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THE VAGARIES OF VOICE IN THE COMPOSING PROCESS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Art
in
English Composition

by
Denise Rochelle Williams
August 1989

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A Thesis
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Approved by:




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28 June 1989

Date



Margaret Doane



Larry Kramer

ABSTRACT

Often, in my years as a student and as a writer, I have heard, and made references to the "voice" in a piece of literature I've read or perhaps written. Yet, as common as its use is in writing and literature classes, we all seem hard pressed to explain precisely what we're talking about. As Gary Sedlacek explains in his article "Voices," "voice is the most important element in imaginative writing, the center of the creative activity." Yet, I. Hashimoto feels that "because the whole notion of 'voice' is so mystical and abstract, the term 'voice' may have become nothing more than a vague phrase conjured up by English teachers to impress and motivate the masses to write more, confess more, and be happy" ("Voice As Juice").

This thesis is an exploration of the nature of the quality we call voice, within the framework of a model. I call this model a "circumscription," and I use the model to help us more specifically define voice within the context of the relationship that readers and writers share in the reading and writing experience. My intention is to waylay many of the vagaries and misconceptions surrounding the idea of voice, and provide in their stead a better understanding of the processes and relationships involved in voice, that enhance our experiences as readers and as writers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCING THE VAGARIES OF VOICE	1
2. THE WRITER WRITING/READING	11
3. THE READER READING/WRITING	22
4. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH LANGUAGE: A DECONSTRUCTION OF VOICE.....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCING THE VAGARIES OF VOICE

W. P. Kinsella writes in a recent New York Times Book Review, that "It is often said about fiction writing that voice is everything. And what a voice Lee Smith has chosen for 'Fair and Tender Ladies,' her most ambitious and most fully realized novel to date." Kinsella is of course being complimentary. He thinks we should read Smith's book, particularly because it exudes that elusive quality called voice. Voice is good. Voice is what all writers strive to achieve. Susan Dodd expresses a similar concept of voice when she writes in the Fall 1985 issue of The Seattle Review, about submitting her "first opus: a novel" to a publisher in New York. The publisher's reply to Dodd's work was astonishing. Dodd writes, "The verdict was swift and harsh. Devastating. And true: 'You haven't found your voice'" (79). Dodd continues to explain that she still hasn't found a voice to call her own. She is not alone. Such a quest for "voice" has dumb-founded many writers, young and old, experienced and inexperienced.

Critical essays on composition and creative writing theory are fraught with references to writer's voice. But there exists a striking ambivalence within the writing community as to what voice

in writing actually is.

Peter Elbow, in his book Writing with Power emphasizes that the writing that is most fun and rewarding to read is that which somehow feels more 'real.' The writing which is more 'real' is that which has a sense of personal voice (283). Elbow attempts to explain voice by describing those writings which have voice and those that lack it.

In describing those pieces that have voice, he says:

Sometimes it was a particular thought that had greater conviction, sometimes it was a particular feeling - an angry happy, sarcastic, or even self-pitying observation that somehow rang truer than its surroundings. Sometimes these passages with voice seemed good by other standards, sometimes they were not good writing at all. Sometimes they were bursts of sincerity, but not always....It was just that they seemed to jump out at me as though suddenly the writer had switched to a fresh typewriter ribbon. (283)

In describing that which "has none" he says,

Writing with no voice is dead, mechanical, faceless. It lacks any sound. Writing with no voice may be saying something true, important, or new; it may be logically organized; it may even be a work of genius. But it is though the words came through some kind of mixer rather than being uttered by a person. (287)

For Peter Elbow and Susan Dodd, voice represents a quality in writing; writing that has voice is better than that which doesn't. This thesis, "The Vagaries of Voice in the Composing Process," will explore the nature of that quality. Where does it originate? How does the experience of voice happen? Can the writer actually "choose" voice as Mr. Kinsella suggests? Why do we call it voice when no one is actually "speaking"? Ideally, such an exploration

would conclude with a clear and concise definition for the quality in writing that we call voice. But because we refer to voice as a quality in this instance, reaching a specific definition is particularly precarious.

Robert Pirsig discusses this problem eloquently when he writes, "Quality is a characteristic of thought and statement that is recognized by a non-thinking process. Because definitions are a product of rigid, formal thinking, quality cannot be defined" (200). It seems that the recognition of voice is purely idiosyncratic. Such recognition is based on subjective analysis. That is, it is based on the thoughts and feelings of the observer rather than the object under consideration. The exploration of voice seems hopeless.

Regardless of how hopeless such an exploration seems, we are still faced with a dilemma that needs some sense of resolution. Publishers, critics, composition instructors and creative writing instructors are being critical of some writing because it lacks voice. Susan Dodd's novel was rejected because it lacked voice. Now what does she do? How does she find it? Is voice something that can be found (or created) at all?

In an attempt to draw our attention to this dilemma, Rise Axelrod, in a speech given at the College Composition and Communication Conference (March 1987), explained that our use of voice in reference to written material is actually a metaphor, and "sometimes we take it quite literally and transfer to the written text

many of the qualities we associate with speech...such as the ideas of presence and personality, and the values of audibility and authenticity" (1). Likewise, Gary Seldacek, in his article "Voices," quotes the definition for voice from A Handbook of Modern Rhetorical Terms (Linda Woodson, ed., NCTE, 1979) as "The imagined sound of a writer's voice that readers encounter in every written utterance and that leads them to judge their affinity with, their sympathy for, or their distance from the writer" (48), thus supporting Axelrod's contention that voice in writing is a metaphor for the spoken word.

However, the metaphor is more complicated than our first assumptions allow. Axelrod is essentially clearing the dust from the dinosaur rib we are unearthing. The metaphor of voice has multiple layers; voice is used in a variety of contexts. On one level voice is sound, on another level voice is power.

In his article "Chapter and Verse," Stanley Plumly uses voice in several of these contexts. In one example, he explains, "the poet's voice, his way of presiding over his material...whether [in] terms of those of a persona or one of a trinity of personal pronouns, is inevitable. The question is never one of the fact of a voice, but of the effective control or disclosure of that voice" (21). In this instance, Plumly is using voice as a metaphor of the first "layer." It is a simple metaphor, the voice in a poem is equal to the sound of the poet's speaking voice. Any writing sample will contain voice in this instance, no matter how "dead,

mechanical, [or] faceless." This is in direct contradiction with the quality that Elbow attempts to distinguish in his discussion about voice.

Later in the article Plumly says, "[the poet's] voice presides as a participant," and "the voice...pokes through consistently to qualify and comment...the voice itself becomes the hero of the story" (28). What specific entity or quality could he possibly be talking about in this instance? Voice has become something different from the imagined sound of the poet's spoken words. It seems now, that Plumly recognizes voice as an entity or consciousness in its own right which is distinguishable and which possesses volition. Plumly continues by explaining that "in free verse...the voice is more available and therefore more vulnerable" (25). Voice seems to have become a metaphor for the being or essence behind one's spoken words.

Such references to voice contribute to our frustration and confusion. In Plumly's article, voice is no longer simply an element of writing, it has become a metaphysical quality. No wonder references to or about voice are indefinite and vague. The discussion about voice is a discussion in metaphysics.

However, if we look to demystify or clarify voice, not by defining it, but by providing boundaries to what we might mean when we speak of voice, perhaps voice as a quality of writing can be made more manageable, less abstract. A common term in geometry is circumscription, which means to draw a circle around a geo-

metric figure, touching the circle to the figure at as many points as possible. While we may not be able to produce exact measurements (definitions), or an exact circle (we're talking metaphysics, not mathematics), perhaps we can provide a circumscription for voice as a power in writing. We can encircle it and give it form. The aim of this discussion is to provide the points of that circumscription. Perhaps in this way, we can responsibly use the term voice in discussing written material.

This circumscription begins with the nature of the relationship that the reader and writer share in the reading and writing experience. The quality, voice, cannot happen outside the context of this relationship. In the reading and writing experience, all there is, is relationship. In this way, the idea of human relationship is interwoven and, in a sense, provides the context for the discussion of voice. It is the thin line that encircles the concept of voice, and which finally gives voice its form.

Peter Elbow, in Writing With Power explains that "the essential act at the heart of writing is the act of giving" (his emphasis, 20). There can be no writing without a reader, just as there can be no gift without someone receiving it. This relationship is reminiscent of the question, if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear, does the falling tree make any noise? Theoretically speaking, if no one (including the writer as reader) reads a written work, has any writing actually been done? However, it goes beyond a tree falling and an ear hearing. In

reading and writing, there is intention. There is a person writing with a purpose, and there is a person reading with a purpose (even when the reader is the writer his or her self). So not only is the concept of voice based within a relationship, it is predicated upon the notion of intention within that relationship.

Point one in voice's circumscription is intention.

Point two has to do with context. We often emphasize the process in writing and reading, as opposed to a product or result, yet we treat this process as an isolated event: isolated from the sense of self in each participant, and isolated from the assumptions, the predispositions, a writer and a reader might bring to that process. Within the relationship where voice is created, there are at least two types of participants (even though these two may be the same individual who takes on the role of one participant and then another). The predispositions of each participant will help determine whether or not voice is created and/or recognized.

The best place to begin is with the obvious. A reader reads, and a writer writes. Chapters Two and Three of this thesis will examine phenomena surrounding the reading and writing experience. Each of these involves more than putting words onto paper and reading words on paper. Each is involved in a process of thinking and acting, which provides the context for relationship.

To complicate the issue further, each participant in this writing/reading scenario plays multiple roles. A writer reads or

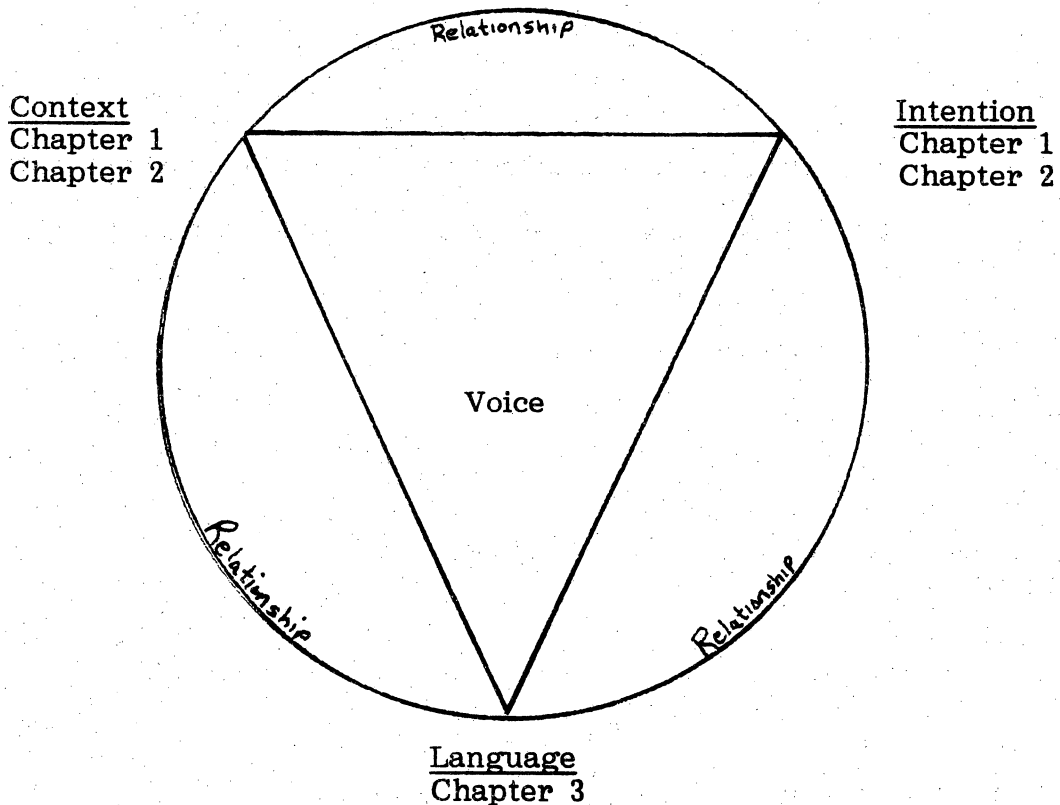
listens, and a reader writes or speaks. In The Barbarian Within, Walter Ong explains that "as he composes his thoughts in words, a speaker or writer hears these words echoing within himself...as though he were another person" (51). In an acceptable sense, the writer listens, or reads, while composing. Within each writer there exists a duality of experience. The writer might experience a self to some degree as the one who formulates and expresses ideas, but she will also experience "the shadow of a 'thou'" (Ong 52), or "other" within herself who experiences and evaluates what has been written. Ong explains that this sense of other is essential to the communicative act which writing represents. The writer becomes part of, or "participates in the other to whom he speaks, and it is this underlying participation which makes communication possible" (52).

Similarly, the reader also experiences an "other." There is the imagined writer, who is a construct of what the reader knows of the author, and the reader's own inner speaking which is audible as the reader reads. As proponents of Reader Response criticism are quick to explain, the reader actually creates the text, and becomes an author as he/she reads. As Stanley Fish explains in his essay "Literature in the Reader," "it is the experience of an utterance... that is its meaning" (78). The ex-
perience that creates meaning belongs to the reader.

The final point of the circumscription of voice is an exploration of our (the reader's and writer's) relationship with

language. Since the relationship between a reader and writer is constructed solely within language, understanding how we use and conceive of language will be critical in examining the concept of voice, which is created within this reader/writer relationship.

The model for our circumscription of voice is more easily pictured like this:



Chapter Two, "The Writer Writing/Reading," will examine the writer, who he or she conceives of him/herself to be, and what he or she might contribute in generating the experience of voice. Chapter Three, "The Reader Reading/Writing" will examine the reader in the same fashion. Chapter Four is reserved for an exploration of our relationship with language, and will address the question of why we seek voice in written material, and how such a power as voice is determined within the context of the previous chapters' discussions about the reader and writer. All this is an attempt to waylay many of the vagaries and misconceptions surrounding the idea of voice, and provide in their stead a better understanding of the processes and relationships involved in voice that enhance our experiences as readers and as writers.

Chapter 2:

THE WRITER WRITING/READING

We begin this exploration with the question, is there anything the writer can do to create voice? To answer this we must examine the writing situation. This examination quickly evolves into an exploration of the context of the writing situation for the the writer. The moment we ask about the writing situation, we must make assumptions about who the writer is, and what that writer might bring to particular rhetorical contexts. In exploring the generation of voice, we must ask questions about what generates and where this generation evolves from. By assuming voice is an actual occurrence in writing we assume there is a speaker from whom that voice emerges. (This assumption reveals the logocentricity that Professor Axelrod referred to when she talked about transferring the ideas of presence and personality to the written text, and later in Chapter 4, we will examine how such logic might be problematic for us.) We associate voice in writing with a particular consciousness or presence.

There are various prompts for writing, (prompt as distinct from purpose, which stays with the writer throughout the writing process). The prompt is the initial impetus that sets the writer

writing, that causes the writer to set pen to paper. It is the experience of this prompt that immediately places the writer in the writing predicament.

For a student, the usual prompt is a class assignment. Often writers use writing to help them think. Writers write to be published. Writers write to communicate. Some writers write for the sheer beauty of words and rhythm. Poets often write in appreciation of an event or thing that is thought-provoking or beautiful. Regardless of the prompt for writing, most of the thinking that occurs before setting pen to paper (or hand to keyboard) surrounds the topic to be discussed or presented. One of the first concerns for a writer is often whether or not she has enough knowledge or skill to write about her topic, and then, how she is to present her topic for a reader. In any rhetorical or artistic situation, the writer is immediately thrown into the role of "giver" or presenter. Without the writer putting words on paper, the relationship between a reader and a writer can't happen. As Elbow explains, "the essential human act at the heart of writing is the act of giving" (20).

Regardless of the rhetorical situation, the writer is in a predicament when faced with a blank page. The writer is "on the line" so to speak. She must give something. There are assumptions she will have about herself and her topic, and her purpose for writing, that create the context in which she will be writing; that determine her ability to give. Vulnerability is the

tail side to the coin of giving. It is this state of vulnerability that teachers often refer to when they ask for "honest" or "authentic" writing. William Coles demonstrates this sort of dialogue in his book The Plural I. In speaking with a student he says,

Now just tell it the way you'd tell it. Just use your own voice, not a manner or a style you've borrowed, just be you, something somebody couldn't imitate, or couldn't imitate easily. Can you do that?

[The student] smiled, "I haven't been able to do it so far." (41)

This situation is an immediate problem for a writer in the academic environment, because more often than not, the writer is being judged on her ability to give; she is being judged on her skill as a writer. When one is giving of oneself, as Elbow claims all writing is, it is difficult to separate the self from that which is given. The writing situation is threatening for the student writer. When placed in the academic environment, often students will lack the sense of autonomy that allows them to "take full responsibility for [their] words" (Elbow 22).

Addressing the problems of the writer's autonomy or sense of self as part of the context in which the writer will write, meets additional problems when we start to consider just exactly who or what that self really is. Joseph Harris, in his article "The Plural Text/The Plural Self: Roland Barthes and Williams Coles" writes,

Real eloquence is honest; the best prose is the most natural. The problem with such a view is that it reduces

writing to a simple test of integrity; Either your guts are out there on the page or they're not.... Seen this way, the advice to be yourself starts to seem dogmatic, bullying, for it assumes that writers already have a self somewhere, ready-made, that they merely need to make their prose reflect and express. (161)

Suddenly, it seems that the writer must first assume a role or identity for herself before she can write and, in the context of writing, become a vulnerable, giving person. While this sounds like a difficult task, any writer actually does this whenever he or she sits down to write. Out of a basic, subliminal reaction to the writing predicament, the writer creates a self. This happens in each instance of writing, from grocery lists to love letters, from novels to a note left on a friend's car. And the nature of this "writing" self is directly related to who the writer presumes the reader to be. This self is dictated by the rhetorical situation. By simply acknowledging an "other" (or reader, who may be the writer herself), a writer creates a "non-other." The writer creates a self.

In continuing the discussion of the nature of the writer's self, William Coles contends that "writing is not simply a tool we use to express a self we already have; it is the means by which we form a self to express" (161). The process of writing is the process of becoming. It would seem that voice might not necessarily result from a writer's "self" expression, but may be that which creates a sense of self for the writer. Writers don't create voice; voice (well crafted written language?) creates the sense of a person who is the writer.

But the question remains, what is the relationship of the nature of this self, to whether or not voice occurs in the writer's writing? As the nature of the writer's self is a critical factor in creating the context in which the writing will occur, the nature of this self may be critical in creating voice.

Sondra Perl's explorations in the nature of the composing process might offer some insight into this question. She touches upon the relationship the writer's self may have to voice with her notion of "felt sense." Perl conducts an experiment in which she studies writers composing. From her observations she notes:

There seems to be a basic step in the process of composing that skilled writers rely on even when they are unaware of it...This [step] seems to rely on very careful attention to one's inner reflections....When it's working, this process allows us to say or write what we've never said before, to create something new and fresh, and occasionally it provides us with the experience of "newness" or "freshness," even when "old words" or images are used. (366)

According to Perl, one's ability to "listen" to one's inner voice is directly related to whether or not a writer is able to create "freshness" and "newness," even with old words. The quality of this "inner voice" will be determined largely by who the writer assumes herself to be. If the writer is unable to create herself as knowledgeable or insightful, she will be unable to "hear" knowledge or insight or "newness" (all, perhaps, elements of voice). A writer's inability to "hear" may be critical in understanding why a writer's writing results in "dead, mechanical, faceless" prose (or poetry).

So there are perhaps two factors that we can distinguish from Perl's experiments that may be critical to the writer creating voice (if the writer actually can create voice). The first relates to the writer's ability to create an identity that thinks in an engaging, provocative manner; the second relates to the writer's ability to "hear" and then transmit that new, provocative "inner voice" to the page.

Earlier in this discussion about the writer's created self, I mentioned that the nature of this self is directly correlated to who the writer assumes the reader to be, and that by acknowledging an "other," the writer creates a "non-other" or self. If the nature of this self is a factor in considering how a writer creates voice, then possibly the writer's conception of the "other," or reader, may play an equally important role.

In quoting The Notebooks of Henry James in The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth says "as the young James had long before said, what the author does is to 'make his reader very much as he makes his characters...when he makes [the reader] well, that is, makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labor'" (49).

Later Booth asserts that it is not possible to write without the reader in mind. Even an author who claims to write "for himself," can only do so "if he imagines himself temporarily as his own reader, approaching his work without special knowledge" (109).

In a sense, there are two readers in the rhetorical situation. One is a living, breathing human being, "upon whose crossed knee rests the open volume, and whose personality is as complex and ultimately inexpressible as any dead poet's" (Gibson 266). It is this reader that Richard Hugo cautions us about when he writes,

Never worry about the reader, what the reader can understand. When you are writing, glance over your shoulder, and you'll find there is no reader. Just you and the page. Feel lonely? Good. (Triggering Town 5)

Booth, however, is talking about the second type of reader. Walker Gibson calls this reader the "mock reader" ("Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers"). Essentially, the mock reader is the reader who is a construct of the writer's imagination (and later, the reader's imagination as discussed in the following chapter, "The Reader Reading/Writing"). It is this reader that Henry James refers to when he talks about making the reader well. It doesn't matter whether this individual actually exists, although in imagining this reader, the writer hopes to come as close as possible to an actual person. What matters is that the writer, in his or her own mind, has a partner with whom to have the reading/writing relationship. How the writer "creates" this partner, in his own imagination, may directly influence the quality of the discourse the writer presents. So the question we must address in examining voice is, how does the writer "write" the reader well?

According to James, our ability to "make the reader" contri-

butes tremendously to our ability to write "with intensity" (Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 42). Probably one of the biggest contributions a writer can make, in creating high quality in the reader/writer relationship, is for the writer to create the "mock reader" in as close an approximation as possible to the actual reader, or to create that "mock reader" a person who the actual reader would want to be.

Accomplishing such a phenomenal task as creating a "mock reader" who is a close approximation of the actual reader who might read our writing poses a huge problem for writers (especially those who might take Hugo's advice on not considering the reader when writing). It means that a writer must ultimately be interested in others, or at least in the world around him. The writer must know actual readers in order to create "mock readers" well. In order to be interesting, the writer must be interested.

In Writing With Power, Peter Elbow touches upon the notion of creating the reader well, when he talks about "breathing experience into words" (314). He contends:

The crucial fact about reading, then, is that the reader is engaged at every moment in making a choice of whether to invest the energy required to have the actual experience implied in the words, or merely to read the directions for constructing an experience...if you want readers to breathe life into your writing so that they get a powerful experience from it, then you must breathe experience into your words as you write (317 and 322).

It is the writer's "job" to write in such a way that readers will make that investment of energy to "breath life" into the words on the page.

"Breathing life" into words however sounds nearly as bullying as "be yourself" or "be interesting." How does one breathe life into words? Richard Hugo cautioned "against communication because once language exists only to convey information, it is dying" (11). How do we keep language from dying on the page? I think Hugo starts to answer this question, when he advises "somehow you must switch your allegiance from the triggering subject to the words" (12). We must become adept at knowing the impact of our sentence structures and word choices on a reader. We must become conscientious about what we are asking the reader to do, then forget it during the writing process. We must practice so that the form becomes part of who we are, so that we can write well without thinking about it. This is what Richard Lanham refers to as "trained intuition" (114). At one point in The Triggering Town Hugo stresses the importance of practice in training one's self to write. He says "once a spectator said, after Jack Nicklaus had chipped a shot in from a sand trap, 'That's pretty lucky.' Nicklaus is supposed to have replied, 'Right. But I notice the more I practice, the luckier I get'" (17). To train our intuition about readers, we must practice, both through human interaction and through writing. The writer's self must be trained in intuition. Establishing a good relationship with the reader is not a matter of luck.

In a sense, what this discussion is aimed toward is the importance of the writer's awareness of, and ability to write

within, his or her "discourse community" (Fish "Interpreting"). Each rhetorical situation is embedded within the larger context of a particular community. The college student writes papers for college professors, instructors and students, who are reading within the context of an academic setting. Fiction writers are writing within a certain genre that dictates what they can write and still be called fiction writers, and what fiction readers expect. Poets must write within certain agreed upon parameters if they still want to be considered poets by their readers.

But simple knowledge or understanding of the genre or rhetorical situation is not enough for the writer to create voice. Surely Susan Dodd is aware of her discourse community and is probably very knowledgeable about her medium. If creating voice is related to the writer's relationship with the reader and how the writer creates the reader, what is that fine line that the writer must cross with the reader, in order to enter the realm of voice?

Most critics and readers will agree that the experience of voice has something to do with accessibility. Somehow the writer as a person is more present, more "there," more accessible for the reader. However the idea of accessibility is just as vague and abstract as the notion of voice.

The notion of accessibility reminds me of an incident in a graduate fiction workshop at the University of Montana, in which Barry Hannah told a student that the story the student had written

was boring. When the student asked how he might make it more interesting, Hannah replied, "be more interesting yourself!" Besides being a bully, is Hannah also referring to the notion that the writer must create an interesting, "voiced" self, in order to be interesting and to have voice? Have we come full circle, back to the writer's creation of the self?

The whole exploration of the nature of the writer's self and who the writer conceives the reader to be, is an exploration of context. It has to do with the often inchoate assumptions the writer brings to his relationship with the reader, that may determine the quality of that relationship. When we say we have experienced voice in a written work, we are also commenting on the quality of the relationship we feel with the writer. When we experience voice in writing, we perceive an "other" with whom we want to be related. The experience of voice however, belongs to the reader, and there are assumptions which the reader also brings to this relationship that may determine his ability to experience voice. The question of context and intention in the reading experience, is the focus of the next chapter, "The Reader Reading/Writing."

Chapter 3:
THE READER READING/WRITING

We have determined that voice occurs within a dynamic inter-relationship between a writer, reader and the language they share. While Chapter 2 explored the role of the writer in generating voice within the framework of this relationship, Chapter 3 will question what the reader might contribute to the generation of voice. Just as the context of the writing experience was an important factor in exploring how a writer might generate voice, the rhetorical context of the reading experience is also important in exploring how a reader might contribute to the experience of voice. A reader is influenced by a variety of factors: his or her language system, literary competence, ego, and discourse community will all help determine his or her experience of a text.

In his essay "The Rhetoric of Blindness," Paul de Man explains that reading "is an act of understanding that can never be observed, nor in any way prescribed or verified" ("Blindness" 107). Some critics such as Stanley Fish, argue that the writer has little to do with the reader's experience of a text, and in fact the "influence" between the text and reader is more the reverse of what we most commonly assume. Textual devices, or

"formal units," Fish writes:

are always a function of the interpretative model one brings to bear; they are not 'in' the text, and I would make the same argument for [the author's] intentions.... An intention...is made when perceptual or interpretive closure is hazarded; it is verified by [the reader's] interpretive act, and I would add, it is not verifiable in any other way. ("Interpreting" 176)

As he states, the formal unit or "text" is always a function of the reader's interpretation. The reader "influences" the text, and not vice versa. Fish further argues against the notion that the text as an object at all. He states:

The great merit... of kinetic art is that it forces you to be aware of "it" as a changing object -- and therefore no "object" at all -- and also to be aware of yourself as correspondingly changing...In its operation it makes inescapable the actualizing role of the observer. Literature is a kinetic art, but the physical form it assumes prevents us from seeing its essential nature, even though we so experience it. ("Literature" 83)

If the reading "encounter" is so solitary in nature, relying strictly on the consciousness of the one being (reader) and completely non-observable by any "other," what is it in reading that allows us the experience of another to whom we attribute voice? Could it be that in reading we are faced with an existential dilemma? We want to believe there is an other speaking, and that we are not alone with our experience. Richard Hugo's advice to "glance over your shoulder, and you'll find there is no reader" can also apply to the reader in his or her experience of the writer. Perhaps when we speak of voice, we are really reacting to the possibility, in true Derridean fashion, that there is no actual voice. As Fish explains, "there is more to [reading], that

is, to its experience, than meets the casual eye" ("Literature" 77). In the final analysis, any "observation" or discussion of the reading process (which "cannot be prescribed or verified") is metaphysical. Texts do not speak. How is it that we hear them?

In his chapter "How to Get Power Through Voice," in Writing With Power, Peter Elbow says a curious thing. He advises student writers to "practice revising for voice." He says, "this is really an exercise in adjusting the breath in the words till it guides the reader's voice naturally to each pause and full stop" (emphasis mine 305). The phrase, "reader's voice" almost slips by unnoticed, but not quite. Elbow's book focuses on the writing process, so what does he mean when he speaks of the reader's voice? How does it differ from the writer's voice? Or does it? What are the elements in the context that the reader operates within? How do these elements influence the reading experience?

Before we can address the problem of a reader's voice, we must first ask, who is the reader? Earlier, when discussing the writing process, we considered that perhaps the reader doesn't exist for the writer except as an extension of the writer's own consciousness. Who exactly are we thinking about when we say "reader," and what does this have to do with voice?

To begin with, there can be no voice without hearing just as there can be no hearing without sound. Jacques Derrida writes:

to speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself; but, at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him repeat immediately in himself the hearing-onself-speak in the

very form in which I effectuated it. (Speech and Phenomena 80)

Likewise, when reading, the reader repeats "immediately in himself the hearing-oneself-speak" as a type of listening. When reading, the reader creates an inner dialogue by first "speaking" a fictitious, authorial presence (thus creating an inner authorial voice), and in so doing, "hears" what is being spoken. A speaking/listening duo occurs at the moment a reader interacts with written words. The reader then, is the one who "processes" sound into intelligibility. In turn, the reader "is to some extent processed by the method that uses him as a control" (Fish "Literature" 87). This "method" is nothing less than the linguistic and literary conventions which the writer and reader share.

Walker Gibson discusses the idea of the reader being processed by the text, in his article "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers." Gibson claims that, in the reading experience, "we are recreated by the language. We assume for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume" (265).

Similarly, George Poulet writes that

reading, then is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I.... Who, when I say I, is indeed that I? (57)

While this seems to be in direct contradiction with Fish's idea that it is the reader who influences the text, and not vice versa, the two notions can be reconciled if we look at the reading

experience as and exchange or interaction.

The reader brings many factors, both conscious and unconscious, to this "processing for intelligibility." The reader makes meaning by engaging an understanding or mastery (in the sense of dance and dancer being one) of "the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of his [or her] language" (Culler 101). Culler continues that this mastery

enables [the reader] to convert the sounds into discrete units, to recognize words, and to assign a structural description and interpretation to the resulting sentence, even though it be quite new to him. Without this implicit knowledge, this internalized grammar, the sequence of sounds does not speak to him. (101)

A reader is someone who has mastered the technique of a particular language, someone who has mastered the language system. The reader, in the sense that he or she embodies a particular language system, is the "process" in "processing for intelligibility". The static identity or ego is preempted by process. As with writing, the act of reading is likewise, the act of becoming.

The elements that come to bear on this process may differ from one reader to the next (each individual is essentially a unique process) in that each reader harbors a unique history. Linguistic competence, literary competence, and individual history will all act to comprise the nature of the process that the reader becomes. These elements all work to influence the reader's expectations and projections for the text. Allen Harris explains "we each listen with our own peculiar collection of strategies,

biases and desires, our own bundle of motives, and we understand only as a function of that immensely complex bundle. One of the implications of this situation is that we do not hear precisely the same things" (172). Could this mean that some of us may hear voice, while other readers will not?

Most often when we use the term voice with regard to written material, it is in the context of evaluation or judgement. In fact, it is impossible to speak of voice out of experience and not out of reflection of experience. Essentially, we live in different worlds of experience, but rarely make the distinction. Recently, I sat in on a seminar delivered by Werner Erhard, in which Erhard discussed this very concept, using the game of tennis to demonstrate his point. In the example, Erhard explained that tennis really provides the arena for two worlds of sport -- that of the player, and that of the spectator. No one would argue that skill is not a major factor in any such competition, yet we never question just where exactly that skill occurs. Is skill a function of the tennis player, or a function of the spectator? It seems obvious that it is the player who possesses skill. He or she is skillful. A problem arises however, when we ask the player to show us his or her skill. What we might get is a strong backhand shot, or some quick foot work but the player will not be able to show us skill. This is because skill is a function of the spectator -- it belongs in the stands, not on the court. The moment a player focuses his or her attention on being skillful, he

or she is no longer playing tennis -- is no longer "in the game" so to speak. The player is now "outside" play, judging and evaluating his or her own actions. For anyone who has experienced being a master tennis player, or dancer, or pianist, or even writer, the experience while playing, dancing or writing, is that of being absent from the task. It is the experience of becoming (or being) the task. Once our attention is focused away from the task, we can no longer be one with it. We have become spectators. Skill does not exist "out there" in the tennis player. It is present only as a function of reflection, evaluation or speculation.

Similarly, when reading we have an experience. Should we stop to reflect on that experience, we are no longer reading, we are reflecting on reading. If I stop to ask about voice in a poem, I am no longer in the experience of the poem. I am "in the stands" so to speak. Most often, the writing to which we attribute voice, is that which we are able to lose ourselves in -- we become the experience as opposed to the reflection of the experience. When in the experience, the "I" that I consider myself to be, ceases to exist. When the dancer and the dance become one, the dancer ceases to exist as such. To speak of voice is really to speak of the experience of spectatorship, not the experience of reading. The devices each of us bring to the reading experience will determine the nature of our "spectatorship." As members of particular discourse communities each of us

will come loaded with our own "bundle" of expectations and purposes that will lead us to determine whether or not voice has been achieved.

The phenomenology of how understanding (which is a recursive, reflective act) can possibly occur in the reading process -- in the interaction between words (signs), phenomenal presence (signified) and consciousness, is mind boggling, even in its most simplified form.

Consider the following example. The first stanza of Richard Hugo's poem "The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir" reads:

Not my hands but green across you now.
Green tons hold you down, and ten bass curve
teasing in your hair. Summer slime
will pile deep on your breast. Four months of ice
will keep you firm. I hope each spring
to find you tangled in those pads
pulled not quite loose by the spillway pour,
stars in dead reflection off your teeth.

On the surface, it seems that each word directs us as to what we should conceptualize. Each sign represents an image or a relationship to other images, which we are to visualize as we pronounce (or read) the words. A reader considers each sign in relation to the other signs in order to create a new image. This concept seems simple enough. However, if we consider the word "green," this simplicity gasps. Hugo writes "not my hands but green across you now/Green tons hold you down." Somehow we know that Hugo means something different with each instance of green. The first is taken as an adjective/verb, and the second is clearly an adjective. Signification as a logical phenomenon breaks down

in this instance. The same word "green" means several different things in the context of the first two lines. With the first "green" I see the color green, and I see sweeping motion (actually, I see a hand sweeping across an inner, visual screen). With the first green, the reader makes the illogical substitution of "sweep" for "green." Hugo could have written "not my hands but sweep across you now," but the sound and the connotative value of the verb would alter the line's effect on a reader. "Green across" is much more eerie than "sweep across."

Part of this effect can be accounted for by the fact that "green" ends with a soft (what is often referred to in creative writing circles as feminine) sound, whereas "sweep" ends on a much stronger note. In the context of the line and the vision Hugo intends, "green" is a much more appropriate verb, even though it is used incorrectly as a verb. "Not my hands but green across you now," gives me chills. "Not my hands but sweep across you now," and I say "interesting, what's next?" How can we account for this difference in effect, strictly on the basis of sound?

In his article "Deconstruction and Linguistic Analysis," Ronald Schleifer explains that isolating one term, such as I have done with "green" is misleading, and that we must consider a word in the context of its sentence. He says, "to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept... is grossly misleading. To define it in this way would isolate the term from its system" (383). But it seems in this instance, the

system breaks down, or else it is more complex and perhaps more imbedded in subconsciousness than our first assumptions allow. Why does the word "green," in its use as a verb, have the effect on me that could not be created had Hugo used the word "sweep?" How can we account for this overall change in effect due to the minute change (or exchange) of one word for another, within a system? Meaning, and hence the whole system, appears to be changed by this one substitution.

In essence, the system is changed with each individual reader's "processing." The problem with the above analysis is that it is my analysis. As Hugo's reader I share a linguistic (we both have mastered English), literary (we both understand and embody an individual level of competence with poetic form) and even personal history with Hugo that cannot be duplicated by any of his other readers. My processing for intelligibility has a quantity (as far as shared "systems" and history with the writer) and quality that is unique. Richard Hugo's writing has a tremendous "voice," but only to the degree that that voice can be experienced as such by the process that his reader becomes. The voice we hear in Hugo's poetry is in essence, a construct of shared "knowledge" between Hugo and his reader.

Jonathan Culler refers to an aspect of such shared knowledge as "convention" in his essay "Literary Competence." He claims:

The work has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way...potential properties ...are actualized by the theory of discourse applied in the act of reading. (102)

He demonstrates the importance of such conventions by suggesting we consider a common line of prose from a newspaper or novel, and set it down on a page in a poetic form. The linguistic qualities of the line will remain unchanged but

the different meanings which the text acquires cannot... be attributed to one's knowledge of the language but must be ascribed to the special conventions for reading poetry which lead one to look at the language in new ways... to subject the text to a different series of interpretive operations. (103)

Convention itself functions as a sign for a competent or "informed" (as Fish refers to it) reader. The notion of convention suggests a communal or public signification -- something that is understood in the same way, by each individual member of a discourse community. When convention is not an aspect of the reading process, writing is perceived as lifeless or nonsensical.

For example, several years ago my father asked to see a book of poems I was reading. He read several poems then handed the book back to me without comment. I considered these to be extraordinary poems (David Wojahn's Icehouse Lights), and didn't see how my father couldn't share my feelings. The poems did not "speak" to him in the same way that they "speak" to me. He did not share the conventions of reading poetry so the poems seemed simplistic and inane to him. He could not "hear" them in the same way that someone versed in literary conventions might hear them. I then read some of the poems out loud to him, after which he said, "Oh, I get it. That's nice." Somehow, he had been unable

to provide the "voice" when he read the poems to himself. When I provided that "voice" by reading the poems out loud, the poems took on new dimensions.

There are several factors then, that we must consider in determining how a reader might create or hear voice in a text. The first has to do with the text itself, and the rhetorical forces brought to bear upon the reader by the writer. If the writer somehow requires the reader to become someone he does not wish to be, the reader will probably not even finish reading the text, let alone perceive the quality called voice. Walker Gibson writes, "A bad book, then, is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play" (268). The text must be written in such a way that the reader allows himself to become the "mock reader," and establish a relationship with who he perceives the writer to be.

A second factor in whether or not a reader hears voice has to do with the reader's purpose for reading and the reader's expectations of the text. Is the reader looking for, or "listening" for, voice? This will be determined by the reader's identity as a member of a particular discourse community.

Voice is a sophisticated notion. A reader of Hemingway, for instance, will not consider Hemingway's voice if that reader is not versed in literary terminology. Voice is an element of "practitioner lore," which is "The accumulated body of traditions,

practices, and beliefs in terms of which practitioners understand how writing is done, learned, and taught" (North 22). When we use the term voice with regard to writing, we are identifying ourselves as members of the literary community. We distinguish ourselves as "insiders" (Kermode). According to Frank Kermode, "to divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution" (3), and later, "there is seeing and hearing, which are what naive listeners and readers do; and there is perceiving and understanding, which are in principle reserved to an elect..." (3).

Being an "insider" (for Kermode) is not simply a matter of being more knowledgeable about literature and reading than the "outsider"; it is about acquiring particular sensitivities to the reading experience. One such "sensitivity" is for what we call voice.

Because voice refers to an experience and not necessarily to a verifiable fact, voice belongs in the domain of readerhood. Each reader's complex "bundle" of motives and desires will contribute or detract from the experience we call voice. Both the reader and writer are essentially created by the linguistic experience -- each is a "process of becoming" in the reading/writing interaction. In the following chapter, we will explore language as the context in which this interaction develops.

Chapter 4:

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH LANGUAGE: A DECONSTRUCTION OF VOICE

The relationship that the reader and writer share, and which seems to actually create, to a certain extent, the identity of each within that relationship, is based in language. So while the assumptions and beliefs that the writer and reader each bring to the writing/reading experience determine the effect of that experience on each individual, the entire relationship takes place within a much larger context: language. The noted psychiatrist and philosopher Jacques Lacan argues that our experience of all reality is predicated within language. The influence of language effects and the mastery of convention is what voice is all about. It is also what rhetoric is all about. In his preface to Derrida's Speech and Phenomena, Newton Garver states "rhetoric is thus not a matter of pure form but has to do with the relation of language to the world (to life) through the relation of linguistic expressions to the specific circumstances in which their use makes sense" (x). Similarly, Marshall Alcorn argues in "Rhetoric, Projection, and the Authority of the Signifier":

Texts are not purely the product of a reader's projection. Texts have particular properties of their own. These particular properties, however, do not exist as

categories of referential meaning; they exist as something we might call rhetoric... [we are encouraged] to hypothesize a relation between the projective forces brought to bear upon the text by the reader and the rhetorical forces brought to bear upon the reader by the text... when we encounter rhetoric in texts, we encounter the forces attached to words that generate, employ, or "bind" emotion. (147-48)

Alcorn is describing a type of reader-text exchange in which both the reader and the text are altered or at least perceived as altered.

During the process of this exchange, communication happens. Voice seems to be an aspect of written communication that elicits an emotional response. In what way is this emotional response related to literal meaning? In writing and reading we may seek understanding on an intellectual level, but to what extent is meaning altered by our emotional experience?

A primary difference between many critics lies, not only in the questions that they ask of literature, but in where they attribute the source of meaning. It is not only a question of which possible meaning is the most important or true, but of where that meaning is generated. Getting back to the distinction "green/ sweep," the literal meaning of the phrase does not change. Numerous words could be substituted for green, without changing the literal meaning of the sentence -- "my hands don't sweep across you now" (or "my hands aren't across you now, but green is").

The question is, is literal meaning the sole function of language? If it is, then any discussion about quality or voice is

simply inane. Let computers do the writing from now on, and banish all composition courses. Literal meaning is apparently fairly simple, unless we include feeling as an aspect of meaning. Feeling is an important aspect of language effects. It is the difference between "getting the chills" from green, and the "ho-hums" from sweep. In Derrida's words "where does this complicity between sound and ideality, or rather, between voice and ideality, come from" ("Speech" 77)? He is referring to the immediacy of experience with words. At the moment of cognition, the word fades into the experience that it represents, or means. As Derrida explains,

this immediate presence results from the fact that the phenomenological 'body' of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced... this effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is for consciousness the very form of the immediate presence of the signified" ("Speech 77).

There is a dynamic relationship here between objects (words) and consciousness (meaning/feeling). Somehow the objects are imbued by consciousness and, in the same instant, alter that consciousness. Alcorn addresses this dynamic encounter by writing:

words matter in their particular material signifying substance -- both as marks and as sounds.... If it is clear that the material presence of words matters enormously to the functions of the self, and especially to the unconscious functions of the self, then it should also be clear that critical theory needs to examine how projective activities are animated by the signifier's materiality. If texts are not blank screens for projections, if instead projections are somehow "filtered" and networked by a text's signifiers, then we must find effective terms to describe this process... projective

processes of reading are modified by textual encounters.
(145)

Jacques Derrida closely examines this relationship in Of Grammatology. What he really examines is our relationship to or with language. The question of voice revolves not only around the relationship between the reader and the writer, but can be more precisely examined by studying the relationship of each to language. What is language, and how does our concept of language determine what we are able to perceive or "hear"? What are the conventions of language that influence or limit the questions we ask of language -- that determine our experience of language?

There are numerous approaches we could take in exploring this question, but the theories of Jacques Lacan are particularly evocative. In her essay on voice, Susan Dodd writes, "Freud noted that 'writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person'" (80). Lacan takes the ball of absence (so to speak), and runs with it. For Lacan, language itself is evoked from a primal sense of absence. Instead of thinking of language as representative of existential phenomena, language is in fact evocative (a word which is interestingly enough, derived from the latin root "vox" which means voice) with regard to such phenomena.

For each individual, language begins early in life in what Lacan refers to as the mirror stage (stade du miroir). As Anthony Wilden explains,

The "mirror phase" derives its name from the importance of mirror relationships in childhood. The significance of children's attempts to appropriate or control their own

image in a mirror is that their actions are symptomatic of these deeper relationships. Through his perception of the image of another human being, the child discovers a form (Gestalt), a corporeal unity... (160)

Essentially, by discovering such a "corporeal unity," which the child identifies as a self, the child also recognizes the distinction between that self and that which is other than self. It recognizes within itself the absence of the "other," who is usually the mother. Wilden further explains that

Lacan would view the newborn child as an "absolute subject" in a totally intransitive relationship to the world he cannot yet distinguish from himself. For the object to be discovered by the child it must be absent...since identification is itself dependent upon the discovery of difference, itself a kind of absense....[For] Lacan, the "lack of object" is the gap in the signifying chain which the subject seeks to fill at the level of the signifier. (163-64)

According to Lacan, language springs from our need for a sort of reunification with "other." We use the signifier, or word, to "call forth" the other, and hopefully, the other's desire.

If we take Lacan's theory as actuality, and we all experience a primal need for harmony or reunification with an "other," it is easy to see how we might create such an other in the reading/writing experience, which is solely linguistic. Language is evoked out of what Lacan terms the desire for the desire of another. All writing is done in language. Hence, writing and reading (one cannot exist without the other) are likewise the result of our desire for the desire of another. It would seem that we indeed are reacting to an existential dilemma when we talk about voice in writing. We really do want to believe there is

another speaking and that we are not alone in our experience.

Lacan's conception of language seems to be in direct conflict with that posited by Plato some two thousand years ago. Plato's conception of reality is based upon an ideal exteriority, and what we call reality is a mere shadow of that ideal existence. For Plato, this ideal is what we refer to when we speak. It is that which our spoken words signify, but which we can never attain. Rise Axelrod addressed this in her discussion of voice at the 1986 CCCC, when she stated that "we associate voice with the truth of mind and thing, an association that goes back to Plato. The logocentric tradition of Greco-Christian onto-theology valorizes voice and gives it its power" (16). In this logocentric tradition, writing is representative of spoken language, (which in turn is symbolic of the ideal "signified"), so writing of the highest quality will be that which most resembles the spoken word. It will be that which we most easily "hear," as if a living voice is speaking it.

Such subordination of writing to the spoken word has its roots buried deep within the history, even genesis, of human logic. Our quest for voice in writing may be nothing more than logocentric tendencies so deeply embedded in our conception of reality that we are no longer even conscious of them. It is more correctly stated that our conception of reality is imbedded within our logocentricity.

Derrida writes, that in a logocentric reality,

The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning... The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified... this notion remains therefore within the heritage of...[the] absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning. (11-12)

Written words are one step removed from spoken words. Spoken words have a direct relationship with our own state of being, consciousness and meaning of consciousness. This thinking can be traced to Aristotle. Derrida writes, "if, for Aristotle, for example, 'spoken words (ta en te phone) are the symbols of mental experience (pathemata tes psyches) and written words are the symbols of spoken words' (De interpretatione, 1, 16a 3) it is because the voice, producer of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind" (11). The quest for voice in writing is a quest for that direct link with consciousness.

But such thinking is faulty. We are looking for voice as a derivative of language. But our conception of language, particularly written language, as something that we create as a tool or symbol, is the antithesis of what we actually experience when we experience voice in writing.

We think of language as functioning from within (mind), then through external channels (speech/air or writing/ink), to be processed or understood by the within (mind) of an other. But this notion totally excludes the relationship of that "within" with what we call external reality. Perhaps the "fault" (if we

can call it such) originates in our use of the metaphor voice. By using this metaphor, we essentially equate spoken word with written, robbing the written of its distinct qualities, when in fact what we mean to equate is spoken words with the effect of written. Sometimes we experience having been "spoken" to when we read, as if we actually heard the words pronounced by another. But what if this effect is actually quite distinct from that which we experience with spoken words? Derrida writes that metaphor in general is "the passage from one existent to another" ("Writing" 27). What is the other existent that we refer to when we speak of "voice" in written material? By analogy, let us say that spoken words are the equivalent of wind and written words are the movement of the leaves of the trees. The movement of leaves does not represent wind unless we say it does. The movement of leaves is the movement of leaves. We say this movement is the same as wind, when in fact it is something altogether distinct from wind.

Consider also the written transcript of a conversation. Such a transcript rarely conveys "presence" such as we speak of when we speak of voice. Often transcribed conversations are confusing and dull and require special interpretive allowances in order to understand them. They do not follow the conventions that are unique to written discourse. Likewise, writing a dialogue is often considered one of the most difficult tasks for the fiction writer, who needs to make a conversation seem real while still employing the conventions of writing. These examples alone indi-

cate there is a property in writing that is not a consideration when we speak.

It's interesting to note that we do not use voice as a qualitative judgement with regard to spoken language. Of a great orator we do not say that he or she speaks with voice. Such a statement seems absurd. Martin Luther King did not speak with voice as, say, Coleridge wrote with voice. Instead we say King was the voice of the oppressed. Speakers are articulate or powerful or energetic, but they do not have voice. Voice in writing is not voice in oratory, and in fact what we call voice in writing may be impossible to duplicate in speech. I tried to think of speakers who struck me as unique or powerful, and then asked whether I could equate my feeling of listening to them with the feeling I have when I read writing that has voice. Particular teachers came to mind, even famous speakers like Ghandi or John Kennedy. They were all articulate, and there was a sense of them being fully conscious or present as they speak. Somehow they were able to remain individual, to retain unique personalities while speaking before crowds of people. I can see similarities in listening to these speakers and reading writers who "have found their voice." However, if a reader responds to my writing by saying that I am articulate, even powerful, he is saying something different than if he says I have voice, or I have found my voice. What is the quality that these great speakers have in common with writers who have voice?

The equation of writing with speech or subordination of writing to speech, such logocentricity, is what Derrida calls an "ethnocentric metaphysics" (Of Grammatology 79), that is unique to Western culture. Chinese characters, for example, are not phonetically oriented and cannot thus be linked directly with speech. Chinese writing is symbolic and distinct from speech. Similarly, mathematics is a non-spoken language. Derrida quotes the historian Fevrier as writing "[mathematics] is a sort of universal language... it is writing, so badly misunderstood, that takes the place of language, after having been its servant" ("Of Gram" 83). Gary Zukav discusses the problem of operating within two distinct language systems when he writes about Einstein's difficulties expressing linguistically what he had written, or come to understand, mathematically. Zukav explains, that Einstein had to make a "translation from one language to another. The original language is mathematics and the second language is English. The problem is that there is simply no way of precisely expressing what the first language says in terms of the second language" (150) The problem with such translation is that English is phonetically based, while mathematics is symbolic or conceptual in nature, and distinct from any spoken language. As such, mathematics is, to a certain degree, also distinct from spoken/heard thought. The truly interesting question is, is it possible to mathematically write with "voice?" If writing is truly distinct from speech, and "voice" is an exclusive quality in writing, then

it would seem plausible to have a corollary quality for voice in mathematics. If so, we have misnamed that quality "voice," and must create or more properly re-name a new term to distinguish that quality.

Let us say for a moment that the answer is yes, there is "voice" in mathematical language. The difficulty with this is that we cannot conceptualize a reality in which voice is not the approximation or signification of being. There is no "being" who speaks mathematics, so we cannot conceive of mathematical writing as having "voice." Mathematics represents "things" or concepts, not "being." Voice is in direct correlation to being, we think. I asked a friend, who is a mathematician, what he thought. He said there are mathematical theorems that carry a certain power over other theorems. They have greater quality. This sense of quality usually applies to those theorems which can be applied globally or more generally, and not just to a particular circumstance. Mathematicians do not, however, refer to such theorems as having voice.

There is other language that is strictly written. The new international pictorial signs that adorn the streets of most cities are a sort of writing without words. In most countries now, one crosses the street after a green, walking figurine appears on the traffic light. But is this a written language?

Mathematics is not a pure language. Mathematicians rarely write exclusively in mathematical terms. They use their spoken,

native languages for analytic commentary and explanation.

It appears that when we speak of voice in writing, we are speaking of a quality that is unique to phonetic writing. Derrida writes "phonetic writing, however abstract and arbitrary, retained some relationship with the presence of the represented voice, to its possible presence in general and therefore to that of a certain passion" (Of Grammatology 312). A "certain passion" is that for which we use the metaphor voice.

Voice, like skill, is what Robert Pirsig might call a modern ghost. He writes,

Within that context of thought, ghosts and spirits are quite as real as atoms, particles, photons and quanta are to modern man ... what I'm driving at... is the notion that before the beginning of the earth, before the sun and the stars were formed, before the primal generation of anything, not in anyone's mind because there wasn't anyone, this law of gravity existed?...the law of gravity and gravity itself did not exist before Isaac Newton... and what that means is that the law of gravity exists nowhere except in people's heads! It's a ghost! (32-33)

As such, the donning of voice, is essentially the creation of voice. Our relationship with reality is not what we pretend it to be. We essentially create our reality through language. Period. Speaking becomes a metaphor for creating. To speak of voice, is to speak in language. To speak it is to create it. We speak "chair" whenever we sit on a construction of wood or aluminum that has a flat, horizontal surface and three or four legs to hold our weight. Gary Zukav quotes Albert Einstein as having written "physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world" (8).

The fact that voice is a mental creation does not, however, make it less real. Voice is no less real than quality or skill. To language "voice" is to inhabit the world of mythos. We want to discuss the experience of voice, not the concept. Gary Zukav writes that "the difference between experience and symbol is the difference between mythos and logos" (261).

Mythos seems to be anything that does not easily sit within the realm of logical, systematic thought. Our own logocentricity includes reasoning that sees the world as a system. All reality operates within the system of logic and in order to understand that which does not yet make sense, we need to find the missing "link" in the chain of logic. It is such logic that sees language as representative of reality, speech as a representation of language and writing as a representation of speech. The chain is complete. Such a view of communication makes sense. The only major problem with this is that the world, and experience in particular, does not operate according to our own systematic ordering. Zukav addresses this problem when he writes,

Logos imitates, but can never replace, experience. It is a substitute for experience. Logos is the artificial construction of...symbols which mimics experience on a one-to-one basis... Mythos points toward experience, but it does not replace experience... a language of mythos... is the true language of physics. This is because... language...[and] also mathematics, follows a certain set of rules (classical logic). Experience itself is not bound by these rules...[mythos] is based not upon the way that we think of things, but upon the way that we ex-
perience them. (262-63)

To try and operate exclusively within either mythos or logos would be nothing short of suicide, or insanity. It is important to acknowledge how the two thinking processes conjoin. Neither is superior to the other. Robert Pirsig writes that logos "refers to the sum total of our rational understanding of the world," while mythos "is the sum total of the early historic and prehistoric myths which preceded the logos" (343). As such, logocentric thought cannot help but be influenced by mythologic thought. Our logocentricity in turn, creates a new mythology -- it creates new ghosts, such as voice.

An aspect of our new mythology that is easily traced to logical thought, is the notion that we create language, and language is a tool for communication when in fact we are in part, if not en toto, created by language. "In the beginning was the WORD." At first glance, this statement seems easy to refute. It is in fact more complicated than we first assume. Robert Pattison quotes Helen Keller as writing:

Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was a no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew aught, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect.... Since I had no power of thought, I did not compare one mental state with another. So I was not conscious of any change or process going on in my brain when my teacher began to instruct me... when I learned the meaning of "I" and "me" and found that I was something, I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me.
(11)

In fact Helen Keller did not exist for herself until she acquired, or (more accurately stated) was created by language.

She may have existed for others, but these others already possessed language capabilities. How can an exterior exist without an interior? Nothing, including herself, existed for Helen Keller until language existed/created. As Pattison writes, "to be conscious of oneself as a user of language... is to begin to take the measure of creation" (12). Similarly, Julian Jaynes writes that "consciousness [hence, self], is the invention of an analog world on the basis of language... consciousness comes after language!" (66)

We know that a system does not exist until we construct it. Aristotle's "method" of rhetoric is likewise a constructed system -- a kind of map which we can use to produce the effects that we want. The problem with our use of rhetoric is that we've forgotten it was intended as a map. Rise Axelrod explained that "our way of understanding the world is an ideology which pretends to itself that it is not an ideology at all" (16). But what is this ideology? Where does the map of rhetoric lead us? This map directs us toward something. What is that something? What is the essence of rhetoric?

William Stafford once wrote, "one who composes in language moves in the presence of sound... breathes with a set of muscles that will clutter or enhance the ever-varying physical presence of language effects" (55). This chapter began with a quote from Marshall Alcorn regarding "the forces attached to words that generate, employ, or 'bind' emotion." There seems to

be a dynamic interaction between language forces and language effects. The writer tries to somehow harness the creative forces of language, while the reader is engaged in an exchange with the "ever varying physical presence of language effects." This force which we attribute to language, and the effect we receive from language, are as close as we can get to the notion of voice. Voice is a qualitative measure of language force and language effect. What the map of rhetoric ideally leads to, is voice. Commonly rhetoric is viewed as a method, as form, as logos. Form has dominated substance, logos over mythos. Rhetoric is the logos, voice is the mythos.

Interestingly enough, if we go back and take a look at the model of our circumscription for voice, it could easily substitute as a circumscription for rhetoric in its ideal form. Both occur only within the context of a human relationship that is deeply imbedded in language. James Kinneavy in his Theory of Discourse, explores in great detail such a model of rhetoric. For Kinneavy, such a model is the foundation for discourse theory. Such a model may also be key to our gaining insight into a theory of voice.

When the first rhetoricians were laying out their methods, they had an ideal in mind. The purpose of their method was to attain this ideal. This ideal might be defined as new consciousness for a listener or reader. The experience of voice, is the experience of donning new awareness or consciousness, if only for a very short time, created out of a quality presence of language

effects.

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