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Changing Clothes: Re-dressing Voice for a Stylish Return

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## Abstract

This paper concerns the idea of voice within the field of composition studies and more specifically the canon of style. I examine the current rise of style to a place of prominence within composition and take issue with the exclusion of voice from this resurgence. By looking more closely at the complex definitions surrounding voice as well as the associations and critiques which have worked to repress its contemporary discussion, I demonstrate the unfounded nature of its dismissal. After revealing the ways in which voice is compatible with postmodern thought and usable despite its complexity, I outline some of the pedagogical implications a renewed acceptance of voice would allow. These include a more complete rhetorical vocabulary, a deeper understanding of ethos as it functions in student writing and our increasingly globalized electronic society, and its importance to the field of alternative discourse.

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## Introduction

Most people do not swim in heavy wool business suits; likewise, few corporate meetings are attended by workers attired in bikinis and Speedos. Different clothes are appropriate and necessary for different occasions and activities. We put on one outfit for an evening on the town, another for a run in the woods, and still something else for a day of work. In the context of clothing, this is appropriate, expected, and usually a purposeful decision. What many people do not realize is that a similar change occurs simultaneously in our speech. Though it is more a result of overall social context than just our clothing, our words take on distinctly different tones depending on the setting we are placed in. Within composition studies, these diverse tones are called styles or voices. These terms could be said to each possess a unique style, for while both speak to the various manners in which discourse can be arrayed, their unique connotations have placed them in totally different circles.

After a long period of unpopularity, style is once again being recognized as important and useful; however, its uncomfortable step-sibling, voice, continues to be ignored and left out of elite theoretical circles. As a more controversial facet of an already problematic discipline, voice is understandably a topic which contemporary stylistic scholars might purposefully be avoiding in an effort to stabilize their somewhat tenuous position. But no matter how much it is pushed aside, voice cannot be escaped. Though our postmodern sensibilities will hardly allow us to even breathe the words “authentic voice” in anything but condescension, I wonder if serious theoretical circles

have not dismissed a potentially useful metaphor too quickly. Voice is problematic, yes, but style has its own history of tricky definitions and complicated problems.

Style is the outfit that got pushed to the back of the composition “closet”, tossed aside and then forgotten for some years only to be re-discovered as a versatile vintage gem. Voice is the crucial accessory that is being left behind in the renewed excitement; the shoes or the belt that really ties everything together and makes it work in the current “fashion”/composition climate. It is a parallel feature of this recurrent conversation surrounding style in that it too sat as a central matter of discussion enjoying acceptance and even prominence around the same time that style was in its “Golden Age” (Butler 6). Ultimately this period of recognition was followed by dismissal and rejection, but in many ways voice is still more organically tied to the recently re-popularized idea of performative stylistics than the more inclusive term “style”. Voice has been wielded under the guise of various definitions and connotations that have made it, like style, rather difficult to pin down.

In an effort to keep compositionists from essentially running out the door with their great reclaimed outfit and no shoes, I will examine the renewed interest in style, showing the ways that it is connected to voice and questioning the force in composition which is managing to propel and silence respectively, the halves of an intimately related pair. By demonstrating the complexities of voice that emerge in its definitions, I will shed light on the associations and critiques which have led to its dismissal. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of Expressivism on the general perception of voice and the critiques which preclude a connection between “self” and writing. I will not argue for a

renewal of the Expressivist classrooms that were popular in the mid to late seventies. Voice can and should stand on its own theoretical foundation as opposed to the rickety structure it inherited from those predecessors. Through rhetorical analysis of the field, this piece will call for a reconsideration of voice as an important pedagogical tool within the canon of style and composition studies as a whole. An emphasis will be placed on the ways in which voice fits into alternative discourses and the ethical implications of its connection to ethos in our increasingly globalized and digitized society.

## Chapter 1 Style: A Return to Relevance

To begin this discussion, we will need to understand why the vintage outfit was even pulled out of the closet. Over the course of its existence style has been begrudgingly acknowledged as useful, overused as a substitute for substance, dismissed as a deceptive and shallow piece of rhetorical equipment, and linked to the bland product-centered formalism that was rejected in the 1980's. Debates over its meaning, uses, and purpose have been on-going for the more than two-thousand years during which it has been a recognized discipline; however, the last twenty years have not been a particularly fruitful theoretical period for style. Now, according to Paul Butler's 2009 book, *Style in Rhetoric and Composition*, style is back "in style". Butler defines style as a "rhetorical concept" that "is connected to a writer's purpose, subject matter, audience, and context," a definition I will work from as well (1). He claims that its recent "recovery" is due to the fact that style "is an indispensable part of persuasive discourse, reinvigorated by such dynamic forces as culture, identity, dialect, oral discourse, genre, multimodal forms, and global influences" (Butler 2). With the specified purpose of showing how style can "have the same influence on the field" that it has on individual "readers and writers," Butler lays out a collection of essays that show where style has been and where it is going, its impact on pedagogy, and how it fits into culture (5). Through an analysis of several key essays in this compilation, I will support Butler's argument that style has returned and

should continue to flourish, but also display a conversation which could be enriched by the unnamed idea of voice which hangs in the background of the discussions.

Revisiting the work of ancient rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian near the beginning of the collection, Butler reminds readers of the timeless importance of the ideal orator, “a good man speaking well,” and the important part style plays in the conveyance of such a picture. In the excerpt of Quintilian’s Book X, Chapter 2, the rhetor urges students to acquire “a stock of words, a variety of figures, and the art of composition...for it cannot be doubted that a great portion of art consists in imitation” (54). This leads into the work of Frank Farmer, Phillip Arrington, Robert Connors, and Mike Duncan who look at contemporary imitation and the individual structural pieces of writing which comprise discourse including the sentence and the paragraph. These are very basic elements of style which the scholars argue are valuable, yet currently un-theorized. Like voice, they enjoyed times of fruitful scholarship, in the case of imitation both in ancient and more recent history, only to be dismissed prematurely.

In a later section of the work concerning influences and debates on style, the scholarly issues that emerged in the “Golden Age” of style are brought forward once again. This section is interesting because it address issues and debates which were coming up during a period that was also fruitful for voice. When debates over voice emerged many of them also took on a binary form similar to that which Louis Milic presents in his article “Theories of Style and Their Implication for the Teaching of Composition”. Setting up an either/or debate is often considered a dangerous scholarly move, but it can be a useful tool for looking carefully at the main parts of a problem.

While other writers (Christenson, Kolln, and Tufte) focus on style's more technical relationship to grammar, Milic sets up the debate of whether language "can be dressed in a variety of outfits" or if it "is the dynamic expression of his personality; illustrated in [...] all his [the writer's] activity" (141-42). In the area of voice this same debate takes shape to determine whether voice exists (see Elbow 1994). It is interesting that despite the similarities of these arguments, the style article remains completely silent on the topic of voice. The omission from Milic's discussion is somewhat glaring, yet unsurprising in light of the term's heavily loaded nature and the focus of the collection.

Throughout the articles on style and culture, this omission is increasingly blatant. In the introduction, Paul Butler says that the "competing interests of teaching students [...] to use Standard English as well as to respect the linguistic differences of various language communities" come together at the nexus of style (280). But as various writers go on to address the impact of orality, gender, and multi-cultural deviation on student writing, voice continues to be carefully avoided as any significant part of the equation. The articles from Geneva Smitherman and Min-Zhan Lu examine the voices that students bring into the classroom and the different ways in which they are forced to negotiate and assimilate what they have with the normative language they are often expected to put forward, yet even here voice is not mentioned in a theoretical composition context. Likewise, Mary P. Hiatt in her Braddock Award-winning essay on "feminine style" avoids making any connection between the self and writing. Even Peter Elbow, one of the most well-known and successful promulgators of voice, only touches on it in passing throughout his essay on the disparity between composition and literature. There is a

careful avoidance of any words that could point back to the slippery idea of self, yet one can see it underlying nearly all the conversations surrounding style and culture.

Butler's defense of style, combined with its simultaneous challenge to scholars and a solid quantity of recent research, forms a strong incentive to re-consider and re-implement the previously discarded third canon. Some critics might debate the importance of a discussion that has been omitted for the last fifteen or twenty years without problem. However, Butler's argument that its return is "reinvigorated by such dynamic forces as culture, identity, dialect, oral discourse, genre, multimodal forms, and global influence" creates a powerful rebuttal as it forms valid connections between style and other recognized and emerging fields which have enjoyed much theoretical acknowledgment in recent decades. Voice is equally primed for reigniting by these forces; however, composition scholars remain silent on this facet of the subject. This strain of discussion demonstrates the point Butler made in an earlier article called "Style in the Diaspora of Composition Studies" that style has never really left the field but merely migrated into "many areas of inquiry" (6). He borrows and expands upon a similar idea put forth by Janice Lauer who recognized this trend with the canon of invention. Butler argues that like invention, style has moved, through "self-imposed exile" more than "forced flight," into different areas of composition studies such as genre theory, rhetorical analysis, and personal writing (22). This leads to the conclusion that style should be actively recognized and analyzed in its many areas of habitation by students and scholars alike. Such study will "allow a more complete understanding of textual objects" and avoid leaving out a rich and important facet of all written texts (22).

My argument is that voice is also important for this “complete understanding” to take place.

While the more technical aspects of style concerning sentence and paragraph mechanics may not tie in very closely with the idea of voice, other discussions of style could greatly benefit from the addition of an accessory like voice. For instance, imitation as discussed by Quintilian is both an important part of developing style and an inevitable part of life that occurs as we “copy what has been invented with success” (54). It could be argued that this process is really an exercise in developing one’s own voice through the imitation and combination of many voices. From our earliest years, language is learned through imitation and most often affirmed when it successfully mirrors what parents and teachers expect to hear/read. Quintilian’s thoughts indirectly support the idea of a socially constructed voice, while Frank Farmer and Phillip Arrington’s argument in “Apologies and Accommodations: Imitation and the Writing Process” points to the practice of imitation through the practical exercise of parody (among other exercises). This “role-playing” inevitably involves taking on a voice that is not your own (Arrington 69). Farmer and Arrington use parody as an example of a way in which imitation can avoid being “deferential, affirming, or idealizing” because they claim it critiques and comments on the very material which it is imitating (69). Bringing voice into this conversation expands the vocabulary one can use to effectively convey to the students what they are imitating. It is a useful signifier because it can find at least one reference in the physical human voice. The fact that voice has a manifestation which is at least partly

tangible certainly helps to ground the idea and clarify an aspect of texts which students can try to imitate.

Other scholars are also working to bring style back to the forefront of theoretical consideration including Richard Lanham (2006), Chris Holcomb (2005), and Fiona Paton (2000). Lanham's work pulls from the field of economics as he looks at the way "digital expressive space" has changed our view of words in text. He parallels the economic switch from "real property to intellectual property" to a switch in composition from a focus on substance to a focus on style. He claims that, "attracting attention is what style is all about" (Lanham xi-xii). Since we are, as he believes, living in an economy based around the "rare" commodity of attention, he sees a need to develop "attention structures" within rhetoric using style. If success in our economy is based on gaining attention, then ideas must be stylistically appealing in order to have a place in the world. This idea complements the one found in voice scholarship which recognizes people's different voices and the importance of each depending on situation (Royster, Fulwiler, hooks, Bryant, and others), but like the essays in Paul Butler's collection, Lanham's work keeps the idea of voice at bay even as he leaves room for its useful inclusion.

Paton and Holcomb espouse related ideas as their research focuses on the performative nature of style, how it actually invokes attention towards certain ideas; however, they approach this topic through stylistic analyses and challenges for other scholars to get more involved in this fruitful arena. Holcomb claims style is a "vehicle for performance" that allows writers to "present a self" citing and analyzing Judith Butler's work *Burning Acts: Injurious Speech* for examples (188). He portrays the connection

between style and delivery as one that is ordained by the ancients but largely unexplored by current theorists. Proceeding from the idea that style should “embody and encode its thematic content,” Holcomb looks at the ways Judith Butler’s work both achieves this and falls short of her projected intention to use “radical forms of expression” to convey “radical thought” (189,188). He asserts that writers and readers must “play their parts” in order for performative stylistics to function effectively: “Things fall apart when [...] readers [...] become too dismissive or prematurely impatient, and writers [...] become too intent on dazzling (204). Paton’s analysis, which preceded and influenced Holcomb’s, looks more specifically at the way ideology is conveyed by style in literary text. She seeks to address and further the interpretive potential of stylistics that was been called for by Mary Louise Pratt in the late eighties. Through an examination of Jack Kerouac’s style in the novel *Dr. Sax*, Paton develops what she terms a “cultural stylistics” and uses it to analyze the post-Cold War ideology of “generational angst” which is conveyed by Kerouac’s style (183). The ideology Paton identifies is an interesting resultant mix which shows *Dr. Sax* to be “a cultural as much as a personal memoir” (183). This meshes neatly with Holcomb’s idea that performative stylistics allow for the presentation of “a self” and both works exemplify some of the benefits connected to the reviving style which Paul Butler projects in his work on the subject (188). Within these discussions the word “voice” is brought up naturally and repeatedly, but it is not specifically addressed. Other topics were the focus of these works, but I see ways in which they point to opportunities for voice to join style in its projected rise to prominence. It is an accessory that cannot be forgotten without great loss. Just as style continued to function despite exclusion and invisibility (Butler 2007, 2009), I will argue that voice remains an important concept that

continues to slip into the vocabulary of even the most vehement anti-expressivists and which if re-considered appropriately could reinvigorate the pedagogy of compositionists (Elbow 2007).

## Chapter 2 Voice: Definitions and Complexities

Fashion icons have widely differing ideas about what constitutes style in clothing. Madonna and Audrey Hepburn both made an impact on the fashion world, but the two could not be more different in their interpretation and execution of what style is. While Madonna has pushed fashion to the limits with constantly evolving and often outlandish outfits, Audrey Hepburn is known for classic, simple elegance. Many people are inspired by Madonna's crazy wardrobe to be more experimental themselves, but at the same time, Audrey Hepburn's interpretation of style has been appreciated and repeated for decades. Their definitions of fashion/style are very different, but understanding the function of both provides a more complete picture of style. In a similar manner, understanding the simultaneous existence of multiple ideas about voice is essential for grasping the whole of how it can function. If we are to include voice in style's new rise to prominence, then it is important that we understand at least some of the main debates and complexities surrounding it. This will allow us to better gauge its potential for functionality in composition.

For many voice scholars, voice and style are nearly interchangeable. They look at voice as a part of someone's "personal" style as opposed to something entirely separate. Peter Elbow differentiated between the two saying, "Style is a more text-centered concept or lens for looking at writing; voice is more person-centered [...] It's a trade-off" (Elbow, Introduction *Voice* x-xi). Both words describe ways to look at writing and point to specific details which can be examined. While style looks at the words on the page and

what they convey in and of themselves, voice always takes the author into account as the source of the writing. Both style and voice can be constructed or put on to some degree, but voice is accompanied by a greater expectation for substance to be present beneath the guise.. As I examine the varying definitions of voice and the complexities surrounding it, perhaps it will become clearer why the subject is so carefully avoided in contemporary style discussions and research.

Despite the fact that two collections of essays by various accomplished scholars were published during 1994 alone, the voice discussion dwindled considerably shortly thereafter. In the introduction to the *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, Peter Elbow, one of the most well-known figures in composition and voice studies for over thirty years, describes the three major debates about voice and responses to them in an effort to define voice and make it usable. These include the “discourse as text vs. discourse as voice” debate, the “ethos as real virtue in a real person vs. ethos as the appearance of virtue”, and the “voice as self vs. voice as role” debate (xi-xix). We see from these remarks the fact that the voice metaphor links that which was originally conceived as a spoken word to the ideas of self-hood, personal character, and the potential of humans to construct roles for themselves which may or may not represent “reality.” Elbow goes on to discuss the different ways in which voice can indisputably be seen as a “solid critical term that points to certain definite and important qualities in texts that cannot easily be gainsaid” including: “audible voice, dramatic voice, recognizable or distinctive voice, and voice with authority” (xxxiii). The idea is that these ways of thinking about voice are less controversial and more straightforward than the idea of

“resonant voice or presence” which Elbow also discusses. This argument is important to note because one of the biggest problems voice has faced is its complex nature. Through an examination of Elbow’s list alone, one can see the multiple forms that the definition of voice can take. Many critics have cited this as a crippling problem which keeps the concept from being usable; however, Elbow remains hopeful that examining and understanding these different definitions of voice will ultimately help “to stabilize and solidify the concept of voice in writing” (xlvii). He believes that as more theorists, teachers, and students begin to understand the nuances of voice, it will become easier to understand what is insinuated by different references to it.

Even with a cursory glance through the pages of *Voices on Voice*, readers can continue to see the various fruitful strands of conversation which were emerging and contemporarily cogent elements of the subject which are now gathering dust. Writers in this collection discussed the problematic nature of voice from multiple perspectives and attempted to show its pedagogical potential. One example of this is seen in Carl Klaus’s piece, “The Chameleon ‘I’: On Voice and Personality in the Personal Essay,” which reiterates the fact that the “myth of ‘finding one’s voice’ strongly implies that once having found it, one will never lose it, never change it” but also shows the value of teacher’s encouraging students to “play a variety of roles” in their writing (128). People play many different parts in their everyday lives and it is crucial that they know how to communicate effectively in each arena. One does not use the same tone or language when speaking to a friend that they use in a professional work setting and most people speak differently to their parents, spouse, co-workers, religious leader, and teachers too.

Becoming comfortable with writing in a range of voices is a valuable skill, and the idea of finding voices instead of one voice and recognizing the impact of one's social and cultural context is an idea which is certainly compatible with the more contemporary views of self as fragmented and constructed.

Other essays in the collection examine voice as “muse, message and medium” (Albertini 185), “voice as a place where many voices intersect” (Spooner 308), and voice “like the classical mask, but a more complex one [...which] projects internal attributes, qualities, and selves of the writer, while at the same time protecting the writer's identities” (Cummins 49). It is interesting to note the way the metaphor of voice within writing elicits other metaphors to explain it more fully. One can understand why critics would question the usefulness of a concept which is rooted and explained predominantly through language that continues to defer meaning; however, if we accept the post-structuralist views of theorists like Jacques Derrida, deferred meaning is all we can ever attain. If that is the case, then voice and its elusive definition is a clearer picture of the consistently complex defining process and it should be as useful a topic as any other.

As Darsie Bowden describes it, “Voice in writing, identified variously as style, persona, stance, or *ethos*, has never been very clearly defined” (173). It is a slippery word which carries different connotations for different people due to its metaphorical nature. As a metaphor, voice is primarily used as a reference to the human voice which is considered comparable to certain elements of writing. This connection to a living human being is what makes voice both a powerful and difficult entity. For some theorists, voice in writing is viewed as a window into the writer's identity. There is an implication that

this identity is static and expressive of the whole individual who lies behind it. Other theorists have argued that any character portrayed by voice in composition is merely one among several all of which may change depending on circumstances and social context. The former view is more representative of the Expressivists who popularized the practice and development of voice in students during the seventies; however, both views enjoyed critical attention well into the nineties (see *Landmark Essays* 1994, *Voices on Voice* 1994, Bowden 1995). Then, as if the book on voice had been neatly concluded, discussion of the topic came to a standstill.

*Voices on Voice* editor, Kathleen Blake Yancey, approaches this loaded term with a less formal organization, covering many of the same ideas Elbow mentions but also making a more pointed effort to defend the existence of voice as a theoretical consideration within composition theory. It is almost as if Yancey is anticipating the silencing of voice that has occurred. She makes the observation that even critics as opposite as Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae who disagree on the semantics of how voice should be used share “an agreement that there is such a thing as voice,” that “what’s important isn’t just voice and the individual, but voice and discourse” and that “voice enables and confers authority” (xvii). In the concluding chapter, Kathleen Yancey also confronts the sticky relationship between self and voice head-on through a dialogue with another contributor. Yancey states that “the writers of this text know that even finding the self in the postmodern era is no mean accomplishment—or quite a (vain) glorious illusion, depending on your point of view” and notes that “of course, if there’s no self, then there is no voice expressing or reflecting or representing the self” (299).

Throughout these works the voice metaphor is reoriented in the context of postmodern society, complemented by other metaphors, and most importantly questioned. However, despite the critical definitions of voice which were being discussed and the groundwork set for its pedagogical use something caused the inquiry to cease.

### **Chapter 3 Voice: What Happened?**

In the conversations surrounding voice during the mid-nineties, questions are posed, answered, and left open-ended in an attempt to spur others to join the conversation. So, why was it abandoned? There are many potential answers to this question and each one may represent a correct aspect of the answer. It is possible that other topics grew in popularity to such a degree that there was no room left for the discussion or maybe it began to feel overdone. Perhaps scholars decided that there was nothing left to be said on the subject, the depths were plumbed and no further answers seemed a worthwhile pursuit, or maybe the whole topic was deemed incompatible with postmodern thought and useful scholarship. While the first two possibilities are rather hard to ascertain definitively, and it is unlikely that all worthwhile questions concerning voice were answered by the mid nineties, I will examine the fourth possibility presented.

Our current conception of voice is aligned very closely with the expressivist movement of the seventies which is not typically deemed compatible with postmodernism. This relationship has certainly had an ill effect on voice because it has caused critics of expressivism, who were loud and plentiful, to dismiss an idea which is able to operate outside of the theoretically problematic area. This dismissal was made possible by the construction of a straw man conception of voice that painted it as an “anti-intellectual” pursuit of a single ethereal unified entity inside every person, waiting to be freed. Far from complete, this definition has gained credibility from the respected critiques who assert its reality and go on to critique its weak and narrow scope. But even

against these odds and in the face of the silence that reigns when it comes to discussion of voice, expressivist pedagogy is not in danger of disappearing. According to Richard Fulkerson's 2005 critique of "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-first century," expressivism is "quietly expanding its region of command" (655). He argues that this is the case "despite numerous poundings by the cannons of postmodernism and resulting eulogies" and the extensive popularity of critical/cultural studies (655). Fulkerson borrows from Christopher Burnham's definition of expressivism featured in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (2001) to explain that expressivist classrooms place the writer in the center of the rhetorical triangle. The expressivist pedagogy "encourages, even insists upon a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing" and "the presence—'voice' or ethos—whether explicit, implicit, or absent functions as a key evaluation criterion" (qtd. in Fulkerson 667). Classrooms which fall into this category use writing as "a means of fostering personal development" and might use writing to help students become more introspective and thoughtful or as part of a healing/therapeutic process (667). In the early days of expressivism, finding one's "authentic/honest" voice was also an important part of the equation. Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie among others encouraged students to do things like, "speak in honest voices and tell the truth" and "write with power" in "your real voice" (Macrorie 15, Elbow 304). Combined, these associations gave voice a reputation as less intellectual and by some standards "anti-intellectual" (Harris 31, Hashimoto 80).

Expressivists cared about individual students and placed a high value on what they had to say. Thus it should come as no surprise that they would latch on to a term

like voice which attempts to get at the connection between author and text. These scholars present an optimistic perspective of students, make claims like Peter Elbow's famous statements "everyone can write" and "it is possible to learn something and not be taught," and often subscribe to the belief that everyone possesses a voice and the potential to find it through activities like free-writing and peer editing (Elbow 2000, Elbow ix, 1973). Unfortunately, this bright outlook was not supported and defended by the same bulk of theory that other pedagogies presented from their inception. Thomas O'Donnell suggests in his 1996 *College English* article that because, "expressivists seemed uninterested in forging their own theory of knowledge, others rushed in to do it for them—theorists who were not at all sympathetic to expressivist aims and methods" (425). This led to the creation of "straw rhetorics" which formed around slippery terms like "authentic voice" and "juice" and received regular scathing critiques (426, see Hashimoto, Faigley, France). O'Donnell summarizes the general claims of these attacks as they stood in the mid nineties with the statement that:

expressivist rhetorics not only fail to provide students with resources for critiquing their political situations, but also unwittingly conspire in the replication of a capitalist/consumerist hegemony responsible for various forms of political, social, and economic oppression

citing James Berlin and Alan France as primary defenders of these positions (423). The arguments are refuted by O'Donnell with examples from his own classes and careful identification of the problems in many anti-expressivist critiques: "caricatured expressivist epistemologies" and "popular mischaracterizations" (432). He makes a strong argument for expressivist methods which, combined with other defenses and continued classroom success stories, may account for its continued use; however, while

voice is a huge part of historic and contemporary expressivist pedagogy, it is not brought forward as the champion of the expressivist cause.

On the contrary, in looking at current expressivist classrooms, Richard Fulkerson notes the fact that voice in student writing is a goal, but current definitions don't "commit the 1960s mistake of referring to the student's 'authentic' voice" (667). It is clear that if voice is known for anything within expressivist pedagogy it is for eliciting a lot of problems in the past when its position of prominence was shared with authenticity. The issues scholars and theorists had and continue to have with voice is its associations with truth and self, concepts which share the common bonds of intangibility, slipperiness, religious overtones, and an affiliation with Romantic ideals that run counter to the flow of postmodernism. While voice remains a crucial part of expressivist pedagogy, it still suffers from the marginalization that it received as the primary target of anti-expressivists who pin pointed its "authentic" iteration as the location of anti-intellectualism.

One example of this reduction, besides those referenced by Thomas O'Donnell, can be found in Joseph Harris' work *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*. The book was published in 1996 around the middle of Harris' term as editor of the NCTE journal *College Composition and Communication*. Harris' position of influence is worth noting here because his opinion of voice in *A Teaching Subject* was not particularly glowing. A whole chapter of the work is devoted to voice, which Harris sets up as a word that motivates students to either look "beyond the text to get at the thoughts and feelings of its author" or examine "the person implied in the phrasings of the text itself" (24). Though Harris does emphasize some positive elements of voice as used by

expressivists, the overall tone is rather negative. He states that early expressivists were “engaged in a political defense of the student in her struggles to assert herself against what was seen as a dehumanizing corporate and university system,” but he quickly adds that “much of the political charge of expressivism has by now faded” (26-27). Harris’ critique is a rather negative generalization which he does not base in statistical findings or formal studies of any kind. It continues as he challenges the connection between voice and the exercise of imitation which he believes is “as daunting to some as it is liberating to others” and puts forward his suspicions that practitioners of voice are not after a constructed literary identity but instead “a self that stands outside or beyond language and culture” (28-29). In combination, these comments on voice tend to paint expressivists and users of voice in the manner Thomas O’Donnell described in his essay: uncritical, ineffective, and rather naïve (423).

To at least partially rehabilitate voice, Harris goes on to describe the ways it could be effectively used in classrooms, pointing out the importance of showing students how their voices are constructed and not limiting them to the genre of personal writing (34). This is an interesting and appropriate revelation; however, it is not so unique an addition to voice theory as one might think based on a reading of the chapter. The *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing* was published in 1994, two years before Harris’ book. That collection of essays, edited and introduced by Peter Elbow with a great deal of precision, contains multiple pieces which talk about the social construction of voice (see Elbow, Bakhtin, Fulwiler, and Faigley). By only citing the portions of Peter Elbow which look at the ambiguity of voice and its unique, personal attributes and ignoring the recent

scholarship (including later work by Peter Elbow) which was critically examining voice pedagogy, Harris minimizes voice and presents it as part of composition with more problems than benefits. Unfortunately, respectable negatively tinged perspectives of voice, like Harris', took hold of composition and within four or five years of *A Teaching Subject* getting published, voice discussion dwindled to a faint echo of its former productive buzz. Though some articles on voice were still getting published in major composition journals during the late nineties, there was virtually nothing by early 2000. While readers of *A Teaching Subject*, mostly teachers and graduate students, get a picture of voice as a student-centered concept, they are also challenged to question its existence, origin, and overall usefulness. Though Harris certainly cannot be held entirely responsible for the dismissal of the topic, it also cannot be denied that powerful voices in academia often function as forces of inclusion and omission. Perhaps Harris' position as editor of CCC's gave the book a more authoritative platform leading to a larger impact on the views of rising scholars in the late nineties and early 2000's. More than likely *A Teaching Subject* was just one factor among many that caused voice to lose its place, but it is still worth noting.

Harris' critique presents a good picture of where most voice critiques end up fixating: the problematic relationship between voice and self (critiques of existence), the origin of voice from within or without (critiques of origin), and/or the multifaceted definitions of voice, which can make it difficult to use depending on one's perspective (critiques of usage). The first and second groups cite contemporary post modern society which does not allow for a cohesive self ("I thought the unified self wasn't possible

anymore.” Spooner 299), and points to the frivolous nature of over-emphasizing unique or “authentic” voice (Harris 30-31); however, this ignores later scholarship which refined and complicated this overly straight forward and dismissive representation of a slippery topic. The third group uses complexity as an excuse to dismiss voice as an unusable term, but if theorists dismissed every problematic term and idea that came along, scholarship would not be left with much to talk about. What must be assessed is whether the problems with voice truly warrant its silencing.

## Chapter 4 Voice: Addressing the Critiques

From the previously mentioned sources alone, we can see that voice is not an obsolete concept without value to contemporary conversations. Though many questions are left unanswered by theoretical discussions of voice, there are many answers that are given. In order to uncover more fully what might have gone on and what can be done to remedy the omission of voice, should it warrant revival, I will examine the various counter arguments which support the concept of voice and refute its general critiques. As this analysis will show, even the critics of voice provide useful insights which could help to resurrect it.

### *Critique of Existence*

First, we will look at the critique of existence. At issue is the idea that voice cannot exist because self does not exist. Relatively few scholars blatantly hold this position because a complete lack of self has yet to be proven conclusively; nonetheless, postmodern theorists, led by the likes of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, have generally dismissed the idea of a unified self. This makes the idea of consistently reflecting a certain picture of self in writing seem impossible because if knowledge, consciousness, and the world are all fragmented, then there is no unity to be found. However, even critics of voice have had to admit that postmodern scholarship allows for some unexpected compatibility with the idea.

For instance, Joseph Harris concedes in *A Teaching Subject* that “poststructuralist theory has offered us powerful ways of rethinking and elaborating our views of voice and

self,” though he warns that theory cannot “solve problems in teaching [...] at best it can only rephrase or clarify them” (41). Though Harris is hesitant to completely support the idea of voice even with a stronger theoretical basis, he still points out that poststructuralists (close relations of postmodernists) opened up useful ways of looking at the relationship between self and voice. While Immanuel Kant may have placed the subject (individual) in a position of importance, later theorists like Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas critiqued the idea by looking at the way construction of individual consciousness was impacted by forces outside of itself. In the case of Foucault, this force was power while for Levinas it was the face of the Other. Both allowed for the impact of outside forces in the shaping of that slippery interior consciousness or self.

Determining the existence of self with certainty would require far more time than the present conversation will allow, but for the purposes of addressing the question at least in part we will turn to some history of the post modern movement. As noted above, many scholars have moved well beyond the consideration of voice as a singular “authentic self” reflection. They display recognition of many voices within any individual and an acceptance of social and cultural factors which have worked to create those different “selves” or representations. Post modern theorists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have respectively fragmented and deconstructed the self causing a rupture in the notion that some ethereal entity like voice could provide a connection to an individual through writing. But what if one looks back a little further at the work of Immanuel Kant, a man who was arguably the father of postmodern thinking? Kant recreated the manner in which people viewed the subject “I”. In direct opposition to the

Enlightenment, he disintegrated the idea of human reason as limitless while still placing it at the center of human perception. Since Kant did not focus particularly on writing, the only way to call upon his insights in regards to voice is to more closely examine his view of the self. Self was a central component of many Kantian works, but for the purposes of this paper we will only examine a couple instances of it.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant asserts that contrary to the previous belief “that all our knowledge must conform to the objects” in fact, “objects must conform to our mode of cognition” (12). Kant likens this switch from object as central to subject as central with the Copernican Revolution, a move which could certainly seem braggadocios if the conception of this idea and its consequences was not now associated with nearly 250 years of subsequent upheaval and productive criticism (12). This reorienting of object and subject points to the larger idea which Kant puts forward in the piece that a *priori* knowledge, “which is to settle something about objects, before they are given to us,” is more possible if objects are matching up with concepts in our minds that are present before any actual experience takes place (12). Kant may limit the bounds of human reason, but he empowers the individual through his conception of *a priori* knowledge about which he states, “How far we can advance independent of all experience in *a priori* knowledge is shown by the brilliant example of mathematics” a science that Kant presents favorably as the product of human organization of *a priori* concepts (28). This view effectively elevates the self to a central position as the primary definer and/or “creator” of the world around it.

From this move, one might safely assume that the individual is important to Kant's post modern theory. Kant does not discuss the stability or lack thereof which might be associated with the individual, but because of its position among fluctuating sensual experiences and perceptions which constantly add to the already fertile ground of intuition, one can imagine that there is room admitted for changes. Nonetheless, self, the individual subject, does exist for Kant in at least some semblance of unity revolving around his *a priori* concepts. If that is the case, then there is already at least a small opening for the possibility of voice. It is not relegated to the realm of impossibility by a declaration that the self does not exist, but it remains a particularly complicated aspect of what is already an unstable concept.

Voice theorists recognize the tenuous connection between self and writing. Kathleen Yancey affirms in *Voices on Voice* that "even the word 'self' is a tease and a misnomer, suggesting, almost promising, what is impossible for a living thing: a static, certain, secure entity" (300). If something is alive, it is growing and growth means changes of one sort or another; however, as Yancey states in her next sentence "there is some predictability attached to all of us, which is why our friends, our family, and indeed, even our adversaries know what to make of us. Defying the predictable can itself become predictable" (300). Even if a unified self is impossible, those around us are able to synthesize enough information about us to create at least a simulated unity which allows them to interact with us in a consistent fashion. Kant might say that people around another human being are using *a priori* knowledge/intuition combined with experience to define that person who is playing the part of object within the thought process.

Regardless of the exact manner in which the self is constructed by others or the subject itself, Kant does verify its existence thereby supplying post modern support for the subject which voice is supposedly reflecting.

But what about the subject's conception of self? Michael Spooner states that "we experience ourselves as unities" even if we are truly the product of any number of cultural, societal, and historical elements (301). How can a writer put forward a voice in writing which reflects such a shifting identity? From a Kantian perspective, the more appropriate preceding question might be how can any idea be put forth or understood as a unified object. Kant discusses the difference between analytic and synthetic judgments stating that "the former might be called illustrating, the latter expanding judgments" (30). When an individual observes an object, judgments are instantly made either from *a priori* knowledge or sensual experience. Initially these are separated by Kant as the aforementioned analytic or synthetic judgments, but later he maintains that all judgments are truly synthetic even if they originate from *a priori* knowledge since *a priori* concepts are also synthesized (72). According to Kant, "only because I am able to connect the manifold of given representations in *one consciousness*, is it possible for me to represent to myself the *identity* of the *consciousness* in these *representations*" (72). If this is applied to the self/subject, making it the object, then theoretically we can know our self as a unity only through a synthesis of representations and *a priori* knowledge. That would mean that self-knowledge is possible and one might assume transmittable through speech or writing; however, Kant says later:

that objects by themselves are not known to us at all, and that what we call external objects are nothing but representations of our senses[...]the thing by itself, is not known, nor can be known by these representations, nor do we care to know anything about it in our daily experience. (49)

The first half of this statement seems to discount any idea of a true self-knowledge or a valid knowledge of anything. Interestingly enough, Kant includes the final comment affirming that we don't "care to know anything about it in our daily experience," thereby negating any view of this perpetually incomplete state as problematic (49).

According to this explanation knowing "the thing by itself" is not crucial for day-to-day living. People are able to navigate the world without complete knowledge of themselves or other objects. Kant says "it is only because I am able to comprehend the manifold of representation in one consciousness, that I call them altogether my representations" because otherwise we would be doomed to have as many selves as there are representations (73). Thankfully, we are able to have "some synthetical unity of apperception" which allows us to recognize things and people despite their propensity to shift and change based on circumstances (72). Our consciousness is able to assimilate different data into a whole that is unified enough to make sense of. Because of this, we are not unable to recognize a parent whose hair begins to gray or baffled by piece of fruit that has become rotten. Adding all of our experiences together, we are able to determine that even with a gray hair our parent is still our parent, not a stranger, and the banana that was yellow has not magically disappeared and been substituted with a replacement item that looks like brown mush.

In the same way, we are able to make sense of ourselves—to a degree. If Kant claims that a “true correlative” to objects cannot be known, then he certainly would agree that a “true” or “authentic self” is impossible to know (49). However, important to note is the fact that a full *knowledge* of self is what is deemed impossible, not the existence of self. For Kant, things still exist whether we have complete knowledge or any knowledge about them (26). That being the case, it seems that voice is certainly a possibility compatible with post modern ideas. It could in a sense be thought of as *a* representation of self which comes through writing. Though unable to provide complete knowledge of the writer’s self, voice can reflect something of the subject which produced it. Voice can exist without our full understanding of it, as easily as we can exist without a complete knowledge of ourselves. In light of this, it seems that voice does indeed have a substantial theoretical basis which is attuned enough with postmodern society to be useful and open enough to leave room for more scholarship. It may not be a purely postmodern idea, but it does possess enough compatibility that the idea of its dismissal on the grounds of its incompatibility seems preposterous.

### *Critique of Origin*

If voice cannot be entirely ruled out with conclusive proof that there is no self or at least the possibility of self(s), then we will move on to look at the critique of origin which is closely tied to the previous critique. If there is something personal, unique, or identifiable about individuals, where did it come from? Is it a product of societal pressures and cultural experiences or something uniquely inherent in each individual? Expressivists have certainly been portrayed through straw man rhetoric as believing that

voice comes from a place deep inside which can and should be accessed through various forms of personal and even therapeutic writing; however, as previously discussed their views are more complicated than this generalization allows. Also, we must recall that voice should not be wholly defined in the context of its expressivist history. While there may be some scholars and/or teachers who subscribe to this idea, the vast majority recognize the impact of society and culture on our perceptions of self.

Though authentic voice was very popular and still holds sway in creative writing (A. Alvarez *The Writer's Voice*, 2005), some areas of high school composition pedagogy (Tom Romano *Crafting Authentic Voice*, 2004) and various therapeutically oriented writing classes (Molly Hurley Moran "Toward a Writing and Healing Approach in the Basic Writing Classroom: One Professor's Personal Odyssey" *Journal of Basic Writing*, 2004), it is not the definitive perspective. Notable examples include the editors of the two previously mentioned collections of scholarship on voice, Peter Elbow and Kathleen Yancey (*Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing* and *Voices on Voice*), who both nod to the socially constructed nature of self. In his introduction, Elbow states:

we write best if we learn to move flexibly back and forth between on the one hand using and celebrating something we feel as our *own* voice, and on the other hand operating as though we are nothing but ventriloquists playfully using and adapting and working against an array of voices we find around us. ("Introduction" xlvii)

He encourages writers to enjoy a sense of identity while not allowing it to restrict or ignore the wider social network with which they are interacting with all the time. In what has become somewhat characteristic of Elbow in his later work, we see a hesitancy to align with either extreme of the binary presented by critics and defenders of voice.

Elbow does not identify fully with Lester Faigley's more cynical critique in "Judging Writing, Judging Selves," which accuses "authentic" voices of presenting an "illusion of a unified and knowing self that overviews the world around it" as if it is woefully naïve and without purpose (116). However, he does not reject the reality that as social beings functioning in a world of influences, we can and should learn to use multiple voices. While Elbow allows for and encourages free-writing and valuing of student abilities (*Writing Without Teachers*), he also affirms that "we don't have simple, neatly coherent or unchanging selves [...] we are made of different roles, voices" (*Everyone Can Write* 207). Here is one of most regularly cited and critiqued "expressivists" offering a perspective which allows for authenticity of individuals while acknowledging their social situation.

Likewise, Kathleen Yancey and Michael Spooner conclude *Voices on Voice* with a dialogue including the admission: "I write in multivoice. And as I write, I find myself relieved of the anxiety of authenticity that expressivism conjures, and also spared the weary insecurity of all things rootless and postmodern"(308). Yancey and Spooner are discussing the freedom that is found in possessing a unique perspective comprised of many contributing voices as they acknowledge individuality and the impact social interactions. In an essay picked up by both collections and CCC in slightly different versions, Toby Fulwiler describes his search for his "authentic" voice from the initial assumption that "our voices are determined largely outside of our selves, according to where we live and work, what we read, and with whom we interact" ("Looking and Listening"157). As he journeys through his personal journals, both current and dated, as

well as his public published work, Fulwiler comes to the conclusion that he has “ a recognizable public voice, both embedded within and yet distinctly apart from others who inhabit the same community [...] At the same time, its pitch, tone, and register can vary according to where it is directed” (164). Fulwiler is also bridging the binaries and finding a functional way of discussing and using voice.

Paul Kameen reveals this common theme yet again in an extended 1999 *College English* review that examines four late nineties works on voice. Looking at the books, authored by Thomas Newkirk, Donna Qualley, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Christian Knoeller, he notes several common themes: a “reconceptualization” of old expressivist terms “*self, voice, experience, the personal*” along the lines of social-constructivism (100), “the persistent presence of student- generated discourse approached with respect,” and “a general unease with the extent to which those keystone terms of expressivist approaches to teaching writing have been exiled from our disciplinary discussions” (101). Kameen neatly sums up the evidenced willingness among serious scholars and supporters of voice to admit multiple possibilities for voice(s) and usefully revive it within a postmodern framework. Unfortunately, ten years later their efforts have not been matched or built upon and voice remains excluded even as style, its close relation, gains respect and consideration.

Among postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, there are those whose work supports and allows for the perspectives of Kameen, Yancey, Spooner, and Elbow and those who further complicate notions of voice. While Mikhail Bakhtin is regularly listed in theoretical and philosophical defenses of voice, Jacques Derrida is noted just as often

for his valuable critiques of the concept. Bakhtin's work consistently develops the idea of language as "dialogic." He asserts that, "the individualistic type of experience derives from a steadfast and confident social orientation" and maintains that "'I' can realize itself verbally only on the basis of 'we'" (*Marxism* 1217, *Discourse* 5 ). Essentially, Bakhtin is arguing for an acknowledgement our situated experience which is created by the interplay between what he terms "the speaker (author), the listener (reader), and the topic (the who or what) of speech (the hero)" (*Discourse* 9). While he does not deny the existence of the individual experience or "personality," Bakhtin does emphasize the fact that "individual personality is just as social a structure as is the collective type of experience" (*Marxism* 1217). Bakhtin's arguments anchor the origin of voice firmly in the social context; however, they do not omit the possibility of individuality. For him, individual voice emerges out of the many voices which cross through us. A unique voice is possible for this theorist, but it does not originate from an isolated internal place.

Jacques Derrida approaches the subject of voice from an entirely different perspective noting a "phonocentric" bias in Western thought. As translator Barbara Johnson puts it, Derrida argues that "Western thought [...] has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities [...] These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities" (Johnson 43). The founder of deconstruction, Derrida, naturally points out that in the Western binary of presence vs. absence, presence is privileged. Thus we see a "privileging of the spoken word over the written word" and by extension, an insistence on voice within composition (43). In "Signature Event Context," Derrida argues that "a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription" (1481). He

suggests that this fact holds true for spoken signs too since all semiotic material defers meaning, a principle he elucidates through discussion of *difference* (1488). This is an interesting contrast to Bakhtin's idea of language as dependent on context, but in some ways the two ideas are compatible.

Bakhtin acknowledges the importance of context for creating meaning, but he does not insist that this is a stable or immutable occurrence. Therefore, when Derrida says "every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written[...] can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts," Bakhtin would probably agree because in many ways the comment affirms the power of context (1483). Derrida's critique identifies Western society's desire for stable, unified meaning and presence as a problematic pipe dream. It motivates a privileging of language characteristics which Derrida claims can never be achieved. While this idea is useful to acknowledge, it can also be crippling and the fact remains that our consciousness does have what Kant terms "some synthetical unity of apperception" that allows us to recognize people, objects, and language as meaningful entities (72). If we are to pursue a theoretical reconsideration of voice and a pedagogical revival of its practice, then we must recognize its social situation, maintain an awareness/acceptance of all language's slippery nature, and avoid limiting simplification of the term.

### *Critique of Use*

Understanding that many voice theorists recognize the manner in which society works to form the self and the various voices individuals possess, one might be puzzled

that there are still those who feel the concept is not useful. How can it still be considered too unwieldy? Many concepts are not required to be completely clear cut before achieving usable status in the classroom, but that seems to be the stipulation of many contrarians. There are many critiques addressing how and when voice should be used, and while most of them point to limited or negligible use, there are still some instructors who continue to implement it in their pedagogy. With Karen Surman Paley, author of the JAC reviewed *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-person Writing*, I hold that many of the more unabashedly negative critiques emerge from a faulty or limited perception of what voice really is. Here, I will examine several pieces that give an overview of the basic directions most critiques of voice usage take. Analysis of the critiques and subsequent defenses will continue to reveal potential problems voice might face upon reconsideration and the climate into which it will re-emerge should it be included in style's rise to acknowledgement and prominence.

Critics of the use of voice are very vocal and confident in their positions; however, as previously mentioned, many have constructed "straw-man pictures" which they proceed to attack ruthlessly and efficiently (Elbow "Reconsiderations" 181). Joseph Harris and Irvin Hashimoto, discussed in detail below, are perfect examples of the essentialist attitude many anti-voice theorists take. Both hint at the "anti-intellectual" nature of the concept and assume that Elbow, Macrorie and other voice scholars believe it "comes from within" and emerges in isolation (Harris 34). Even Richard Fulkerson, a notably balanced and respected critic, limits voice when he critiques Karen Paley's book as a defense of "the wrong victim in the wrong way" because her demonstration of

expressivism does not match his idea of its potential scope (668). For Fulkerson, expressivist pedagogy and therefore voice, “would be defended by showing that it led to greater self- awareness, greater insight, increased creativity, or therapeutic clarification of some sort” as opposed to showing it “address[ing] issues of social consciousness-class, race, gender, ethnicity, etc” (668). Though most critics complain that voice is too focused inward (when it should be seen as socially situated), this discussion implies that by definition voice-centered pedagogies cannot address social concerns. Limiting a concept like voice and keeping it separate from critical cultural studies pedagogy because of its association with expressivists or its traditional critic-created definition seems like a rather “anti-intellectual” practice as well.

Darsie Bowden and Alan France, among others articulate blatant concerns about the danger of ideologies enforced by voice. In Darsie Bowden’s 1995 *Rhetoric Review* article, “The Rise of a Metaphor: ‘Voice’ in Composition Pedagogy,” the usefulness of the metaphor is critiqued based on the underlying assumptions which allow it to function. These include a privileging of personal writing over academic, an idea of “good writing as the intermingling of oral and written modes,” and the assumption “that speech is closer to thought than writing” all of which Bowden feels are dubious if not faulty foundational statements (184-85). Though Bowden does admit that “voice helps writers conceptualize some of the intangibles in writing,” she fears that its flawed associations may make it more problematic than useful. She claims that when you admit complete social construction of voice, then “the voice metaphor [...] ceases to function effectively” (186). Apparently, social construction and unique perspective cannot co-exist for Bowden

which is indeed problematic. In her concerns about the way voice sets up “good writing,” she is joined by France who vehemently contends that voice is “the rhetorical device by which contributors [to voice discussion...] center discourse on the individual” to the exclusion of useful interaction in public discourse (596). Both scholars fear voice as a breeding ground for either dangerous self-centered complacency or a deceptive ideology loaded pedagogy.

However, sources as diverse as Jean François Lyotard, Michael Spooner, Richard Fulkerson, and Thomas O’Donnell disagree with Bowden and France’s assessments. On the postmodern theory front, Lyotard indirectly confronts Bowden’s critique that socially constructed voice(s) is not really a possible referent of the word voice by bringing out a picture of self that “exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before” (15). Though it is only “nodal points” that we occupy in the grand scheme of things, he claims that “no one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent” (15). This view affirms the social situation of an individual self which is able to exert at least minimal control over the many voices which cross over and through it. Voice theorist Michael Spooner asserts the usefulness of the “nodal points” metaphor in the understanding of voice when he claims it allows us to see ourselves as follows:

I am a node in a vast network [...] what seems ‘my’ voice is composed of voices that reach me through the network. Yet [...] the place my voice inhabits is unique, since no other node has heard the same voices in the same order at the same time that I have. (308)

Spooner recognizes his position as a conglomeration of social forces, but he also does not discount his individual perspective. Voice is not an inherently limiting term. As a metaphor, it opens up possibilities. While it does have a heavily ingrained connection to the audible human voice, it has been repeatedly re-conceptualized by theorists in connection with style, ethos, and its plural form—voices.

Other scholars who have conceptualized voice in its plural and socially constructed forms include Peter Elbow, Carl Klaus and Toby Fulwiler (discussed previously), Walker Gibson, Lizbeth Bryant and Karen Surman Paley among others. In a rather critical article on voice, Gibson states, “we all play roles all the time [...] it is simply a way we have of making ourselves understood” (13). The article from which this was taken, “The ‘Speaking Voice’ and the Teaching of Composition,” was originally published in 1963, which means even near the beginning of its inception voice was being complicated in productive ways. Gibson goes on to say that, “by composing our language we compose ourselves, and while there are other ways of presenting ourselves to the world, our language remains the most persuasive” (17). This Kantian analysis, with the centralized subject as creator of meaning, reveals a very progressive view of voice(s) which continues to be useful. Though Gibson is not acknowledging the full impact of culture on the creation of these voices, he does recognize a dynamic interaction between the speaker and his/her world. For voice to return, this interaction will need continued emphasis.

In more recent scholarship, Lizbeth Bryant and Karen Paley also explore the role of voice in classrooms that respect individual student perspectives while recognizing the

importance of developing social awareness and critical skills. Published in 2001, Paley's ethnographic work is meant "to demonstrate that 'expressivist' programs are much more complicated than they have been made out to be and that first-person writing can be simultaneously highly personal and highly politicized" (xiii). She systematically builds a case for personal writing which she says, "involves the use of a narrational 'I' that seems to be the actual voice of the person who writes" (13). Paley's work demonstrates the importance of voice in contemporary classrooms and challenges scholars to re-think their "own essentializing of academic others" (xiii). Richard Fulkerson criticized Paley for defending "the wrong victim in the wrong way" arguing that the classes she examined weren't expressivist and expressivist classes do not really "involve cultural studies"(668); however, this only re-affirms Paley's point that many critics of expressivist pedagogy see it in very essentialized, narrow terms.

Bryant's work *Voice as Process* is one of very few book-length scholarly works on voice published more recently (2005). It opens with an introduction from Peter Elbow who enthusiastically supports the overall project and Bryant's successful negotiation around the overused answers to the four main voice "conflicts"—teach only academic discourse and suppress "inappropriate" voices, teach students to find their "single, and unchanging voice", there is no voice, use home voices at home and school voices at school (viii-ix). Through careful analysis of student work, theorists' voice stories, and specific case studies, Bryant comes to the conclusion that constructing voice is a non-linear process consisting of "six primary activities [...]: encountering, engaging, navigation, negotiating, rejecting, and integrating" (88). All of these exercises point

towards connection with society, and throughout the rest of the work, Bryant's obvious valuation of student's individual voices is apparent. Critics might say of Bryant, as Fulkerson said of Paley, that this simultaneous engagement with the world and acknowledgement of individuality are incompatible; however, such statements say more about the critics' limited perspectives than the writer's knowledge of voice and expressivist pedagogy.

Much has also been said regarding the teaching of voice as dangerous, ideology filled, and self-centered. Alan France's article claims that an expressivist classroom:

reinforces students' social alienation and insularity by encouraging them to identify good writing with the ideal of the autonomous self, the "authentic voice," ignoring the cultural and historical determinants of individual identity. And reducing the "public" to corporate bureaucracies or to marketplace transactions [ensures...] Personal success displaces civic virtue. (600)

These are serious accusations. Voice is not only a culprit in student isolation from society; it is an impetus which reduces the student conception of "public" to "corporate bureaucracies". France puts forward a cultural materialist perspective as the solution to the repressing, ideology imbued expressivist pedagogies; however, he fails to see the ways in which critical cultural studies, even of the cultural materialist vein, can be just as ideology filled and problematic as those centered around voice. Thomas O'Donnell confronts this problem with France head on when he says, "the criteria for learning to which some politically oriented pedagogues subscribe has more to do with the adopting of doctrines and ideologies than with the methods involved in understanding and investigating them" (427). In Richard Fulkerson's discussion of critical cultural studies classrooms (CCS), the additional point is made that "though students are 'free' to write

their papers from any perspective they choose” as long as it is well thought out, “a socially committed teacher will rarely find contrary views presented by an undergraduate to be sufficiently ‘thoughtful’ (666). Any pedagogy, critical cultural studies, expressivists, or otherwise, is susceptible to accusations of indoctrination, but earlier in Fulkerson’s discussion, he locates the potential for this problem particularly in CCS focused classes where, “teachers dedicated to exposing the social injustice of racism, classism, homophobia, misogyny, or capitalism cannot perforce accept student viewpoints that deny such views” (665). Taken together, the work of Lyotard, Spooner, O’Donnell, and Fulkerson certainly adds perspective to France’s rather harsh position against voice and expressivist pedagogy.

James Berlin, Irvin Hashimoto, and Joseph Harris represent another group of critics who question the use of voice based on its association with what they describe as naïve, “anti-intellectual,” and/or anti-social underpinnings. Berlin, a long time critic of expressivist rhetorics, expresses concerns upon which France based many of his arguments when he says (O’Donnell 424), “reality is a personal and private construct” for expressionists to whom “solitary activity is always promising, group activity always dangerous” (145). He claims that expressivists deny “the social nature of language and experience” and thus avoid “engaging in public discourse to affect the social and political context of their behavior” (185). Berlin’s critiques lampoon the]expressivist aim of locating an “authentic” voice as it has been traditionally characterized. Though his arguments express more explicit doubts about expressivist pedagogy as a whole than the

isolated concept of voice, he represents another authoritative voice which has caused the idea of voice to lose academic credibility and theoretical interest.

Irvin Hashimoto's essay, "Voice as Juice: Some Reservations about Evangelic Composition" is another notorious critique of voice. Focusing on the most extreme, often isolated instances of expressivist discussions on "voice-as-juice," Hashimoto claims that voice is not desired by all students, not "appropriate for all kinds of writing," and maybe "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" (74-76). His outlook offers some valuable food for thought, and he points out evangelic tendencies which can permeate many areas of composition. However, the extremely negative and disparaging tone he takes for most of the article, combined with his assumption that users of voice-centered pedagogy share "a firm belief that everyone can be 'saved' by discovering his/her 'voice' [which] may have anit-intellectual consequence," makes the piece feel unbalanced and somewhat jaded (77). At the end of "Voice as Juice," Hashimoto emphasizes that he is "*not* arguing here that all those who advocate "voice" are necessarily anti-intellectual themselves" or that "we abandon it [voice] completely," but after heavy critiques on many major voice theorists (Donald Murray, Macrorie, and especially Elbow among others) and few specific examples of voice's "many uses" , the statement feels a bit shallow (79).

As Hashimoto demonstrates, voice was most infamously construed as the Expressivists' focal point, "authentic voice," which has been ambiguously described as a sort of True expression of a writer's "Self" that comes through, when allowed, in

composition. This definition of voice, though embraced and furthered by theorists such as Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie in the sixties and seventies, has since been set aside leaving only a bad taste for contemporary theorists on the subject of voice as a whole. Joseph Harris is another critique who conveys this sentiment in *A Teaching Subject* when he describes Peter Elbow's views on voice saying:

As Elbow uses it, voice often refers to something like style or tone [...] but while such terms suggest that the problem facing the writer is a technical one [...] voice hints that matters of selfhood are also at stake. It implies breath, spirit, presence, what comes before words and gives them life [...] its exact workings can never be pointed to or defined, since to do so would be to reduce them to a kind of mechanical trick, a matter of style or technique—and voice is precisely what transcends that (24).

Harris's tone is distinctly negative verging on sarcastic in this section and he goes on to align himself with Irvin Hashimoto in accusations that this style of teaching has “messianic underpinnings” which are problematic and impractical when carried to their logical conclusion in the academy (25). These statements display an obvious privileging of dominant traditional academic discourse which is somewhat concerning. Harris does concede the fact that English studies as a whole have had the same “missionary zeal” tendencies and goes on to give some reasons for the emergence of this view of voice including political unrest which encouraged more people to speak out (25). Harris concludes his chapter on voice with the contrasting views of voice which he has no hope for reconciling and the admission that voice is useful for addressing the “tension between freedom and constraint” (43-44).

In a more balanced essay presented in *Voices on Voice*, Toby Fulwiler presents the two sides of the voice debate as they stood in the mid nineties. He explains that, “one

side emphasizes the uniqueness or naturalness (nature) of each writer's voice arguing that readers can know "authenticity" when they see or hear it" while the other side places the origin of voice "within social contexts which make (nurture) our voices what they are" (Fulwiler 36). While Fulwiler presents essentially the same debate that Harris did, there is a distinctly different character about the argument. The language used to describe each position is more moderate and while the discussion still does not settle the contradictions presented in this debate, there is a sense that looking at texts from both positions can provide valuable insights.

While there is no dispute that voice, within the field of composition and rhetoric, falls under the category of style, it still remains an ostracized second-class relation to the more acceptable and general third canon. In a recent (2007) article by Peter Elbow this position is indirectly challenged. Elbow posits that this rejection of voice is the result of either/or thinking as opposed to both/and thinking, making a parallel of the current conflict (voice acknowledged vs. voice ignored) to the conflict in ancient Greece between Sophists and Plato (arguments won through crafted voice vs. arguments won through authentic/True voice) (169). He puts forth the idea that Aristotle mediated this conflict with both/and thinking citing two passages in *Rhetoric*: first, "we believe good men more fully and readily than others" (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1356a) then later, "We can now see that a writer must disguise his art and give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially" (*Rhetoric* 3.2.1404b). According to Elbow, this suggests Aristotle's willingness to accept more than one position simultaneously—effective voice can come from actually possessing virtue (being a "good man") but it can also be constructed as

long as one “disguise[s] the art”. Elbow goes on to explain what a both/and perspective looks like in area of voice by describing misconceptions of his own work:

When I argue strongly for unplanned, uncensored freewriting, people often ignore my stated commitments to careful, planned, skeptical revising. When I argue for the believing game, I’m not heard insisting on the need for the skeptical, logical, critical thinking of the doubting game. When I argue for private personal individual writing, people have trouble seeing me affirm the social dimension of language and writing. (173)

He wants readers to understand the possibility that, “If a stalemate is strong and ingrained, the competing positions themselves are probably [both] valuable and necessary” (174). Thus, writers and scholars can benefit from examination of conflicting views of how composition “works” or should work.

The article goes on to acknowledge that voice in a text can be valuable as it draws readers in, aids with “rhetorical effectiveness”, helps some students enjoy writing more, can “help with reading”, and as he delicately submits, reflect self in specific/appropriate circumstances (Elbow 176-80). Elbow argues simultaneously that we should sometimes “ignore” voice as a “necessary part of good reading”, in order to teach writing effectively, in our own writing when it’s not appropriate, as a metaphor when its harmfully confusing, and as an idea when it propagates the “notion” that we have a “single, unique, unchanging self” (180-183). The contradictions in this argument reflect the two sides of debate presented by Fulwiler, but also address another concern. When Fulwiler was writing, voice had not been shut out of critical conversation, so the debate was only a matter of origin (voice from the self vs. voice constructed by society). For Elbow, this conversation is barely addressed as he attempts to bring voice back to a point of

consideration and offers up a third option: voice as useful and appropriate depending on the situation.

The arguments and counter-arguments for the issues I have discussed are not all-encompassing; however, my hope is that this snapshot of the theoretical discussions which were taking place in the late eighties, nineties, and into early 2000 might prove engaging enough to warrant reconsideration. There are still nuances about voice that make it difficult to encapsulate, but a lot of work has been done to make it a functional, useful term (Elbow, Bryant, O'Donnell etc.). Though it will probably never be entirely free of its expressivist associations, Karen Paley has demonstrated the possibility of critical expressivist classes that are socially engaged. It is apparent even from this sampling of critical material that many of the original concerns with voice have been addressed, yet it still remains the cast-off or at least forgotten accessory of style. If expressivism is "quietly expanding its region of command," as Richard Fulkerson claimed in 2005, then the nexus of its pedagogy should continue to be challenged and assessed (655). Voice is not a simple, straight-forward word, but as many of the scholars above demonstrated, it is still useful and important.

## Conclusion: Places for Voices

Of course there are still discrepancies concerning the manner and extent to which voice should be used, but we can now see the potential it continues to possess. So, if voice is usable despite its many critiques, how can it gracefully re-enter critical consideration? Will it ride in on the coattails of style or re-establish its own place in composition? Our look back at the history of voice might point to the former as the more realistic possibility. One would think that voice's current omission from discussion would be the result of blatant existential flaws, weak theoretical underpinnings, or a lack of usability; however, the theorists discussed above question all of this. If the theory and pedagogical practices of voice are strong enough to warrant its continued use, then they should warrant more discussion. Since voice is not eliciting this reaction on its own merits, it may be time to look to style.

Without subscribing to a purely expressivist classroom model in the most traditional and problematic sense, teachers can still incorporate voice with great effectiveness through the canon of style. For years, the two areas have been combined and their nuances debated, but one recent conclusion situates them as follows: "Style is a more text-centered concept or lens for looking at writing; voice is more person-centered [...] It's a trade-off" (Elbow, Introduction *Voice* x-xi). Both are useful, related ways of looking at writing, but voice's connection to people gives it some advantages. Though theorists have shown that this link is not unwavering and relations between language and meaning have been universally destabilized, there is still value in composition. As human beings we cannot escape the need for language and understanding. In fact, the instability

of language acknowledged by postmodernism may be the impetus for style's rise in popularity. We are forced to accept language as shifty, but that makes it all the more useful to focus on the patterns and techniques which allow functional meaning necessary to existence to come through with more regularity. Having a better grasp on style, will ideally provide people with more control over their lives because they can present themselves more favorably and effectively. But in isolation, the goal of understanding the technical semantics of making language work to your advantage can end up being a rather calculating pursuit. This is where the humanizing influence of voice can emerge as a balance for the study of style.

Karen Paley and Lizbeth Bryant demonstrated the ways voice has functioned and can continue to function by elevating students as they find their voices and empowering them with critical awareness of their social contexts as they use different voices. These characteristics are important to the stylistic pillar of ethos and the style-centered field of alternative discourse which are closely intertwined. A longtime consideration in style, ethos has also been closely tied to voice by many scholars. In their article "East Asian Voice and the Expression of Cultural Ethos," John H. Powers and Gwendolyn Gong state:

the voice is also richly expressive of the ethos of the individual communicator and the cultural traditions within which the communicator interacts. For, as we are using the term, *ethos* is one's character—one's personal sense of values. (205)

Powers and Gong remind us again of the situated position all individuals occupy within a larger community and point out the impact that has on shaping one's character and values. Likewise, Karen Paley submits that "the much-maligned notion of 'authentic voice' is the basis of ethos and that this ethos is essentially the logos of personal narrative. It is the very mechanism of persuasion" (x). For personal narrative to be effective, it needs to reflect character and values of an individual. Whether this reflection is true and stable may be debatable, but the fact that writing, especially personal writing, which does not contain ethos tends to be less persuasive seems undeniable (see *The Smoking Gun*, "A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Addiction to Fiction). Writer bell hooks, noted user of many voices, says "the struggle to end domination [...] to move from object to subject, is expressed in the effort to establish the liberatory voice" (55). Though hooks does not explicitly mention ethos, the implicit importance it holds as a part of gaining a non-dominated position is evident. Hooks' comment echoes those of the feminist movement which also discuss the importance of establishing ethos and a voice as a move to break free of oppression. For these minority groups, embracing voice serves as a critique of the post-modern deconstruction of self, the self which Joseph Harris claims "stands outside or beyond language and culture" (28-29). I would argue that these selves and voices which are defended so heartily by those who have undergone oppression are more aware than most of the impact culture and language have had on forming them. They are unwilling to give up their unique perspectives, coming forth in their voices, simply because another voice of power wishes to nullify their reality.

Interesting to note, is the fact that discussions concerning ethos and voice revolve around traditionally non-standard uses and users of English. Their discourses are part of what makes up alternative discourse, a study defined by Patricia Bizzell as one made of “ [discourses that] do not follow all the conventions of traditional academic discourse and may therefore provoke disapproval in some academic readers” (ix). These “alternatives” are wide ranging “including different dialects, essay forms, cultural allusions, authorial personae, and more,” all different stylistic devices (Bizzell x). Important for voice, is the fact that it is effortlessly mentioned in many pieces that discuss and exemplify alternative styles. The connection between ethos and alternative discourse revolves around the fact that many writers whose work is considered “alternative” use ethos as a major means of persuasion. The definition of ethos which I am working from in this context is an offshoot of the traditional Aristotelian definition which states, “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible” (1.2.1356a). For writer’s of alternative discourse to be taken seriously, their voices and the experiences from which they emerge must at the very least appear honest and line up with the image they present and any outside knowledge the audience may have regarding their circumstances. Their language and descriptions of unique experiences help establish their credibility in what is unfamiliar territory for most people.

As one of the increasingly ripe theoretical fields within contemporary rhetoric and compositions studies, alternative discourse includes texts that do not fit into the parameters laid out by the traditional academy. Texts that get labeled “alternative” are often the result of social, ideological, and historical factors and contain under-privileged

racial, class, and gender discourses as well as the emerging multimedia discourses. They are considered “alternatives” to the dominant discourse, which has caused some critics (including Sidney Dobrin and Phillip Marzluf among others) to bring up the valid concern that such labeling might function to create “linguistic exoticization.” or a “notion not only of difference, but often of inferiority” (Marzluf 516, Dobrin 45). Nonetheless, these discourses are currently becoming more and more a part of mainstream academia. As our culture pushes its technological boundaries, multimedia discourses in particular are increasingly important for everyday communication. Comprised of pictures, text, and even video, social networking sites are expanding the public sphere and opening rhetorical opportunities among an enormous network of people. Here we see the important part style is playing as more and more avenues open and allow for its more experimental forms to emerge.

Kathleen Welch acknowledges in her book, *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric*, that there are sometimes objections pitted against the “appropriation” of classical rhetoric for modern analyses because “literacy as it emerged in the eighth to fourth centuries B.C. appears to be too far apart in time, cultures, and social constraints” (147); however, these criticisms belong primarily to the formalist school of training which has been increasingly dismissed in recent years (150). In truth, there are many contemporary applications of the ancient rhetorical principles available, particularly those concerned with style. Kathleen Welch points out that “a peculiar characteristic remains common” between ancient society and our own due to the reprising “dominance of oral discourse” through video and television (Welch 152). While much about rhetoric has

changed including participants and general perspective, the basics remain largely the same: an audience is persuaded through the use of ethos, pathos, and logos. There are simply more means available by which these arts can be exercised.

Because of the space generated by electronic mediums, ethos construction has undergone some of the more significant changes affecting modern rhetoric. Gaining credibility is as important as ever, but it has become both easier and more difficult with the advent of technology. Ancient Greeks could easily check up on the veracity of an orator's statements by asking around their small towns. This is still a possibility for the modern individual in some cases; however, much of what and even who we "know" now comes to us through electronic screens. We can develop one ethos for the physical world we dwell in and another for the electronic extension of reality we can choose to inhabit at anytime. With such unusual power at our fingertips, how does the function of an ancient Greco-Roman ethos change and how does that impact discussions of style and voice?

Although Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric is the most widely known of only "two systematic works on rhetoric surviv[ing] from fourth-century Greece" his work was not the first to address the idea of ethos within oratory (Kennedy 49). Isocrates, writing more than twenty-five years before Aristotle, provides some of the "earliest passage[s] in Greek that[...] show awareness of invention, arrangement, and style as three parts of rhetoric" (45). This rhetorical consciousness is made manifest through "elaborately polished discourses" which Isocrates used to instruct his students (44). In several of Isocrates' works, he addresses and/or writes from the position of the Cyprian ruler Nicocles with instructions on the ways in which one should convey their character

through actions. Since a general emphasis on practical, useful rhetoric runs through all his work, it is no surprise that these pieces contain many specific references to the way people, in these cases particularly political leaders, should live their lives in order to build credibility within the public sphere.

In the letter *To Nicocles*, Isocrates encourages the young leader: “Throughout all your life show that you value truth so highly that your word is more to be trusted than the oaths of other men” (22). Later, writing from the imagined perspective of Nicocles in *To the Cyprians*, Isocrates claims that being moral by practice in compliance with reason is better than being “moral by nature” since,

those who are temperate by chance and not by principle may perchance be persuaded to change, but those who besides being so inclined by nature, have formed the conviction that virtue is the greatest good in the world, will, it is evident, stand firm in this position all their lives. (47)

Both of these instances display the value that Isocrates placed on building ethos through consistent practice and the existence of true virtue. “Natural” or inherent qualities were not considered as stable or reliable as those which a leader might purposefully assume, a perspective that we can see reflected in contemporary discussions on voice.

Persuasiveness was desirable and necessary in the very litigious ancient Greek society. Isocrates declared in *Antidosis* that a pursuit of effective rhetoric/persuasive abilities actually encouraged the pursuit of virtue saying, “the man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character [...] the stronger a man’s desire

to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honorable and to have the esteem of his fellow-citizens” (278). Ideally, this would be the way most people think through rhetorical production: I want people to trust me; therefore, I will be a trustworthy individual. Unfortunately, living a life of character all the time is easier said than done. Isocrates is correct when he claims that “words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud” and “the argument which is made by a man’s life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words,” but many people focus on hiding the cloud as opposed to building good repute (*Antidosis* 278). This principle might shed light on the current preference for style over voice since the former is more closely tied to outward presentation than the latter. It takes work to build character which can come forward with minimal construction of voice, but it also requires great effort to maintain a series of highly constructed stylistic allusions which have no grounding in reality.

According to George Kennedy, “Aristotle was a realist” (52). That being the case, one might suspect that he and the ever-practical Isocrates would share much in common; however while both emphasized the importance of ethos within the art of rhetoric, they did not look at its construction in the same manner. Aristotle did say that a speaker’s “character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses,” but he did not place as much emphasis on the history and “natural” character that an individual possesses (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1356a). This may be due in part to what Kennedy terms a “dispassionate analysis of rhetorical techniques” that is “analogous to his analysis of the forms of plants and animals in his biological works” (56). Aristotle

was primarily a scientist and cataloger of empirical data, so perhaps as Kennedy suggests, this minimal treatment of the topic was his way of “preserving objectivity and keeping an emotional distance” (57).

In a statement that practically echoes Isocrates comment at the end of *Antidosis* Aristotle claimed that, “we believe good men more fully and more readily than others” especially when “exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided,” yet he went on to say that an orator should “make his own character *look* right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind” (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1356a, 2.1.1377b emphasis mine). The implication is that while there is an obvious need to present a credible character to one’s audience, you do not have to actually possess it. Character or the presentation of good character can push opinion when people’s decisions are still in limbo but “a writer must disguise his art and give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially” (*Rhetoric* 3.2.1404b). If we accept the idea that Aristotle was writing objectively about how to persuade, then this is a simple recognition of the fact that people can fake ethos. That this implication is put forth so early in the history of rhetoric is particularly interesting when we see the way that other rhetors, such as Isocrates, Quintilian, and St. Augustine in particular, strongly encouraged the idea that people must actually possess virtue. Perhaps as different writers witnessed greater corruption, they felt more compelled to plead for this ideal, but it is also possible that what remains of their work lends itself to personal opinions more than the handbook format of Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*.

Regardless, both views of ancient Greek ethos construction continue to operate. In our increasingly digitized society, Aristotle's "realist" recognition that a certain ethos can be displayed for one audience and not another is feasible in ways he could not have imagined. With electronic screens and long distance barriers in place, people of the twenty-first century have more freedom to create ethos that matches the "kairos" of any number of situations. However, with this great freedom comes a Foucauldian power of surveillance. Electronic resources like the internet and smart phones make information much more accessible. Likewise, inventions we now take for granted, like books, magazines, television, and transportation, have all worked to open up pathways for research and discovery. You might be able to construct a voice or many voices out of stylistic features alone with much greater ease, but if these voice(s) lack ethos you are more likely to get caught and lose credibility very quickly. The freedom to experiment with multi-voiced identities is thus a double-edged sword.

This detour into ancient rhetoric serves as a useful, if somewhat unexpected reminder that "there are times, lots of times, when we might properly challenge a student about his choice of voice [...]the responsibility implicit in such choices is surely something that we teachers mustn't ever forget" (Gibson 17). Whether a voice constructs ethos purposefully or attempts to reveal inherent qualities of ethos, there are responsibilities that accompany the choices. Ethos has been a consideration in the study of style for over a thousand years, and it is unlikely that it will be disappear anytime soon; however, understandings of the word certainly change as its cultural context

changes. In the current climate, voice proves to be a useful tool in the discussion of ethos as it too opens up discussion of natural vs. constructed identity.

I submit that this re-consideration can also be valuably employed in composition studies within the realm of alternative discourse, and that in fact this has already begun to happen. While areas of compositions such as pedagogy, basic writing, and developmental writing might wish to avoid the complexities of such a fluctuating and potentially problematic definition, alternative discourse is an area of the field that is constantly pushing the boundaries of accepted definitions. It is also one of the few locations where voice continues to be mentioned more freely due to the necessity of connecting individuals and individual groups to specific discourses produced from their unique history and social experiences. Are we looking at a diaspora of voice, similar to the one Paul Butler describes for style? Perhaps in this instance, migration is a better term since voice is not manifesting itself in quite so many areas as style; nonetheless, I think it is important to recognize the similar histories of these two words (style and voice) and the different manner with which each is treated. By avoiding the term, theorists neglect an important facet of the various styles represented in mainstream writing as well as the increasingly popular field of alternative discourses. In Kathleen Blake Yancey's 1994 work *Voices on Voice*, a thorough discussion of this multifaceted entity is given with the concluding idea that, "voice provides a means to the self and to selves and to discourse and to the culture within which the writer always composes" (xx). Assuming this definition is viable, it is very cogent to consider reviving it as a specific facet of style

which can be put to good use in multiple areas of rhetorical analysis and composition studies.

Within the realm of alternative discourse, we can see the re-emergence of the authentic voice, but instead of limiting authenticity, the reflection of reality, to one single portrait, many writers discuss their multiple voices which are the true reality. People have different voices and develop different voices over time. As a writer develops, they are able to assume more and more voices (Elbow 172-73). Jacqueline Jones Royster asserted a similar idea in her 1996 article titled, “When the First Voice You Hear is not Your Own” saying, “I claim all my voices as my own very much authentic voices” (37). Why wouldn’t Royster say she claimed all her *styles of speaking* as her own instead of “all [her] voices”? What is lost by the omission of voice as a metaphor to describe different ways of writing or speaking? These questions must be considered to determine the contemporary importance voice might have. Perhaps the definition of voice can be broadened to be more inclusive and useful within the increasingly theorized canon of style, but what do we do with authentic voices, the troublesome entity which points toward a Truth of experience if not a Truth of self?

Royster voices frustration in her piece at being characterized by a single voice. During a presentation “that required cultural understanding” she “rendered their [characters in the scene] voices, speaking and explaining [...] trying to translate the experience to share the sounds of my historical place” (Royster 618). After the talk a “well-intentioned” respondent exclaimed, “How wonderful it was that you were willing to share with us your ‘authentic’ voice!” (618). Though the fact that the respondent said

she used an ‘authentic’ voice was not upsetting to Royster, she was bothered by the fact that even after mentioning her possession of “a range of voices” the respondent told her that the presentation voice “‘was really you’” (619). I find this exchange interesting, because as quoted above Royster, went on to describe her desire to claim all her “very much authentic voices” (619). She wants to be identified with the different social, cultural, historical, and educational experiences that allow her to speak powerfully in different dialects. Authenticity is not rejected as limiting, but instead embraced as validating so long as it is applied to voices instead of the singular: voice.

Though many writers in alternative discourses utilize and even discuss the use of multiple voices (see Jacqueline Jones Royster, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Geneva Smitherman, Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, and Victor Villanueva), there are still many concerns about employing them in classrooms. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede question the results of bringing certain alternative or “hybrid” discourses into the classroom with the concern that “a kind of prescriptivism, appropriation, or cooption of those discourses” might take place (Ede 42). Others such as Philip Marzluf problematize the recent trend of diversity writing by looking at the potential for expressivist teachers to overemphasize authentic voice thereby “exoticizing and stereotyping students’ linguistic performances” (503). Appealing to the eighteenth-century Natural Language Theory for a parallel, Marzluf explains his fear that a “focus on authenticity [natural voice] proliferates stereotyped binaries of ‘whiteness’ and ‘otherness,’” (505). He is anxious for teachers to avoid forcing students to use vernacular and valuing it at the expense of content in a condescending manner. In a CCC response to this article, Margaret Himley

and Christine Farris confirm and complicate this notion with their own respective critiques that diversity writing should involve more “dis-identification, indirection, discomfort” (Himley 450) and the challenge that “authentic voice” might not be so implicit in diversity writing as Marzluf assumes (Farris). I find these challenges involving voice within alternative discourse, as evidence of its presence and proof of its usefulness as a point of discussion. Though both style and voice act as vehicles for meaning, they carry different connotations. As Kathleen Yancey states, “voice seems to bring to writing and the text a quality we don’t have otherwise: the individual human being composed of words in the text” ( Yancey ix). Though a human being may have many voices, all of them constructed by an infinite number of social, ideological, and cultural factors, their specific translation of these things to text can make it memorable. Paul Butler argues that we need to “see style for what it is: a key way to separate what is memorable from forgettable in history” (5). I would argue that the unique voices some individuals are able to convey is what makes their words memorable.

There is an aversion to the indefinable, “personal”, overly “felt” aspect of composition. If a technique or practice cannot be logically catalogued or pinned down for inspection, then it makes many scholars uncomfortable. It does not have an academic flavor to it. Case studies and high theory, which utilize observed facts and complex jargon, are the preferred points of study. Though these elements work to expand the field and are even used in the studies of voice, they can also accentuate the hierarchal nature of academia by prioritizing topics dealing with dry “logical” theories and measurable results over personal accounts or emotive style-centered endeavors which are deemed less

academic. Perhaps that is why Aristotle both resisted and ultimately accepted style as an acceptable element of rhetoric. Though style can be used to demonstrate or create a voice, something slippery and hard to define, its individual elements could be logged very meticulously. This empirical comfort zone built around may be allowing its more graceful transition back into current discussion, while the unquantifiable underlying entity of voice remains more obscured. But as we have seen through alternative discourse, spaces are opening for discourse that is not traditionally logical, “academic”, white, and/or male. With this growing acceptance of many new voices in the academy perhaps there will soon be a place for the re-entrance of voice too. Until then, perhaps it can join the more collected and stately canon of style as its brightest accessory.

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## **Vita**

Deborah Jones attended Mercer University studying English and secondary education. After completing student teaching at Westside High School in Macon, GA she graduated and entered the Master of Arts program at University of Tennessee, Chattanooga with an assistantship in the English department. Deborah entered UTC with a concentration in Literature but switched to Rhetoric and Composition after her first semester. During her time at UTC, she became increasingly interested in composition theory and pedagogy which led to this project. Deborah graduated with a Master of Arts in May 2010.