literary writing.

Data Collection and Analysis

To discover the process of a learning task, I used the case study method to explore how an engineering student moves through this task of interacting with a text to create a topic for an academic essay. The writer, David, was enrolled in a course entitled 'Writing for Engineering' at the University of Pennsylvania. At the time, he was in his junior year of study. The course is an elective, chosen by students who are interested in the kinds of writing they may experience in the engineering field. Proposals, instructions, field and lab reports, and academic essays about the readings constituted the writing assignments. Literary texts, specifically, were read to elicit class discussion around various 'genres' of writing. Robert M. Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance was used as an example of instructional writing and chosen as the text for this study. At the end of David's journey with a text, he was to submit an academic essay about Zen.

The pieces of the 'frame' begin with the reading of Zen and the keeping of a journal, where David explored his 'wanderings.' Journal entries and marginal notes written in David's copy of Zen were recorded and returned. Next, David was asked to write a brief response to one of the three questions from a list handed out in class. His response was collected and returned with my comments before any class discussion took place. On the first day of discussion, the response paper was handed back and David was assigned to write an academic essay on Zen for the following class session. Finally a conference was scheduled when his first draft was completed.

Four class discussions of 80 minutes each were recorded for this study (the time it took to finish our discussion about Zen). The conference was also recorded and consisted of two parts: my written comments on David's academic essay and specific questions about his journal, his comments written in the Zen text, and our class discussion. After the conference, David was to hand in a final draft. The above chronology of these pieces of the 'frame' is made explicit to show how very little 'teacher interruption' played a role in the formulation of his topic choice and his writing of the first draft.

Writing the Journal and Comments in the Zen Text

My instructions for the journal were as follows:

'You will need a small copybook, notepad, or stenographer's pad. . . In this you will jot down any thoughts, impressions, interpretations, opinions, associations, ideas questions, etc. you may have on the readings. What I don't want is a summary of the book/essay you are reading. I'm more interested in what you think about as you read, how your mind works to interpret, what you feel as you go about the task of reading.'

How he went about structuring the entries was left to his discretion.

David's approach varied when writing this journal. He often organized his time around 20 or 30 page segments, and then he turned to the journal and reflected upon what he had read. "I did this," he said, "so I was able to go back, and if I wanted to remember where something was, I knew I had written it down." He also wrote in the journal when something "hit" him. Often, it had to do with just one sentence. For example during a conference he said,

That really doesn't have a lot to do with the overall book, I think. It really has to do with this one sentence . . . the things I write usually apply to that one sentence or that one little section that doesn't have anything to do with the whole theme of the book. The things I pick on when I write in the book are little things, that don't mean a lot.

Another reason to write in the journal was "to take a break." He explained, "I would come back and write, then pick up reading."

From my analysis, the journal entries seem to encompass a blend of summary, analysis, and interpretation of Pirsig. Association is a part as well. I asked him about this recording of 'associations'. His feelings about this inclusion were specific:

There were other times I wrote in my journal that had absolutely no relevance to anything. I'd go back and read them and say 'why did I say that.' It seemed so stupid. Well, maybe not stupid, but it had no relevance to what I thought the message of the book was.

Often in the journal he interrogated Pirsig by addressing him directly: "so what are you going to do? What is your solution?" Or he addressed me. One written comment in the Zen text stated, "He is putting down everyone because he makes assumptions that they don't know about the relationship of quality [he circles a passage in the text]. Who is to say some of this is not quality? I'm just nitpicking--I understand his argument."

He explained in conference that here he addressed me, as he often did. "I didn't know the answer," he said.

He explained in our interview session that his reasons for writing comments in the Zen text itself were to

deliberately mark things to come back to. I have a tendency that when I read to do a lot of thinking about things like in the back (on the back flap), like when I'm trying to learn things . . . I wanted to have something answered or things of interest that stuck with me at a particular moment . . . I think I circled things that I think are important.

He explained this practice as follows:

I think I got into a train of thought when first reading it and then when I started reading later on I understood what he was saying, but I thought I was misinterpreting what he was saying the first time I was reading." Other markings included brackets, circles, and underlines. He did this when "I wanted to write about it in the journal." At no point did I provide a method on how to make use of writing when reading.

I asked him if marking in the text was a constant practice. He had this to say:

David: No it's not. I usually don't even highlight in my textbooks . . . I think it started when I first started to use my journal. I used to write at the end of the chapters in the book, you know after I'd read a chapter. And then it started with Double Helix (a prior text read). Every time Watson said something sexist, I'd say, 'I have to go back and write this up,' and I'd underline it, so that I could find it more easily when I went back to look at the chapters. I found myself reading three or four chapters at a time, so I just started marking up the text and making comments in the journal and in the book.

Two of his reading strategies seemed to involve a search for an answer and his back and forth movement from the text to the journal and then back again. By looking at his journal and written comments in the Zen text issues emerged; continually, he brought up "ghosts," "unfatherly father," "grades," "product of the late 60's," "John and Sylvia," and "notion of underlying form." I thought that perhaps I could reconstruct his process as he went through to find an answer. I placed his journal and the Zen text side by side, to see if I could reconstruct his interaction. Then I presented what I had uncovered to him at the interview session

One of the first issues David brought up in class discussion was Pirsig's lack of

ratherly concern. He said, "I know my dad wouldn't be so unsympathetic toward me."

In his journal there are two separate entries. The first one stated,

Another thing I've noticed is that Pirsig does not show too many fatherly emotions. Actually, I think he's downright nasty to Chris sometimes. He talks about Chris like a burden, rather than as his son. For example on p. 52 he states, 'just want to go to sleep now, but he's [Chris] angry and I expect we're going to have one of his little scenes. I wait for this and so it starts.' Doesn't seem too fatherly does it?" He circled the same passage in the Zen text that he quoted and wrote in the margin 'not very fatherly.'

But David didn't stop there. Although he waited for quite awhile to return to this issue in his journal, he thought about it as he continued through the Zen text. On p. 58 he wrote, "does illness excuse bad behavior?" I asked him what this meant: "Yeah, this is something else I didn't understand, I mean Chris would say 'my stomach hurts.' He was sick all the time . . . I thought he was making fun of him. I was just wondering if he was valuing what he was expressing about Chris, because I really didn't agree with it. So what if he's sick, that doesn't give Pirsig the right to stomp on everyone else, and Chris. At least that's what I thought he did." On p. 190 he underlined "that seems to be Chris's problem now." Finally, in his journal, David came to some resolution about Pirsig as 'unfatherly' and wrote, "I think the reason Pirsig is not fatherly with Chris is because of his belief and bias toward classical reasoning. He is not emotional. On p. 216 he calls Chris an 'egotist'. That statement is definitely not fatherly . . . Pirsig's lack of fatherly love . . . his emotion is constant with his presentation as a logical philosopher, more concerned with underlying form than romantic understanding . . . What about emotions like love? Hate? Where do they fit into life? Pirsig does not consider them much probably because they are not important to him."

His search for an answer about 'ghosts' is a bit more complex. On p. 55 of Pirsig's letter 'ghosts' is underlined, and he writes, 'the ghost again.' Then on p. 57 he jots down some phrases: 'ghost/death,' 'intimation of a figure,' 'it is Phaedrus,' 'is Chris dying,' and 'who is Phaedrus?' These comments were strung over the blank spaces of the page. In his journal he writes, "This discussion of ghosts has tweaked my curiosity. Pirsig has planted the seed by introducing the mysterious but sagelike Phaedrus. Who is Phaedrus, and why is he

following Pirsig? What is his relationship with the Chautauqua?² Why is he a ghost and how can he be given a proper burial? I will have to look for these answers because I think they will explain a lot about the philosophy and message of the author."

He proceeds to mark in the Zen text. On p. 71 he underlines "It was the ghost of rationality itself.*" But then by p. 77, some 'discovery' happened, and he turns to the journal: "One of my questions has now been answered. Phaedrus is Pirsig! (pg 77). Interesting plot twist and it explains the journey to get rid of the ghost and the relationship of ghosts/Phaedrus with Pirsig and the group. One minor mystery solved. I think Phaedrus is more than just an old personality of Pirsig but is a metaphor for some philosophy. I think this will be clearer as I read on." Interestingly enough, he never mentioned this 'inquiring' again, and I assumed he had come to some conclusions about 'who Phaedrus was.' But in class discussion, it seemed he hadn't finished with this inquiry. He said, "I have some questions about Phaedrus. That whole relationship is never really explained to me but it's implied a lot. He's sort of chasing ghosts instead of discussing ghosts. I had to go back and skim over some sections to figure it out. Who or what exactly is Phaedrus?"

Although one 'minor mystery' had been solved for him, the others had not, and he moved to focus on his second question about 'a proper burial.' He underlined in the text, "Did Einstein really mean to state that truth was a function of time? To state 'that' would annihilate the most basic presumption of all science!" Next to this quote he wrote, "Truth is a ghost, an invention of the mind which is a function of time." At this point he elaborated in his journal: "Pirsig talks of truth on page 100 as an absolute. He seems to reject Einstein's idea that truth is a function of time. Perhaps truth is a 'ghost'--an invention of the mind and that certainly is a function of time and place and background and experiences."

He did not return to his journal to figure out the answer but kept to the Zen text. On p. 129 he underlined 'church of reason' and questioned, "does he mean religion is all gloss and no substance like a Teaching college? Reason/Philosophy is the subject being rammed

down students throats." Then on p. 153 he underlined, "the Church of Reason that I talked about was founded on their graves. It's supported today by their graves. And when you dig deep into its foundations you come across ghosts.*" On p. 155, 'church' and 'school' are underlined, and in the margin he scribbled, 'church of reason-university,' and "Ghosts need a proper burial." Here, he had reached some kind of resolution and never again turned to this issue, either in the journal or with written comments in the Zen text. When I asked him about this 'following of an idea' he said, "The 'ghosts' I think was more of an agenda because I really didn't understand what was going on, and that was more of something that I was asking, and I wrote down in the journal to remind myself to think about it."

It seemed that when he wanted to 'follow an idea,' he elaborated on it in the journal. This strategy began with a question and took two forms in his journal and the comments in the Zen text. He either asked a question and searched for an answer by 'following that idea' until he had become satisfied with a reasonable solution, or he raised a question and then gave an answer later or immediately, as in this case: "Is gift of casual conversation a good thing? Casual conversation connotes meaninglessness to me. It figures Pirsig would not have it" (written comment in Zen text). Whenever he did this, he developed it more fully in the journal: He writes, "I thought casual conversation was a good thing?" Often, these comments take the form of criticism about the narrator. This interacting with the Zen text, displayed in journal entries and written comments in the text, happened prior to any kind of class discussion or interaction with the teacher.

The Response Question

My rationale for assigning the response question was to get him thinking about Zen, to get the wheels turning for both class discussion and the academic essay. I explained, "I just jotted down these questions in the hopes that it would generate some thought. They're my issues though, not yours. I hope that in the course of our discussion your issues will

become clearer for the final draft." David chose question #1: (All questions are listed in Appendix I.)

Pirsig presents his book as an "inquiry into values." What does he mean? Does he inquire about values, or does he advocate certain values? How would you describe his attitude toward values?

I expected no significant parallels between the response question and the journal entries, and for the most part I was correct. However David did make use of information he had written in the journal, particularly the issues of John and Sylvia, Pirsig's opening quote, and an explanation of the Chautauqua. There is more similarity, however, between the response and the comments in the Zen text. He quoted Pirsig twice (passages he circled in Zen) and used the subtitle of the book. Here is another example:

Comment from response paper: 'eventually the discussion boils down to good and evil'

Comment in Zen text (underlined): 'kind of death-birth continuity that is neither good nor bad, but just is.'

Comment from journal: 'does not think good or evil are important distinction.'

The major difference between David's two 'genres', the response paper and the journal, is in his presentation of Pirsig. No where in the response is there a sense of 'inquiring' or 'questioning' of him. The paper addresses the question, mostly in the form of summary, and David analyzes and evaluates briefly some of his ideas, an approach with the flavor of 'answering exam questions.' The most interesting thing is his use of 'I.' In the journal, the 'I' litters the pages; in the response question, 'I' is used only once, and comes after he poses a rhetorical question: "Which side does Pirsig prefer? The answer, I think, lies in the dedicating quote" [my emphasis]. Apparently, David saw the journal entries and the response question as quite distinct kinds of writing.

Finding a Topic: First Draft

To reconstruct his discovery of a topic may be impossible, but I was deeply perplexed, since he wrote on a topic that did not seem to be one of his issues, at least as evidenced from his journal and Zen text. Instead, he explored a topic on the parallel structure of the

narrative. Again, I turned to the journal as my point of entry. His interest in the plot structures began as early as p. 77, and he wrote in his journal, "interesting plot twist and it explains the journey to get rid of the ghost." One of his final entries stated, "Pirsig has two stories going on at once. One with him and Chris and the Sutherlands, and one about Phaedrus and philosophy. Or is it just one? There is a close parallel between the two. For example, when he and Chris are climbing the mountain, the philosophy part of the story is about grades being shallow goals. The Chris story is about ego climbing as a shallow goal. The two stories are definitely related in content and meaning." What's so interesting about this journal entry is that it arises out of two of his 'issues'--Chris's treatment by Pirsig and 'grades.' These were the only comments in the journal about structure, and no comments were made in the Zen text.

I wanted to know if I had some part in influencing him to write on this topic. In class I only addressed this issue once, and it was indirectly, prior to the actual discussion of Zen, and came when discussing a structure for an academic essay. My comment was: "It's very difficult to tell two stories at once, and mesh them together in such a way that a reader can see that they're two stories. Pirsig tries this. He has two stories going at the same time. It's very difficult to do." The only time we discuss the two separate plots is on the last day of class when his paper was already submitted, and it became a topic of discourse because I asked him to talk about his paper.

The response questions seemed to play a part. Question #2 asks about the journey metaphor (how David tied Pirsig's two plots together in his drafts), but it did not mention anything about plot or the journey metaphor as a structural device to tie the two plots together. I remained curious about David's arrival at this topic. He said that he had another topic in mind, one of his 'issues.' He began to write a paper about how Pirsig's book developed out of the 60's era. In his journal he wrote several entries such as, "uses the same lingo of the time period, and the whole upheaval of the sixties is necessary for this book to draw upon as reference and background." In fact, David had drawn up a preliminary outline (in the form of notes that he gave me), and decided on a focus: "Pirsig

needed the 60's and 70's as a basis for writing this book. The ideas presented only have meaning and value because of the revolution of that time period." He went on to explain his change of heart:

David: I wrote that down, and I started to think about it, and it didn't get me anywhere, well it did, but I didn't like how it was going, so I switched. So I said I have to have a new topic, so I went to the questions you gave me and I looked through them. Actually, I started out with the first one, the one I had written in my response.

Mark: Inquiry into values?

David: Right, and I started working on that, then I looked at the second one on structure, and that sort of did something that I had remembered, and so I started writing that, but then I noticed that it went back to the first question about values, how the structure related to that, and that's where I got my evolving of ideas . . . I realized that they were connected in some way, the structure had to relate back to the inquiry into values, but that didn't become obvious to me when I sat down to write the paper. But as I was writing it became more apparent. And that's when I began to see my message, that's when I got into the evaluation. I thought it was very useful for the purpose of his inquiry into values.

I waited to ask him if he had picked an issue I would be interested in, but first I wanted him to confirm the issues I had found. He agreed they were his issues, but he picked the topic, "probably for the same reason that you thought my issues were interesting too. It had piqued my interest." I continued:

Mark: I hardly mentioned it as an issue, only a brief few lines in class.

David: (pause) I think I switched topics because (pause) I got a little lazy to do some thinking on my own because the questions were there.

Mark: Are you good at playing the game so to speak?

David: Sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not. No, I don't think I wrote the paper to please you if that's what you mean.

Mark: No, I'm not saying it was a conscious decision to please me.

David: I really don't think that when I chose the topic that I was choosing it to please you. It definitely wasn't a conscious decision. I didn't say, 'oh well, why don't I write on structure.' I didn't even realize it was your kind of issue. But I remember that we had discussed it and I remember thinking that was an interesting thought.

Mark: We never discussed it in class, that's the interesting thing, not until you had already finished your paper.

David was not convinced, but relented, and maybe I was coercing him to agree with the 'connection' I uncovered.

At this time during class discussion, one of the issues I raised was about gender, the use of the pronoun he/she, and I asked David if he had done that to please me. For the assignment on instructional writing, he had used both pronouns (he/she), something he had not done before up to that time.

Mark: Did you learn (about gender usage) or did you learn what I wanted you to learn in terms of my stuff, to please me?

David: I did it because we discussed it . . . I don't know what I think about it. I see it as important, but not that important . . .

He was firm that I had played no role in the formulation of his topic. Yet he had admitted considering gender usage because of what I had discussed. It seemed he was doing this because I saw it as important. I began to see that the pieces of the frame were wedged unevenly, particularly around power relations.

Writing Conference

Prior to class discussion of Zen and the first draft, I provided lecture notes on structuring an academic essay using Murray's schema (1987). At that time, I gave advice about creating a topic. I explained, "I'm not giving you a topic. I define topic as something about the subject matter. The topic is something very particular about the book. So in a sense, I chose the subject matter . . . You can choose any topic you want to write about, only the subject matter is the same - Zen." I went on to emphasize the importance of their 'issues' from the journals and said, "I get a sense about some of your issues and agendas and some of your philosophical beliefs, because they surface in the journal . . ."

From the outset of the conference, David brought up the use of this schema, and then we quickly moved to discuss how he could present his ideas about two plots, since I was having

difficulty understanding him. He had written that plot and message were two different things, and I tried to explain that a plot contains some message.

David: I guess my terminology's bad.

Mark: I had problems with how you were presenting your ideas about two parallel plots, since each 'plot' contains a message.

David: Right, they're really two plots and they can live without one another but neither of them would be as good as the other, and I just wanted to see how he used them. He defines the two and I was interested in how he related them. What I was trying to do was first say that the two ran parallel to each other and were actually one story. That's what I ended up saying ... he had two stories.

Mark: It's almost like you found that out in the course of this.

David: Well, I did. Through the class discussions and thinking about it more. I think I sort of had that idea to begin with but it really wasn't well formulated. And I think I got a better idea of what I was talking about when I was trying to write ... I had written this during class discussion and I think that had something to do with it too.

David reiterated that class discussion had informed his thinking about the topic, although we had never brought up the idea of two plots working together.

Another idea I had, as to what informed him when creating the topic, was his interest in the writer/narrator. After our first discussion of a published text (Double Helix), he maintained an interest in what writers do and why they do what they do. He had written in his journal about Pirsig's unreliability as a narrator, so I asked him if this had anything to do with previous discussions of texts. He said, "That was something you definitely got me interested in, and then I realized Pirsig did do that [an inconsistency in Pirsig's point of view, written about in the journal]. Before I would have said 'well, yeah, maybe he shouldn't be saying something like that,' but I really wouldn't have given it much thought. I would have said 'something's wrong here,' because I never really associated the narrator with the author or the narrator with anything like a human being ... to me they're always a self-contained little thing, and then I realized there's a connection out there, that some of the ideas are getting expressed here. Maybe he's not

expressing all of them." From this discussion I had no way of knowing if notions of point of view or narrative voice informed him in his creation of a topic.

First Draft/Final Draft

To chart the process of revision between the two drafts, the use of the journal entries, the comments in the Zen text and our conference together would be the subject of another paper. Some parallels are worth mentioning however. From the journal, he used many of his issues and connected them with the topic of Pirsig's double plot structure, as well as a few of Pirsig's quotes. He also incorporated some entries and put them verbatim in the drafts. Although he was adamant about not making use of the response question for the drafts, there were a number of parallels, particularly in his sentence structure. Here are a couple of his manipulations:

Response paper: This statement embodies and defines the rest of the book.
Drafts: This metaphysical trip embodies the main ideas and message that Pirsig wants the reader to understand.

Response paper: He intends the reader to evaluate and reassess his or her values.
Drafts: He wants the reader to reassess his/her values.

Finally, in each of his papers, the use of I is employed only once--I think-- and takes the same position in all three of his texts (response paper, first draft, final draft), as a part of his evaluation section. Also, he included the use of his example from the journal, and for the last draft, he made sure that a 'coda' was in place (Murray 1987).

Results and Discussion

For this reading and writing assignment, David 'follows an idea' by using writing to either remind him of this idea or to map out what he had wanted to discover or have answered. He does this for a number of reasons. When he feels he is misinterpreting the author, he makes a note to make sure that he 'gets back on track.' When he wants to follow the author's line of reasoning, he traces it to see if he can agree. When he struggles at the

level of ideas, he makes connections in the hopes of arriving at a solution. When he has a reaction to something, he makes notes to remind himself that this is happening repeatedly (his critique of Watson's sexism in Double Helix, for instance).

David read for overall meaning, themes, or messages, and he circled, underlined and bracketed those parts that expressed all of these. Places where he marked issues such as unfatherly father, ghosts, Chris's treatment, casual conversation, as well as single sentences, he considered "trivial", since they did not relate to the "overall meaning." Recursiveness is a major part of his reading strategy. When David did not understand what Pirsig was writing, he went back to reread sections. Reading is displayed as problem-solving as well. When following an idea, David tried to unravel and solve the mysteries of the text. Also, there is a reader audience for him. He did not simply read for himself, but opened a dialogue with Pirsig by questioning him directly (comments in journal and Zen text), and he read for me, so that I could supply answers.

Writing in the journal was done at particular times. David wrote on the back flap and in the journal "to learn things" and to understand what was being read. Writing is also used when something 'hits' him. When he sensed the unreliability of the narrator, he expressed his personal feelings. However, David had his own notions about recording this 'subjective experience': "Little things don't mean a lot . . . you only write down what has relevance." Finally, writing is done to expose a 'gap' in the text, something that struck David as a problem in plot structure and with Pirsig's beliefs and depictions of characters. He did this by interrogating and questioning Pirsig.

The journal seems to be a place for him to elaborate on his ideas about 'learning' the text. The back and forward motion between the journal and the Zen text provided a place for reflection, questioning, and record. Clearly, the journal was a place for David to do the kind of writing D. Gordon Rohman describes, " as a personally transformed experience of an event" (1983: 90).

In the process of composing his papers, David expressed the idea that writing is 'discovery.' He explained, "it didn't become obvious to me when I sat down with the paper."

He revealed that he knew his draft was more of an 'evolving of ideas,' where he didn't have a 'well-formulated' thesis. And he recognized that he had missing pieces, but 'for lack of time---'. At the 'invention' stage of creating a topic, David did not seem to consider the journal as a credible source, but instead turned to the response questions as his 'departure point' for a topic. In a sense, the inquiry that he charted in the journal was seen as something distinct; inquiry was not a part of his first essay draft. Although he did use the journal as a reference for creating the 'text' part of the paper (examples, illustrations, etc.), he explained how he collapsed response questions 1 and 2 to formulate a topic.

From my own observations, the 'pieces of the frame' fall into two halves. The writing done in the journal, in the Zen text, and the verbal exchange in class discussions are distinct from the three 'formal' writing assignments. His journal and the comments in the Zen text criticize Pirsig at many levels--narrative structure, ideology, and personal feelings about the characters. In the 'papers', there is not a hint that Pirsig has made 'gaps,' and there is no sense of critique. David never raises that the two plots don't work well together, yet in class discussion, he had much to say about this: "not one continuous line, you get things in pieces . . . Yes, it was nerve-wracking, too much effort. And it doesn't always work well." At no point does David discuss these 'gaps' in his 'papers,' instead, he attempts to show how Pirsig successfully joined the two plots together. He does this by choosing the journey metaphor as a device that makes this 'weaving of the plots' happen. David does not consider that Pirsig may have failed to join his two plots together and does not see disunity as a worthwhile inclusion. At the level of ideas, 'irrelevant details' must fit the overall message (Pirsig is [unfatherly] because "his emotion is constant with his presentation as a logical philosopher").

The journal as a whole is full of rambling digressions and constitutes an inquiry into reading, where writing is used to explore ideas, state beliefs, express subjective feelings, and question the authority of the author/narrator. In the 'papers' the structure is linear and exacting. The response paper follows a tri-part structure of summary, analysis, and evaluation, and the drafts attempt to make use of a more 'formal' structure, possibly

Murray's schema. The journal is littered with 'I,' but the 'I' in the 'papers' is used only once, and hides behind a rhetorical question.

Who initiated topics in the writing? Freedman and Sperling,(1985) discuss how in their study students often took their clues when talking and writing from teachers. David chose his topics ('issues') and wrote them in the journal. But it seems that I initiated the topic for the 'papers.' As David says, "they [topics] were there."

Coda

What are David's assumptions about writing more 'formal' papers? It is difficult to get at the knowledge he brought with him to this class, and perhaps my isolating a context for this study has serious consequences. There is too much of his history with texts that I don't know. Although I see my method of 'reconstructing' his creation of an academic text as a profitable one (using journal entries in conjunction with comments in the Zen text, classroom discussion, and interviewing), what he learned from me in the beginning weeks of the semester, as well as his life long practice with reading texts and writing about texts, would require a much more in-depth study.

I did seem to have some influence on David's learning. For one thing, he began to write 'in' texts. Prior to this, he seemed to believe in some sacred myth about them--never to be touched or 'dirtied' in any way. Now he inquires about writers' motivations. To believe that narrators are 'self-contained things and not people,' as David perceived, is rather disturbing. Both these strategies were something he had never done before meeting me.

My 'gift' of response questions, however, may have been a huge restriction. I want students to create, not reproduce topics. This is not to say that some creation did not occur, particularly in the collapsing of response questions 1 and 2. But David's creating seemed to stem from my issues in the response questions and did not come from his own intellectual or personal pursuits. What are his beliefs about academic prose particularly? That you can't use 'I' when you write? That you can't question, interrogate, and interrupt an author? That instead, you must present a work as unified and ignore the gaps? That

interpretation is the goal? How can he understand that the approach he used to write his journal could be a part of academic prose as well?

He came with 'ways of reading and writing' about literary texts that are outside of this particular context. He brought to the task scenarios, such as reading is for meaning and message, and literary topics are to be written on issues such as plot structure and metaphor. 'I' is used sparingly when writing essays about literature. Published texts must be unified; the goal is to write about the 'text' as unified. What 'ways of knowing' did he enact about literary texts? His approach could be described as 'New Criticism', a way of mining through texts for aspects of language (symbol, image, metaphor, etc.) and structure (plot), isolated from cultural, social and historical contexts, and the writer's position in the discourse. Surely, his notions about journal writing and essays about literature are quite distinct.

To look to me for answers is quite a burden. Are teachers perceived as having all the answers when it comes to reading and writing about texts, simply based on their status and position? What of David's willingness to please me? Will he be leaving this classroom context having reproduced knowledge (Giroux 1983) without having critiqued it? Certainly, he seemed to reproduce the knowledge he learned about gender; it wasn't his concern. How good are students hooking into what teachers want and like? And more importantly, are men really changing about gender relations or are they learning to apply an old strategy of 'playing the game' to a new context?

Perhaps my making of a comparison between the two 'genres' of writing is a misguided one, since journal writing and academic essays may have so little in common. But it is clear that David's response paper and drafts were not 'a personally transformed experience of an event'; something I had hoped they would be.

The long, arduous journey that David took to read and write about a literary text is a telling tale. Perhaps it is just one of countless tales of a drudge-like task told by students. But for David, when he interacted with the Zen text, he was capturing moments of learning, and as he said, "I realized there's a connection out there." Possibly,

the same interaction when David reads literature and writes in the journal, connected with 'what's out there,' can happen when he undertakes the writing of an academic essay on literature.

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² A chautauqua is an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer (Pirsig 1984:7).

Postscript

A Response from the Research Participant, David Rutzel

Mark,

... Your paper has been on my mind several times and I have been constructing a response in my head ... I found something interesting about your paper that may turn the tables on you. On page 2, the first sentence of your procedure section you call this my journey and again use the word journey on page 3 in your last sentence of the section. I thought that was an interesting word choice given the topic I chose to write my paper on. Did my topic influence you? ... On the bottom of page 7/beginning of page 8 I think you misinterpreted what I was trying to say. Or I didn't make myself clear. When I talked about Chris' illness by writing on page 58 in Zen, "does illness excuse bad behavior," I was referring to the fact that Chris would get away with unacceptable, rude behavior because he was "sick." I don't think that just because someone is sick, they should be given 'diplomatic immunity,' so to speak, but Pirsig implicitly condoned this behavior of Chris but I didn't like it. That comment on p. 58 had nothing to do with unfatherly actions by Pirsig. The quote you attribute to explaining my comment was intended to ask you why Pirsig included Chris' illness in the book at all because I could find no reason to include it and I would find it embarrassing if my father wrote about my diarrhea in a book for no good reason.

I think you did an excellent job interpreting and reconstructing my thoughts on ghosts. You really nailed down the fact that I thought the journal and response were two different "genres." I didn't even realize that until you told me. But it's true. I did not think I could do the same things in the response as I had with my journal. In particular, I had no qualms about criticizing Pirsig in my journal but never considered it when writing my paper/response.

As for your assessment that the one entry in my journal was the only reference to structure--I think you missed some things. In the Zen text I had written PARALLEL in two places. They both were reminders to me that the structure paralleled closely and the two stories were following closely. Also in the Zen text there were several arrows pointing to one story and then to the other (pp. 179, 230 are two examples). Also, I had spent some time thinking about it to myself before I wrote the paper. Looking back on it, the idea of parallel structure was more of an 'issue' for me than unfatherly treatment of Chris. The former was a concern and a topic for further thought while I was reading Zen and the latter was more of a knee-jerk emotional reaction

You claim that I used he/she to please you, the teacher and grader. That implies I only did it to appease you and that upset you because you felt we were missing the point. I realized I didn't write he/she to please you (teacher, grader). Instead, my motivation was to consider the reader like Flower [Problem Solving Strategies 1981] taught. This was an academic paper and you were the audience. I knew you were sensitive to the issue so I catered to the reader like a "good" writer should. It was the same reflex that would tell me not to lecture about "how to be a good housewife" to an ERA rally. There is a fine line between "pleasing" and keeping the audience in mind. I was bothered by you calling it "pleasing" because of all the extra connotations and garbage that phrase implies. They did not apply in this case. However, I am guilty of doing what I was taught--to keep the audience of the paper in mind. I hope you understand my part

Sincerely
David Rutzel

Appendix 1

Questions for *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

- a) Pirsig presents his book as an "inquiry into values." What does he mean? Does he inquire about values, or does he advocate certain values? How would you describe his attitude toward values?
- b) This book covers a great deal of territory physically and metaphorically. Why does Pirsig cast his philosophical treatise as a journey? What role does the journey play in helping readers understand his message? How successful do you feel the journey metaphor is?
- c) Pirsig casts his narrator in the role of an instructor. In what does he attempt to instruct us? Pick an example from the text and evaluate his instructions. Do they teach you how to do something? What, if anything, do you learn from them?

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