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AUTHOR   Berthel, Jame
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ABSTRACT
        The turmoil that students feel when their values are
challenged is directly tied to their fear of annihilation--of death.
Both are a matter of identity and the "self' for the reason that the
ability to reason, invent, and separate and defend is that faculty
which protects them from natural forces. So the connection between
the rhetoric they construct and their essential survival in the world
they build is direct in every sense of the word. The affirmation of
self has been explicated in three exemplary philosophical traditions:
the "nothing exists" rhetoric of Eliatic sophistry, the radical
occidental metaphysics of presence in the work of Jacques Derrida,
and the paradox of "emptine-s" from Zen Buddhism. While the
philosophy of Zen is unspeakaoly subtle and fleeting, the puzzles of
paradox, in the form of questions ("koans"), and their responses, are
quite reasonably implemented once the student is enabled by them. The
point of view on which this pedagogy is carried is the idea that
ancient Buddhism, classic sophistry, and the work of Derrida depend
equally and everywhere on what might be the oldest trick in the book:
creating arguments for the sake of argument and never, simply, to
win. In the end the student learns to construct, dissect, and
synthesize arguments while having no subjective and, therefore, no
political stake in them whatsoever. (TB)

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Ms. Jame Berthel
Illinois State University
4240 Dept. of English
Normal, IL 61761
309 829 6899

RECONCILIATION: A NONDUAL FRAME FOR CRITICAL THINKING IN PROCESS RHETORIC

The turmoil we experience when our values and beliefs
are challenged is directly tied to our fear of
annihilation--of death. Both are a matter of identity and
the "self" for the reason that the ability to reason,
invent, separate and defend is that faculty which protects
us from natural forces. So the connection between the
rhetoric we construct and our essential survival in the
world we build is direct in every sense of the word. The
connection is the same between words and silence, between
something and nothing, and between being and nonbeing.
Humans live in a world of words. The human condition is
therefore, in Nelson Goodman's terms, the rhetoric of
"worldmaking."

While intelligence is often measured by verbal
ability, educators must factor the effects of subjectivity
on verbal expressions, for the result of a blind faith in
words is the possibility that we will see words as singular
representations, rather than as events encroached upon by
subjective agency. Faith in a rigid Signifier-to-signified
binary at the word level cannot help but foster dogmatic
patterns in the realm of the symbolic, the metaphoric, the

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social and political.

While composition students may develop basic skills, they may not examine the meaning they attach to the sense of lawfullness that successful rhetorical events produce. The very notion of success and failure attached to rhetorical enterprises is a product of rampant subjectivity at the word level. If we fail to admit the unstable connection of Signifier to signified, we may fail to see that rightness and wrongness are equally unstable. Far more damaging is the compelling sense of competition, the emphasis on rightness and wrongness, on winning and losing, which propagates alienation. When we argue to win, we nobly pretend to do so for the sake of protecting the truth; it may be the case that our impulse to win is tied to an enterprise no more noble than affirming our precious identity--our "selves." In the heat of debate, we nurture a surreptitious allegiance to causes, failing to engage language for the sake of itself.

Composition instruction may overlook the impact of subjectivity on metacognitive development, alongside basic reading/writing skills. Many students show practical improvement, but can they account for the internal and silent process from which the improvement sprang? Furthermore, students are unable to monitor their process AS it occurs, making appropriate adjustments through conscientious choices. The mind can be both investigator and the thing investigated. It is this metacognitive aspect

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of learning which, when absent, accounts for the lack of critical thinking in graduates of the western system.

If the reciprocity of signifier to signified, of self to other, and of mind to matter is the central assumption of metacognition as a critical factor for learning, then some deliberate yet pliant medium is needed which simultaneously lays bare the propositional and contingent nature of both the mind and the world it apprehends. By further defining these relationsips, the role of metacognition in critical thinking can be further defined and understood, as will the rhetorical strategies in which critical thinking is expressed. One such medium is the subtle but profound condition of paradox.

The affirmation of a self through language has been explicated in three exemplary philosophical traditions: the "nothing exists" rhetoric of Eliatic sophistry, the radical occidental metaphysics of presence in the work of Jacques Derrida,.and the paradox of "emptiness" from Zen Buddhism.

The role of the subject as a self survive:. paradoxically by and in spite of the objective "otherness" it experiences literally in the mind. The situation exists as the result of two phenomena: 1) the belief that "selves" exist and 2) the rhetoric through which this belief is mindfully exercised.

Paradox, as a frame for the advancement of a critical and dynamic rhetoric, was used quite differently by the early sophists and by Derrida than it is by Zen patriarchs

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to exploit the role of subjectivity in the relationship of Signifier/signified; this difference is critical. Both the sophists and Derrida use paradox to underscore the semantic context on which words always already depend. The sophists used semantics also to trap their adversaries into contradicting themselves. Derrida performs semantic acrobatics to promote the idea that nothing exists anyway, outside of the game in which semantic feats are played out. Both the sophists and Derrida appear victorious by reducing to reductio absurdities the arguments of those who attempt to differ with them.

When semantic deconstruction becomes the difference between winning and losing an argument as well as the difference between making arguments and actually believing them, we can see the imr .tance of paradox in the process. In this sense, both the sophists and Derrida promote the feeling that there is no meaning (purpose) outside of the business of winning and therefore outside of the semantic gimmicks necessary for victory.

We must not underestimate the advantage of exploiting the agency of the subject, therefore exploiting the willful blindness of our belief that we do essentially exist in the world we behold; it is for this reason that the particular fashion in which Zen patriarchs employ paradox is useful. Zen practice extinguishes the "self" of the subject by wearing-out the intellectual relationship of subject to object through a reductio dialectic which is eventually

expressed in the silence of meditation. It is important to note however that the devotee is not sitting in silent meditation for the purpose of eliminating his thoughts; he is concentrating ON them.

Herein lies the critical difference between sophistic or Derridean logic and Buddhist logic: while Zen leaves the student with the impression that the stuff of experience is a product of the mind and of the language by which the mind produces faulty evidence for the existence of a self, Derrida is not so interested in the problem of "mind." Derrida does "deconstruct" the western metaphysics of presence by performing semantic slights-of-hand in order to blur the difference between the "thought" as opposed to the "felt" sense of "presence," however, he seems nonplussed by the difference between language as evidence of a subjectless presence and the existence of a subject when language is happening. Both the sophists and Derrida forfeit attention to the "presence" of a subject in favor of the open play of language, which is ostensibly a matter of subjectivity. Zen, on the other hand, exploits language in favor of an argument that presence IS mind/mind IS presence yet with literally no subject and therefore literally no object. Zen is thoroughly subjective because presence, in every sense of the word and the world, is nothing more than a product of the mind. Zen is a case of subjectless subjectivity. It is the ultimate nonsense of paradox when considering a metaphysics of presence in the

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first place.

While this may sound on the surface somewhat like
simple structuralism, or not so simple deconstruction, the
"difference" in this case of the extinguished "subject" is
language with no foundation in reality. To describe
language in this condition, Buddhists use the word "empty."
It is this aspect of Zen which complicates/compliments the
structuralism of Derridean sophistry in a manner central to
this theory.

The philosophies of Derrida and Zen agree that all
knowledge is subjectively propositional and contingent.
However Derrida and Zen together find suspect the literal
difference between "this" and "that." In this study then,
the essential relationship of literal difference upon which
this study depends is between the subject and object, i.e.
between the "I" and everything that is "not I," between
being and nonbeing.

It may seem that because of the emphasis on Zen
Buddhist philosophy, that this approach to theories of
subjectivity promotes a religious agenda. May i suffice to
say that my otherwise concerted interest in Zen is strictly
academic and fully apart from religious dialogues in the
main. Zen evolved in reaction to early Buddhism; the
discipline of Zen is not to be experienced in and of itself
as a religious (read meaningful) endeavor. Religions by
nature thrive on dualistic tenets and promote distinctions
between, for example, those who are inside as opposed to

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outside of the membership, those "saved" or not and the like--not to mention the concepts of birth/death, sin/redemption, virtue/vice and other debilitating metaphors. In Zen, there are no members, there is no participation, and nothing to participate in. Zen could not "be" Zen if this were not the case. Central to this theory then, and the practice which interrogates it, is the idea that nothing exists, literally, outside of the arguments at hand. The issue, then, is to view arguments in and of themselves, and certainly not the idea that we have communed in an academic, though lofty search for "meaningful" ways of being human beings.

I am likewise careful to anticipate the impression that the theory involved in this project is in any way nihilistic.

> J. Hillis Miller and others have effectively refuted the charge that deconstruction is nihilistic. If that charge is now less frequently heard, there are still others to the effect that deconstruction in inherently peverse, dadaistic, and even terroristic. And anxieties concerning its difficulty need to be addressed (Atkins and Johnson.)

Rather than to claim that human (subjective) experience is meaningless, I submit the Zen impression that when we go looking for meaning, we fail to account for the possibility that meaning is a construct of the agency of the subject and nothing more. There is nothing to which the word "meaning," or any word for that matter, could possibly refer because the realm outside of language, to which words refer, is likewise a product of the mind.

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"Mind" is as well merely a convenient designation for a phenomenon created paradoxically with, against, and in spite of itself as the result of sense/object contact in the world about.

Derrida is a curiosity for making the claim that "There is nothing outside the text." What Zen provides which Derrida dismisses is an operational demonstration of the theory it stands for. Zen is practical deconstruction because the Zen master never explains the "point," instead forcing the student to experience it firsthand. The student experiences, with no intervention on the teacher's part, the pointlessness of rhetoric that Derrida is most interested in. Achieving this immediate impression on the student is, in Zen practice, a matter of introducing the student to the appropriate obstacle at the appropriate time. Zen masters defined and perfected the very nature of that obstacle as paradox. The aim of this approach to process rhetoric is then to introduce to the writing task a paradoxical obstacle which the student must make an effort to overcome. Attempting to do so, the student experiences a release from the mindful and relentless grasping of meaning on which language depends. The process of extinguishing the dual condition of subject to object, and therefore the merely convenient convention of language, affords the student an unusual ability to engage in human discourse in the spirit of detached skepticism so critical to the concept of academic inquiry on which liberal education is

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founded.

While the philosophy of Zen is unspeakably subtle and
fleeting, the puzzles of paradox, in the form of questions
(koans), and their responses, are quite reasonably
implimented once the student is enabled by them. It is the
koan puzzle of Zen teaching on which pedagogy is modeled in
this study.

The point of view on which this pedagogy is carried is
the idea that ancient Buddhism, classic sophistry, and the
work of Jacques Derrida depend equally and everywhere on
what might be the oldest trick in the book: creating
arguments for the sake of argument and never, simply, to
win. In the end, the student learns to construct, dissect
and synthesize arguments while having no subjective and
therefore no political stake in them whatsoever.

The pedagogical design is therefore an open but
deliberate and disciplined frame in which self-referential
paradox is used primarily in the same spirit Zen Masters
use self-referential paradox to invite their disciples into
enlightenment, a condition in which the the perceived world
is realized as only a product of the mind.

I have developed a series of paradoxical though
distinctly western writing prompts which create a similar
effect on the student. Each prompt bears an implicit self-
referential paradox which the student must make an effort
to unpack. The nature of this "effort" involves the
students' attempt to write her way "out" of the "problem"

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within the prompt by finding what we together define as a "middle." The middleground is roughly speaking a cognitive function, a "felt" sense for the ground shared by two apparently conflicting conditions. Solving the "problem" involves a negotiation, a reconciliation of opposites toward some one conditon which defines both, while holding an allegiance to neither. The middle, while reconciling, or extinguishing the binary condition, remains itself unchanged. The situation is not unlike that of metaphor.

Writing prompts include questions which exploit both the student's sense of self as well as the potential for paradox in any rhetorical proposition. A sampling includes:

- What's the difference between getting what you deserve and getting what's coming to you?

- Is jealousy a sign of true or false love?

- What's the difference between having no conscience and not caring what other people think?

- Can we learn anything outside of experience?

The goal of a reflexive pedagogy by this design is to introduce students to a form of argumentation which refuses to simply "chop off" one of the "horns of a dilemma" and consider a problem solved. While it is typical in western culture to solve problems with an agenda of argue-and-vote, this discipline introduces the student to an alternative method of reconciliation. The resultant "objectivity," is the condition and design of an uncontaminated education in which participants are naturally enlightened about

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them"selves" and the world of words in which "they" "exist."

Once the students experiences reconciliation, they are able to entertain the inevitable propositions of human experience without intention or expectation. This done, the student is likely to engage in productive dialogues by accepting the accounts of others anonymously, in good faith, and therefore with no desire to prove, to conclude or decide.

A Zen patriarch once defined the enlightened one as an ordinary person who no longer has anything to do. The sentiment suggests that the enlightened one no longer has desires and intentions driving the day to day business of surviving as a relative, a citizen, or a member of anything   Students subjected to tasks in which they make an attempt to overcome an obstacle of paradox, achieve metacognitive awareness while engaging at the same time the ability to marshall arguments by developing a powerful but detached skepticism which aids them in problem-solving in the moment, yet outside of themselves and the social constructs through which the agency of the subject is affirmed.